

**Watertown City Council**  
**Committee on Public Works**

**Councilor Piccirilli, Chair, Councilor Feltner, Vice Chair, Councilor Palomba, Secretary**

**Committee Report – February 3, 2025**

**Presented to the City Council – February 11, 2025**

The Committee on Public Works met on Monday, February 3 at 6:00 PM in the City Council Chambers. Present at the meeting were Councilor Piccirilli, Chair, Councilor Feltner, Vice-Chair, and Councilor Palomba, Secretary. Also present was Councilor Gardner.

For the first agenda item, the Committee moved to the Council Office to interview Joseph Ganno for appointment to the Stormwater Advisory Committee

Mr. Ganno explained that he had first applied to be on the Solid Waste and Recycling Committee, but was not selected. Then the Resident Advisory Committee reached out to him to see if he would be interested in serving on the Stormwater Advisory Committee (SAC). He expressed a strong interest in serving and felt his particular contribution would be in public outreach and education.

Councilor Piccirilli shared the two challenges facing Watertown regarding stormwater - meeting the federal regulations and taking steps to prevent leaks from sewer systems into the stormwater systems.

Mr. Ganno said he has attended two SAC's monthly meetings and read the minutes of other meetings. He was impressed with the extensive knowledge of the members and the DPW staff regarding key stormwater-related issues. He expressed a willingness to learn about the technical aspects and the federal regulations that impact stormwater.

Councilor Feltner asked if Mr. Ganno would have a problem meeting at 4:30 PM when the SAC meets. Mr. Ganno said this would not be an issue and if he was not able to attend a particular meeting in-person he would join via zoom.

Mr. Ganno wondered if he would have to be interviewed again since he will be fulfilling a vacancy on the SAC with a term ending in five and a half months. Council Piccirilli responded that he would have to meet again with the Committee.

Councilor Palomba made the following motion:

**The Committee on Public Works recommends to the City Council that Joseph Ganno be appointed to the Stormwater Advisory Committee for a term ending July 15, 2025.**

Council Feltner seconded the motion, and it was passed 3 - 0.

At 6:20 PM the Committee moved back to the Council Chambers to take up the second agenda item to discuss a proposal to name the intersection of Dexter Avenue and Hazel Street for Arshile Gorky. Joining the meeting were Erika Oliver Jerram, Director of Community Design; Liz Helfer, Public Arts and Cultural Planner; and resident Jack Dargon.

The meeting began with a presentation by Ms. Helfer about the request to name the intersection of Dexter Avenue and Hazel Street for Arshile Gorky. She explained that the request was being put forth by a Working Group, including herself, Mr. Dargon, and representatives of the Armenian Museum of America, the Mosesian Center for the Arts and the Historical Society of Watertown. The Working Group is part of a larger coalition of organizations who are collaboratively to celebrate “100 Years of Arshile Gorky”. Ms. Helfer referenced the letter to City Manager Proakis from the Working Group (attachment 1) that provides a brief history of Mr. Gordy’s contribution to the arts community and the school of Abstract Expressionism, his experience as an immigrant from Armenia, and the period of time (1920-1925) he lived in Watertown. She mentioned that the Working Group will work with the Department of Public Works on where in the intersection a pole and plaque should be placed and that it would be similar to what is used to name an intersection for a veteran.

The location changed from the original Council agenda item on October 8, 2024 that requested Artsakh St and Elton Ave (attachment 2). Ms. Helfer noted the Working Group, based on feedback from the Armenian community, felt Dexter and Hazel would be more appropriate.

Ms. Helfer also provided the Committee a draft flyer (attachment 3) that announced a series of events celebrating “100 Years of Arshile Gorky” that would be kicked off at the commemoration of the naming of the intersection. In addition, she shared the design of two plaques honoring Mr. Gorky that would be placed near the homes where he and his family lived while in Watertown – 86 Dexter Avenue and 14 Coolidge Hill Road.

