



Watertown City Council

Committee on Economic Development and Planning Meeting

Monday, July 10, 2023 at 6:00 PM

Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chamber - Second
Floor

Agenda

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, the meeting and public hearing will be conducted with remote opportunities for participation. Remote participation and access methods include:

ACCESS INFORMATION:

- A. This meeting will be held on July 10, 2023 at 6:00 PM. Location: Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chamber - Second Floor
- B. The meeting will be televised through WCATV (Watertown Cable Access Television): <http://vodwcatv.org/CablecastPublicSite/gallery/27?channel=3>
- C. The Public may join the virtual meeting online: <https://watertown-ma.zoom.us/j/83549340015>
- D. Public may join the virtual meeting audio only by phone: (877) 853-5257 or (888) 475-4499 (Toll Free) and enter Webinar ID:
- E. Public may comment through email: vpiccirilli@watertown-ma.gov
- F. Please Visit the Updated Comprehensive Plan Dedicated Webpage here: www.watertown-ma.gov/comp-plan

-
- 1. Call to Order
 - 2. Comprehensive Plan Draft Update as of June 26, 2023
 - A. Discussion
 - B. Public Comment
 - 3. Finalize Committee Recommendations to Planning Board and City Council
 - 4. Adjournment

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Lisa J. Feltner, chair

John G. Gannon, vice chair

Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr.,
secretary

To:	Gideon Schrieber City of Watertown	From:	Phil Schaeffing Stantec
Project/File:	Watertown Comprehensive Plan	Date:	June 26, 2023

Reference: Response to Public Comments on First Draft Comprehensive Plan

The first draft of the Watertown Comprehensive Plan was published on the project website on February 17, 2023. On March 9, 2023, the City and consultant team hosted a public open house at the Watertown Free Public Library to present highlights of the draft plan and invite review and comment on the recommended strategies. Meeting participants provided written comments via sticky notes placed on posters listing the draft strategies and via comment cards. An approximately 30-minute general comment speaking period was provided at the end of the meeting for participants to share their opinions with the planning team and audience. After the open house, an online survey was available for two weeks for additional public comment. The survey offered multiple choice ranking for each strategy and a free response opportunity for each goal. A City email address (planning@watertown-ma.gov) was also available to receive written comments from residents and community groups.

The planning team compiled and reviewed numerous comments from individuals or groups in response to the first draft of the Watertown Comprehensive Plan. This feedback came from:

- 105+ open house attendees on March 9, 2023 (in-person and online)
- 110 completed online surveys (survey available on the project website March 9-24, 2023)
- Five residents via email
- City Councilor Tony Palomba
- Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee
- Watertown Environment & Energy Efficiency Committee (WE3C)
- Live Well Watertown (LWW)
- Trees for Watertown (TFW)
- Watertown Faces Climate Change (WFCC)
- Watertown TMA

This feedback is an invaluable part of the public process to test the plan's recommended strategies and to refine them to better reflect community priorities. Both City staff and the consultant team reviewed these comments and discussed how to address them. The first draft plan has been revised to incorporate many of these suggestions. The revised draft plan will be submitted to the Watertown City Council for consideration and adoption.

The comprehensive plan is a living document designed to incorporate the many specific topic-based plans that have been completed in Watertown in recent years. As a living document, it can be revisited and

Reference: Response to Public Comments on First Draft of Comprehensive Plan

updated—as the 2015 plan has been updated by this document. In order to be comprehensive, the plan document makes higher-level policy recommendations that work to integrate the efforts of other important planning documents. Therefore, the goals and policies of the plan are aspirational but achievable strategies that are further informed by the many more specific recommendations of these other, more detail-oriented plans.

The table below outlines the general comment themes and the plan revisions made in response to them. These significant themes were identified from comments that are broadly shared by many respondents. It is important to recognize, however, that every comment provided a specific perspective.