There was some concern that the request to name the intersection might not align with our present policy “Naming Policy for Squares and Intersection for Non-Veterans” that is described in the Watertown Code. See <https://ecode360.com/42229328#42229328>. In addition there was concern that Mr. Gorky’s stay in Watertown was very short and there are other luminaries who have connections with Watertown. However, Mr. Gordy’s national reputation in the arts community qualified him for an intersection in his name.

Councilor Feltner made the following motion:

**The Committee on Public Works recommends that the City Council agree with the naming of the intersection at Dexter Avenue and Hazel Street for Ashile Gorky subject to the coordination with the Department of Public Works for a sign similar in size of Veterans signs with the location and wording be approved by the Department of Public Works.**

Councilor Palomba seconded the motion, which passed 3-0.

The Committee also discussed the proposed sidewalk markers (attachment 4), which will be provided under a grant from the Cultural Council, and their location, size, and materials. Ms. Helfer said the DPW will include the coordination of these sidewalk markers, along with the intersection sign. The Committee requested the Council be advised of the DPW assessment of the sign and sidewalk markers before implementation.

Councilor Palomba made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Feltner and passed 3-0. The meeting adjourned at 7:02 and the minutes were prepared by Councilor Palomba.

Attachments:

1. Revised request for naming dated September 9, 2024
2. Original request for naming dated February 28, 2024
3. 100 Years of Arshile Gorky Flyer
4. Proposed Sidewalk Markers

George Proakis, City Manager  
149 Main Street  
Watertown, MA 02472

September 9, 2024

Dear Manager Proakis,

A working group of Watertown cultural organizations, Watertown resident and artist, Jack Dargon, and the Public Arts & Culture Planner, Liz Helfer, have been collaborating on commemorating artist Arshile Gorky who lived and painted in Watertown between 1920 and 1925, and returned regularly throughout his life. Gorky is a luminary of 20th century art in America, and conceiver of the New York School of art, commonly referred to as Abstract Expressionism. The working group has identified a square in the east end of Watertown and requests that it be named after Arshile Gorky.

Commemorating Gorky's time in Watertown will help call attention to the City's past and present welcoming tradition, and history of offering refuge and opportunity to immigrants newly arrived from countries around the world and concurrently pay tribute to Watertown's large Armenian community to which Gorky belonged. Today, immigrants continue to be drawn to Watertown because of its history and reputation as a welcoming community and a public commemoration of Arshile Gorky would serve as a reminder of the City's values, its living history, and serve as an educational opportunity for residents and visitors alike. As part of the planned multi-faceted commemoration, the working group hopes to oversee the permanent placement of markers at the homes where the artist lived and establish a self-guided Arshile Gorky walking tour which would include the newly named "Gorky Square." Given the Gorky's international reputation, the working group anticipates an economic benefit to Watertown from visitors to greater Boston eager to see where Arshile Gorky began his maturity and training as an artist.

The story of Arshile Gorky is one of determination and resilience. In Watertown there was pressure within the community, and sometimes from within the artist's own family, to put aside his artistic ambitions and take up manual labor like most of his contemporaries. Instead, Gorky established relationships within the small artistic community in Watertown that was part of the Armenian immigrant diaspora and began taking art classes in Boston where he quickly advanced to teaching classes. The name Arshile Gorky is synonymous with Abstract Expressionism, and inseparable from the historic gravitational shift of the world of art from Paris to New York in the 1950's. Arshile Gorky arrived in Watertown in 1920 in the immediate aftermath of witnessing his mother's death by starvation and after surviving the political persecution and ethnic cleansing of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. His perseverance beyond all odds is a tribute to the human spirit.

The working group has identified the intersection of Dexter Ave and Hazel St for naming. After arriving in Watertown from New York's Ellis Island, Arshile Gorky lived at 14-16 Coolidge Hill Road in Watertown with his sister Akabi and her family before the family purchased and relocated to 86 Dexter Ave. Coolidge Hill Road and Dexter Ave are located directly west and east of the heart of Watertown's historical Armenian cultural district between Elton Road and Bigalow Ave, almost epicenter of both homes. The working group requests the city name this location "Arshile Gorky Square" and include subtitles of the artist's Armenian birth name, Vostanik Adoian.