Themes from Public Comments RE: First Draft Plan	Response in Revised Draft Plan
More emphasis should be placed on recent existing plans (like <i>Resilient Watertown</i> , <i>Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan</i> , and others) – identifying those plan goals and implementing their recommendations.	New strategy added in relevant goals to implement existing plans and to periodically revisit them in response to changing conditions. Goal 1 strategies re-organized to mirror structure of <i>Resilient Watertown</i> plan.
Highlight how quality of life, transportation, local businesses, and sustainability are linked (“15-minute neighborhood” referenced). More and better non-vehicular transportation options that connect residents to squares and corridors will improve quality of life and reduce car trips and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.	Emphasis added in Goal 2 includes call-out box explaining “15-minute neighborhood” concept and its relevance to Watertown.
Concern expressed about scale and character of many recent development projects, particularly life science building height near neighborhoods.	“Managing Redevelopment” and “Neighborhoods” subsections of Goal 2 revised re: shared benefits of new development and zoning assessment.
Concern expressed for prevalence of life science buildings in recent and planned development, particularly in light of recent economic trends.	New strategies added in Goal 3 to diversify economic base via an in-depth economic development study (new call-out box added as well), to continue oversight of life science buildings, and to highlight importance of creating an economic development staff position (new strategy 3A).

Reference: Response to Public Comments on First Draft of Comprehensive Plan

Greater support desired for local and small businesses in Watertown.	Strategies in Goal 3 revised (including new strategy 3E) to place greater emphasis on increasing small business support, improving physical conditions of squares and corridors to support customers and businesses, and creating an economic development staff position.
Transportation strategies should be more closely linked to climate goals re: reduced single-occupancy vehicle trips and GHG emissions, as well as accessibility needs for who are unable to walk, bike, or drive.	Goal 4 intro text revised to acknowledge connection between transportation and climate. Microtransit and additional shuttles added to strategies as alternatives to explore for greater accessibility. <i>Resilient Watertown</i> VMT and electric vehicle goals added to call-out box.
Desire for more concrete language about taking action rather than just considering certain transportation strategies.	Goal 4 modified from “ <i>Promote</i> safe, efficient multimodal transportation...” to “ <i>Provide</i> ...” Strategies for multimodal policy goals (4B) and Vision Zero (4C) changed to “adopt” and “develop” respectively.
General support for more housing but some differing opinions about new housing scale. General support for more affordable housing, housing for families, and housing for seniors.	Goal 5 encourages more housing and identifies strategies to support it.
Desire for greater emphasis on importance of trees – both preserving existing ones and planting new ones	Strategies 1H, 2C, 2I, 6G support tree preservation and planting.
Live Well Watertown (LWW) is an engaged community partner for health and wellness related efforts.	LWW added as implementing partner to several strategies in Goals 6 and 7.

Regards,

STANTEC CONSULTING SERVICES INC.

Reference: Response to Public Comments on First Draft of Comprehensive Plan

Phil Schaeffing AICP

Associate

philip.schaeffing@stantec.com

Attachment: Watertown Comprehensive Plan, Revised June 2023

Watertown Comprehensive Plan

REVISED DRAFT



June 2023

Comprehensive Plan - City of Watertown, MA

Special thanks to Watertown's residents, business owners, and all who participated in the planning process and helped shape this plan.

Planning Advisory Committee Members

Andres Aeppli *Resident - Transportation*

Bob Airasian *Watertown Business Coalition representative.*

John Airasian *Watertown City Council*

Jeff Brown *Watertown Planning Board*

Dan D'Amico *Resident*

Ines Gonzalez-Romero *Resident*

Maria Rose *Conservation Commission representative*

City Staff

George Proakis *City Manager*

Steve Magoon *Assistant City Manager; Director, Community Development and Planning*

Gideon Schreiber *Assistant Director of Planning*

Larry Field *Senior Planner/Housing*

Liz Helfer *Public Arts & Culture Planner*

Peter Centola *Recreation Director*

Laurel Schwab *Senior Environmental Planner*

Katie Swan *Environmental Planner*

This document was developed for the City of Watertown by a Consultant Team led by Stantec and supported by Streetsense and Horsley Witten Group.



Stantec

STREETSENSE



"Founded in Peace"

WATERTOWN
MASSACHUSETTS

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Introduction

Introduction

Watertown is experiencing a period of growth and change that is projected to continue in coming years, and the growing population is increasingly diverse. By 2031, Watertown is expected to add more than 6,000 jobs, mostly in the research and development sectors. A positive impact of this economic development is that it will increase the non-residential tax base, contribute to improved streetscapes and infrastructure, support a local retail base, add foot traffic to our main streets, and provide more opportunities for residents to work in the city where they live. It will also create significant changes, increasing

the demand for housing of all types (including affordable housing), and influencing local transportation patterns.

Development since 2015 has continued a trend of repositioning former industrial or commercial properties into life science labs or mixed-use development. This new growth has changed the character of large parts of the Arsenal and Pleasant Street corridors in particular with some lower-scale single use and larger-scale mixed use. Future redevelopment projects for the aging commercial and industrial properties that remain will present new opportunities to address housing diversity, create publicly



Introduction

accessible open spaces, influence transportation habits, and contribute to the commercial tax base.

As noted, Watertown has been successful in attracting innovative economic development projects, mostly in the life sciences sector. These projects and several large mixed-use developments have increased the local tax base which in turn has allowed for significant public investment in new schools and other public improvements. While life sciences is a strong growth sector in the Boston area, recent market pressures may slow how quickly space is occupied and create new opportunities for other types of tenants, including other regional industry clusters such as climate-tech businesses. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted local small businesses in the traditional commercial areas like Watertown and Coolidge Squares. The strength and vitality of these squares is important to the Watertown community, but a number of factors have limited the ability of some businesses to adapt to trends like increased online shopping, a changing customer base, or competition from new businesses. Physical constraints like limited space for outdoor dining or sidewalk displays, parking proximity, or building age/condition also affect business performance.

The transportation network continues its evolution to accommodate all users along more streets. Pedestrian and bicycle improvements including the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway, the Watertown Community Path, and “Complete Streets” projects encourage non-vehicular trips for short distances. There is significant bus ridership in Watertown despite the impacts of COVID-19 and corresponding service cuts, and the MBTA has recently released plans to expand transit service through the city

by 25 percent. Meanwhile, traffic congestion is a concern at peak times along major corridors and neighborhood streets used as cut-throughs, especially as new development projects open.

Privately-owned, publicly accessible open spaces have been integrated into many recent redevelopment projects like Elan Union Market and Arsenal Yards, adding to the variety and locations of these amenities. Along the Pleasant Street corridor, new connections to the Charles River through formerly industrial property expand public access to the Greenway. Still, there is demand for more open space and recreation options, especially passive recreation, due in part to changing needs of an increasingly diverse population and recreational trends. The Community Preservation Act (CPA), passed by Watertown voters in



2016, provides funding opportunities to help address some of these open space needs (as well as housing and historic preservation).

Watertown is committed to reducing contributions to climate change and to enhancing local resiliency to climate change impacts. Pursuing these goals will influence decisions about land use and urban design, transportation choices, open space and parks, and more. Recent steps include updating the zoning ordinance in 2018 to mandate “LEED Silver Certifiable” standards for new commercial, industrial, and mixed-use development ; becoming the first New England city to require solar panels for 90% of parking garages and 50% of roof coverage on buildings over 10,000 square feet or more than 10 housing units; requiring Transportation Demand Management; and

adding new requirements to the Stormwater Management ordinance that support green infrastructure and substantial infiltration of large storms to help reduce flooding. In January of 2023, Watertown became the first city in Massachusetts to adopt the Commonwealth’s new updated Specialized Stretch Energy Code, which will ensure more sustainable energy standards for new buildings.

These trends and recent changes illustrate both the opportunities to harness growth to shape the type of community Watertown wants to be and the challenges that should be addressed to mitigate negative impacts, whether in affordability, transportation, access to open space, climate change, or other areas. This comprehensive plan provides the vision and strategies to guide decision making.

Providing Policy Guidance for More Specific Plans

The comprehensive plan is designed to integrate with the many more specific topic-based plans that have been completed in Watertown in recent years (see “Recent Plans/ Reports” on this page). In order to be comprehensive, this plan document must also make higher-level policy recommendations that work to integrate the efforts of these important planning documents. Therefore, the goals and policies of the plan are aspirational but achievable strategies that are further informed by the many more specific recommendations of these other, more detail-oriented plans

Recent Plans/Reports

- Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP, 2023)
- Watertown Baseline Assessment (2022)
- Resilient Watertown Climate and Energy Plan (2022)
- Commercial Development/ Housing Nexus Study (2022)
- Capital Improvement Plan (CIP, 2023-2027)
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2021)
- Community Preservation Act (CPA) Five-Year Plan (2021)
- Housing Plan (2021)
- Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program (2020)
- Public Arts Master Plan (2020)
- Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (2018)

Charter Preamble

Watertown voters approved a new preamble to the City Charter in November 2021. This statement is the result of careful work by a charter committee and City Council over many months. It is a statement of community values and serves as a base for the goals and strategies in this comprehensive plan. It reads:

“We, the people of Watertown — mindful of generations who came before us and those yet to come as we seek a more perfect union — are committed to preserving the blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In recognition of the historical truth that we live on land that is the traditional territory of the Pequotsette people, we hereby establish the following Ethic of Civic and Environmental Stewardship, supported by a group of Guiding Principles for this Home Rule Charter for our city.”