With your support, this initiative for commemorating Arshile Gorky in Watertown will move forward. A map of the proposed location is included. If you have any questions, please contact Liz Helfer, Public Arts & Culture Planner.

Sincerely,  
*100 Years of Arshile Gorky Working Group*

Jason Sohigian,	The Armenian Museum of America
Boriana Kantcheva,	The Mosesian Center for the Arts
Joyce Kelly,	The Historical Society of Watertown
Jack Dargon,	Watertown Resident
Liz Helfer,	Public Arts and Culture Planner

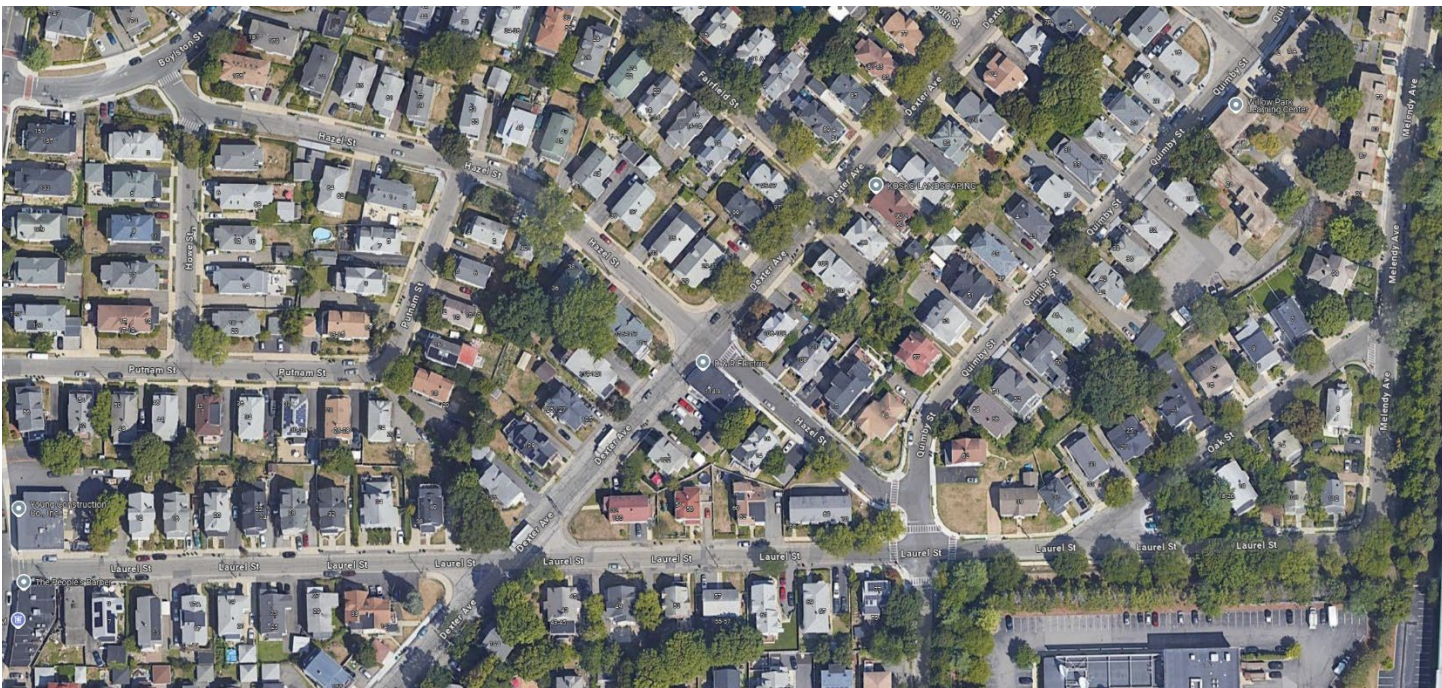


Image from Google Maps.