<https://ecode360.com/36825791>

These guiding principles find multiple expression in Watertown’s policy priorities, practices, and partnerships, in furtherance of the Charter’s purpose: to provide the residents of Watertown with a government that represents all who live, work, play, and create here, and affirms our right to live and grow in freedom, dignity, and tranquility. They also foster wise management of resources that guarantee the opportunity for all residents to reach their full potential while caring for one another and promoting the health, safety, and welfare of our community.

Ethic of Civic and Environmental Stewardship:

Guiding Principles

- Safety & Tranquility
- Learning & Excellence
- Equity & Diversity
- Health & Well-Being
- Creativity & Innovation
- Accountability & Transparency

We believe that this stewardship ethic and related guiding principles uphold public trust in the competent and faithful execution of government duties, including loyalty and care. Taken together, they yield vibrant and welcoming neighborhoods, high quality and inclusive schools, transparent and accountable municipal operations — including performance excellence, responsiveness, and collaboration and thriving local businesses. Recognizing the impact of our decisions on future generations, and committing to practices that foster a sustainable environment in service to the common good, we, the people of Watertown hereby adopt the following Home Rule Charter for our city, all in accord with the Home Rule Amendment to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”



Planning Process

Planning Process

Why Plan Now?

In the years since the 2015 Comprehensive Plan was adopted, Watertown has experienced an accelerated pace of change. Our population is growing as more people recognize the high quality of life here. Life science companies are moving to Watertown in increasing numbers. Arsenal Yards has become a regional mixed-use destination. Then in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit our community and the nation. It caused unprecedented, transformative shocks that have slowly eased but not entirely disappeared. People and businesses are still grappling with the lingering impacts and trying to determine what the “new normal” will look like.

Through all of this, the City diligently worked on the recommendations of the 2015 plan and completed more than 75 percent of them. Major accomplishments include voter adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), new requirements for rooftop solar and LEED-certifiable design for many new construction projects, improved design standards and guidelines, and

a Complete Streets policy among others. Mixed-use, commercial, and residential developments have added jobs and housing the city needs while helping fund infrastructure modernization and providing other public benefits. The City committed to having innovative and sustainable elementary schools and a new high school, with two new schools completed in 2022.

As a result, the City of Watertown launched this effort to update its comprehensive plan. This new action plan will guide decision-making by responding to emerging challenges and opportunities. It builds on past success while recognizing that there are still important priorities to address.

The City also updated its Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) at the same time. The OSRP provides a detailed seven-year action plan to improve the parks, open spaces, and recreation amenities in Watertown. The public engagement process shared information and sought feedback on both of these plans.

How We Got Here

The planning process launched in early 2022 and consisted of four phases. In each phase, resident participation and input provided valuable insights which helped guide the direction of the plan.

Baseline Assessment

The planning process began with data analysis and planning research to better understand where we are today. Community members, city staff and consultants identified trends that will influence our future. They collectively worked to note opportunities and challenges as areas to focus our attention. We shared this information with the public and asked for their feedback about what is most important to them about their community. The Baseline Assessment report summarizes this research and initial round of public engagement. It was completed in July 2022 and shared on our project website. The Baseline Assessment provides the foundation upon which the comprehensive plan is built.

Vision and Goals

The vision and goals are guiding elements for the plan. The vision statement from the 2015 plan was used as a starting point and modified based on participant feedback from the visioning forum in May 2022 and the online survey. We asked residents what elements might be added or removed to represent their current vision of the future in Watertown. The city's recently adopted charter preamble also informed this discussion. A series of goals were developed once a draft vision was formed. The revised vision statement and draft goals for this plan were shared with the public at workshops in September.

Plan Development

Once the vision and goals were drafted, the work of developing strategies to achieve each goal began in earnest. Opportunities and challenges identified in the baseline assessment, as well as resident priorities from public engagement, informed many strategies. Others came from a variety of sources including ongoing City efforts, recently completed plans, and priorities from the 2015 plan that have not been fully addressed yet. Preliminary strategies were shared at the September workshops for public feedback.

Draft and Final Plan

Draft strategies were further refined with City staff during the fall. This included creating the action plan which assigns responsible City departments and a general timeline to each strategy. The initial draft plan was shared online and at a community open house for feedback in March 2023. A revised draft plan was submitted for consideration by the Planning Board and City Council in June. After public hearings to discuss the plan, it was adopted in _____.



Community Engagement

Community Engagement

Building a plan with broad support for implementation requires listening to residents, businesses and other stakeholders. Participants expressed a range of opinions on a variety of topics, yet general consensus emerged around many issues. These perspectives and ideas helped shape the vision, goals, and strategies of the plan.

Community outreach and engagement was a key part of the planning process. An important goal of the community engagement effort was to include individuals who are often under-represented in planning initiatives. The community engagement process provided a variety of ways for people to interact with the project team, share their thoughts, and respond to draft recommendations through the process. An interactive project website and hybrid in-person and online public meetings were cornerstones of the effort. The website and online meeting recordings allowed people to participate when and how it was convenient for them. Surveys and mapping activities invited comments online and in person. City staff also led one biking and three walking tours and attended public events like the Farmers Market, Arts Market, and Faire on the Square to meet people where they are and to raise awareness of the process.

Planning Advisory Committee

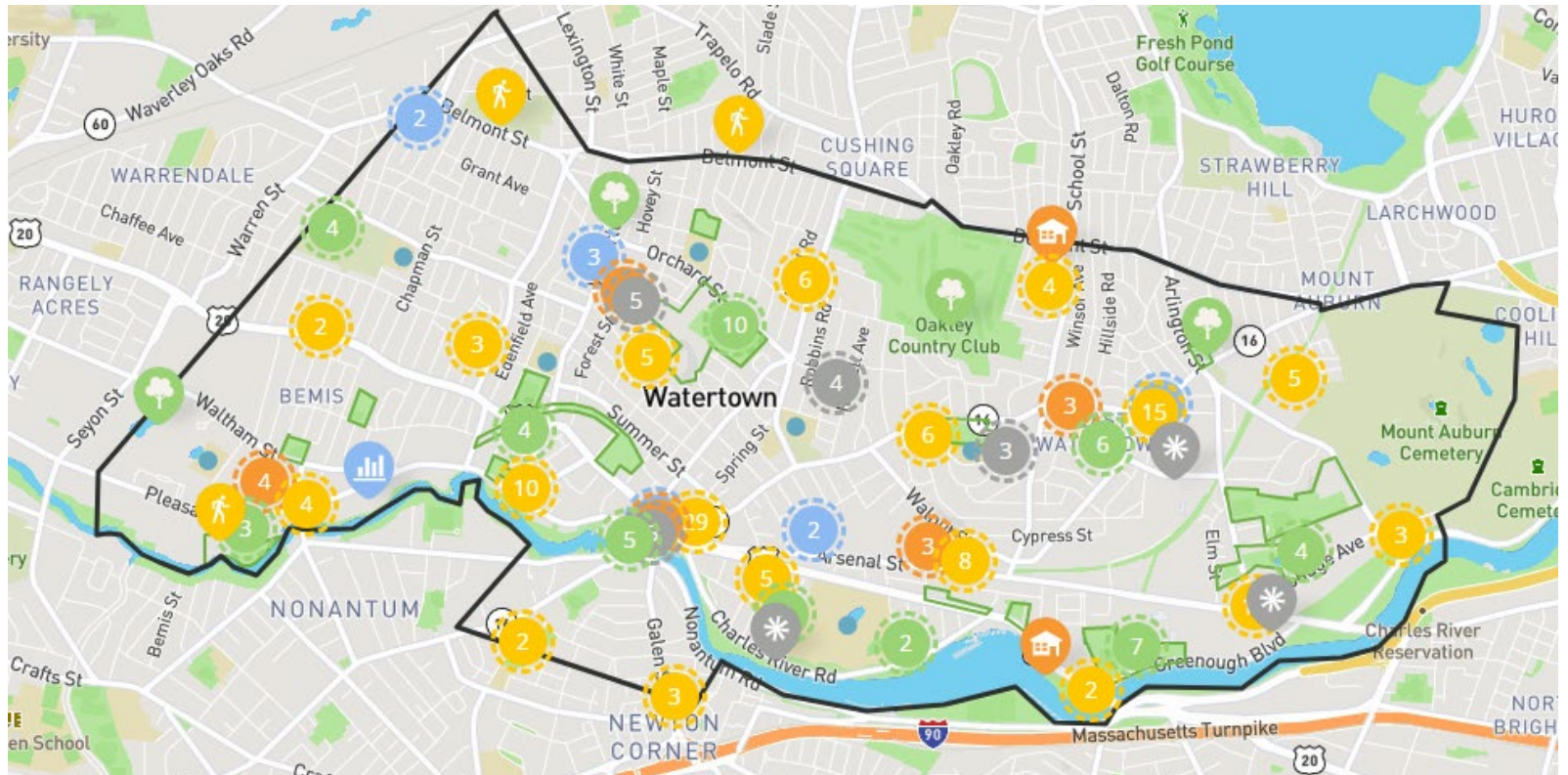
A seven-member Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) was formed to help guide the community engagement process and promote the planning process. It includes representatives from City Council, the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and the Watertown Business Coalition, one resident with transportation expertise, and two residents from under-represented populations within the community. The City engaged in a public process to select the three resident members, looking for specific expertise and residents from under-represented populations (defined as including, but not limited to, minority, non-native English speaking community members, families with children, younger adults, and shift workers). Over the course of the planning process, PAC members met five times to discuss the community outreach and engagement efforts prior to major public events. They served as community liaisons and a resource for outreach ideas.