Image from Google Street View.

George Proakis, City Manager  
149 Main Street  
Watertown, MA 02472

February 28, 2024

Dear Manager Proakis,

A working group of Watertown cultural organizations, Watertown resident and artist, Jack Dargon, and the Public Arts & Culture Planner, Liz Helfer, have been collaborating on commemorating artist Arshile Gorky who lived and painted in Watertown between 1920 and 1925, and returned regularly throughout his life. Gorky is a luminary of 20th century art in America, and conceiver of the New York School of art, commonly referred to as Abstract Expressionism. The working group has identified a square in the east end of Watertown and requests that it be named after Arshile Gorky.

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*100 Years of Arshile Gorky Working Group*

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Image from Google Street view.

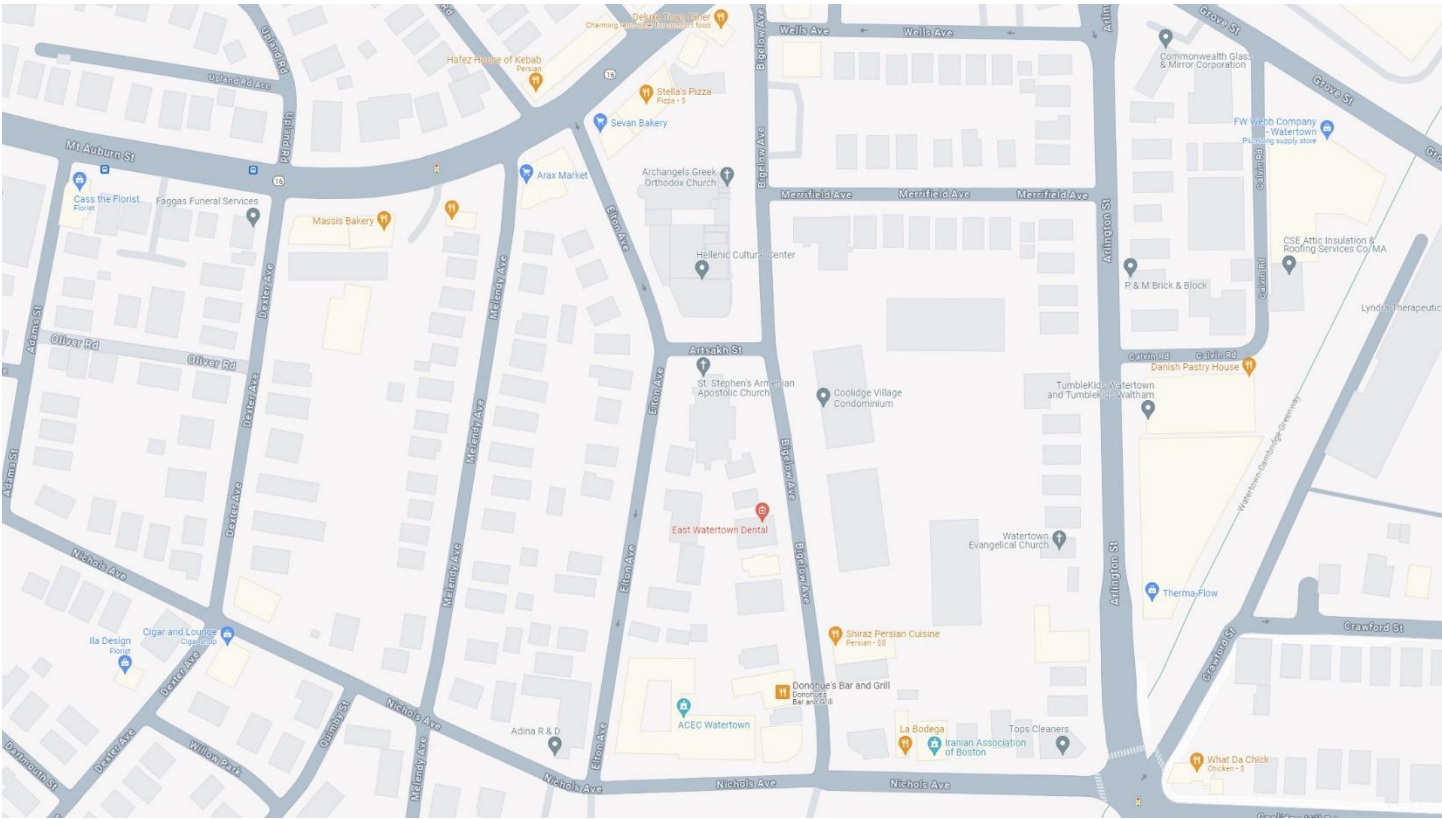


Image from Google Maps.

# 100 Years of Arshile Gorky

In 2025, Watertown, MA, is celebrating the life and work of artist Arshile Gorky (born Vosdanig Adoian). Arshile Gorky is a seminal figure of the Abstract Expressionist movement in the United States. After surviving the 1915 Armenian genocide and its aftermath, Gorky arrived in Watertown in March 1920, as part of a third wave of Armenians immigrants arriving in the United States to escape persecution. He lived in Watertown with his sisters until early 1925, when he moved to New York City. Gorky's impact on art history and his continued influence on contemporary art cannot be overstated. One hundred years later, we celebrate Gorky's legacy as an artist, an immigrant, and a luminary of Watertown.

**Commemoration: Naming a Square**  
Dexter Avenue and Hazel Street

March 1

**Arshile Gorky Capsule Collection**  
Watertown Free Public Library

March 1 - 31

**Exhibition: Gorky and the Language of Drawing**  
Mosesian Center for the Arts

March 7 - April 25  