Project Website

An interactive project website was launched for the comprehensive plan process in March 2022 (www.watertown-ma.gov/comp-plan). It was the home for project updates, online engagement activities, upcoming event information, project documents, and a sign-up for e-newsletter updates. From its launch through late March 2023, more than 4,800 unique users visited the site at least once, and many more than once. In total, the website has seen more than 14,000 visits. There have been 588 unique stakeholders engaging in activities like the interactive map and surveys.

Online Surveys and Mapping

Three surveys, an interactive map, and a virtual workshop were available on the project website over the course of the planning process. The first survey was published after the visioning forum, the second focused on open space and recreation needs, and the third followed the draft plan open house. The interactive map was used early in the process to help identify opportunities and needs primarily in four topic areas: land use, transportation, open space and recreation, and economic development. The virtual workshop was the online complement to the pair of September workshops about draft goals and strategies.



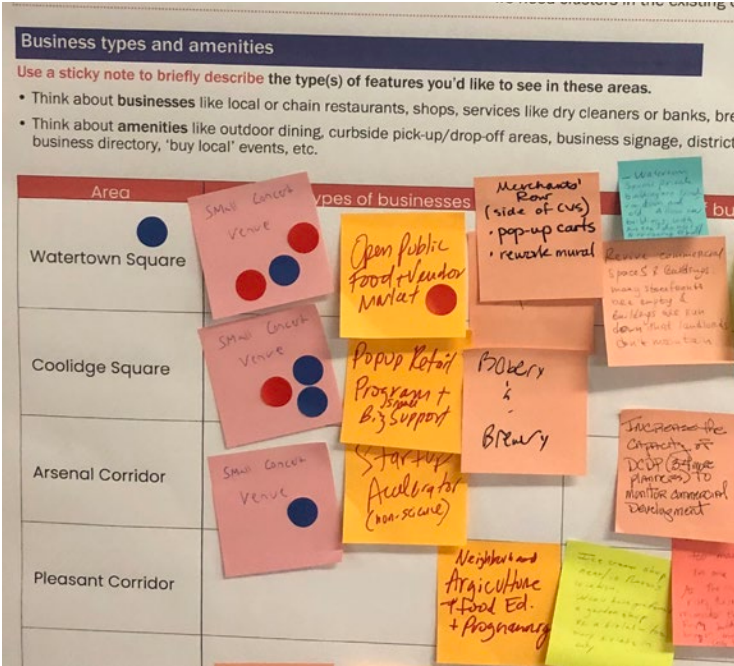
Public Events

Four interactive public meetings were held during the planning process. The planning process and public meetings were promoted via social media, emails shared with community groups, flyers posted in local businesses and apartment buildings, and individual outreach by PAC members. City staff and members of the planning team were interviewed on WCATV to talk about the purpose of the plan and the importance of participating. All meetings were offered both in-person and online via Zoom so people could participate as they felt comfortable and were able. Small group discussions, topic stations, surveys and dot sticker voting were some of the tools used to collect feedback from participants.

- **Visioning Forum:** The first public event was held May 19, 2022 at the newly-opened Hosmer School. Participants talked in small groups about their vision for the future of Watertown. They noted opportunities and challenges on a map of the city and identified shared group priorities.
- **Workshops:** Two public events were held September 20 and 29, 2022. These identical workshops asked for feedback on the draft goals and strategies. Participants visited five topic stations to review draft material and respond to specific questions. This feedback informed the development of the plan strategies.
- **Open House:** A draft plan open house was held March 9, 2023. Participants learned about key recommendations in the draft comprehensive plan and visited stations to provide feedback on specific elements. This feedback was used to refine the plan prior to submitting it for formal consideration by the Planning Board and City Council.



Community Engagement



Interactive community workshops and a walk/bike tour series invited residents to talk with one another about important planning themes and provided multiple ways to provide feedback to the planning team.



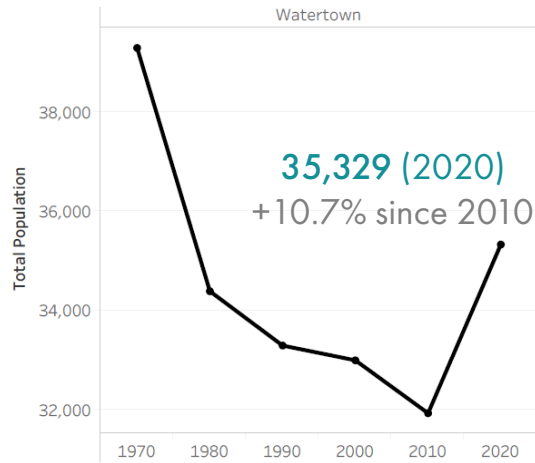
Photo Credit: City of Watertown