Reception: March 13, 5:30-7:30pm

**Film Screening: "Finding Gorky"**  
Mosesian Center for the Arts

March 28, 7:30pm  
Panel Discussion following

**Mural Reception: Legacy of Gorky**  
by artist Brandon Marshall  
Reception at the Grove Street underpass  
on the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway

June 12, 5:30-7pm

**Guided Tour: Walk with a Doc**  
Live Well Watertown's Walk Series

June 12, 1-2pm

**Exhibit curated by Kim Theriault**  
Armenian Museum of America

Fall 2025  
Reception: date forthcoming

**Self-Guided Tour: "Arshile Gorky in Watertown"**  
Discover where he lived and worked



Learn more:  
<https://arcg.is/04bOWS>



*The Historical Society of Watertown*



**Mural by Brandon Marshall**  
Grove St underpass  
Watertown-Cambridge  
Greenway

**Former Residence**  
14 Coolidge Hill Rd

**Former Residence**  
86 Dexter Ave

**Arshile Gorky Square**  
Intersection of Hazel & Dexter

**Former Hood Rubber**  
behind the Watertown Mall

**Moesian Center for the Arts**  
321 Arsenal St



# **Arshile Gorky in Watertown**

**86 Dexter Avenue**

**Arshile Gorky  
(born Vosdanig Adoian)**

**c. 1904 – 1948**

**Artist Arshile Gorky lived at 86 Dexter Avenue from 1920 to 1924. It was here that Gorky began to develop his artistic style and ideas that remain central to modern art. After moving to New York City, the artist returned to Watertown regularly until 1944, a year before his sister Akabe sold the house.**

# **Arshile Gorky in Watertown**

**14 Coolidge Hill Road  
Arshile Gorky  
(born Vosdanig Adoian)  
c. 1904 - 1948**

**Arshile Gorky lived at 14 Coolidge Hill Road in March 1920, after surviving the 1915 Armenian Genocide. The future luminary of the art world and originator of Abstract Expressionism settled into what was then an informal rooming house for Armenian men. Six members of Gorky's family also resided here in 1920, including his sister Akabe, who managed the property.**