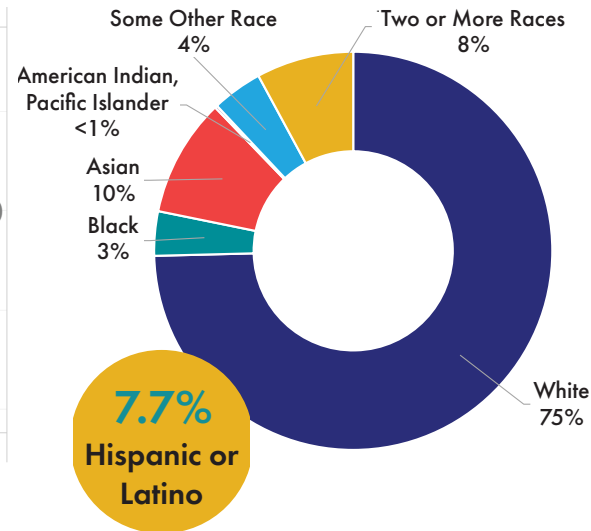
Watertown At A Glance

Watertown At A Glance

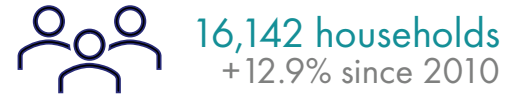
Population Trend, 1970-2020



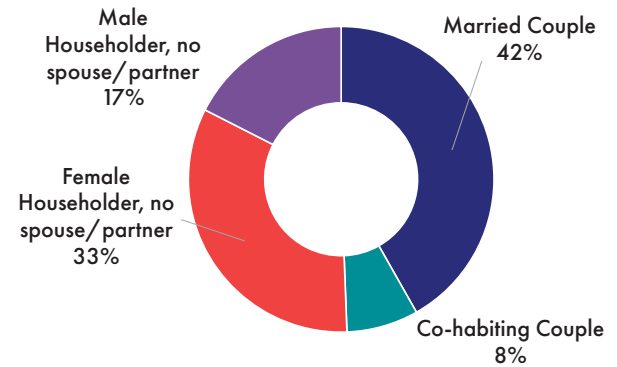
Population Demographics, 2020



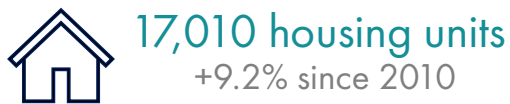
Total Households, 2020



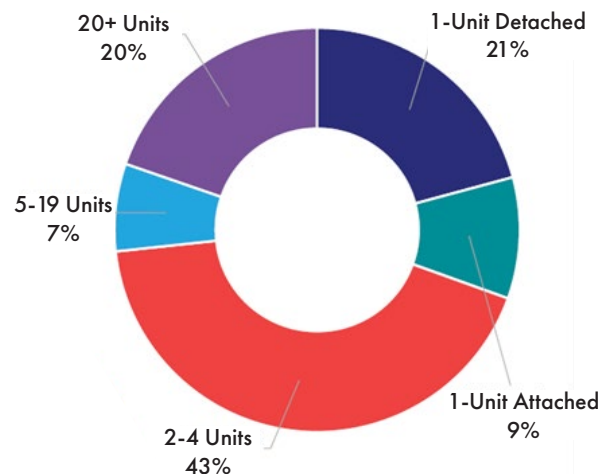
Households by Type, 2020



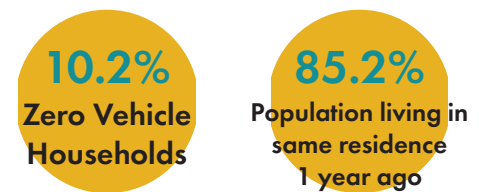
Housing Supply, 2020



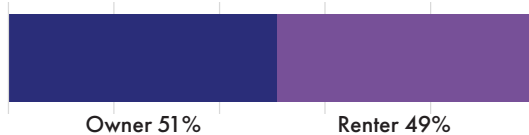
Housing Units in Structure, 2020



Other Housing Characteristics



Housing Tenure, 2020



Cost-Burdened Households, 2020

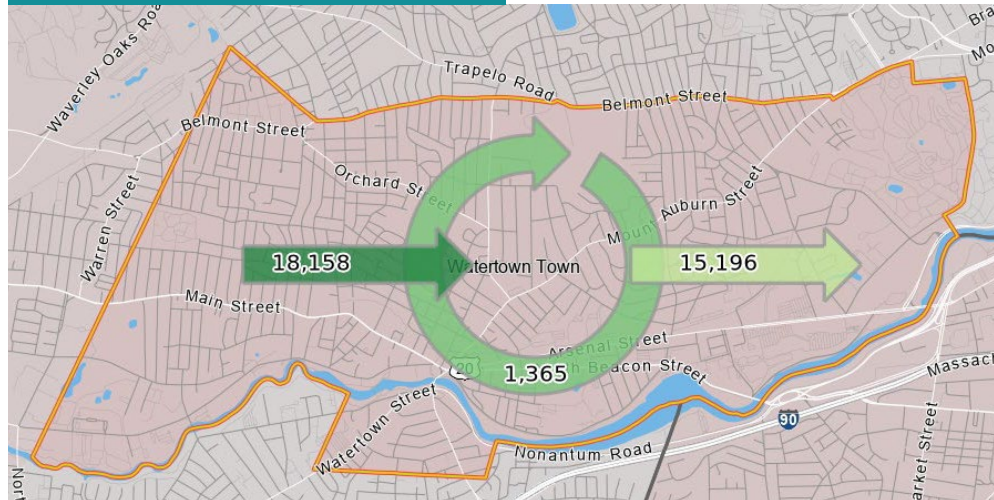
A household which spends more than 30% of their gross income on housing, be it rent or mortgage payments.

43% of Renters | 26% of Owners

Sources: 2020 Census and 2016-2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Watertown At A Glance

Commuter Inflow/Outflow



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, LEHD

Educational Attainment

	Watertown	Boston	Waltham	Cambridge	Belmont	Newton	Metro region	MA
Educational Attainment for the Population 25 Years and Over								
High school or less	28.3%	44.1%	40.4%	18.9%	19.2%	17.6%	44.2%	47.8%
Associate's degree	5.7%	4.6%	7.1%	2.0%	4.3%	3.7%	7.1%	7.7%
Bachelor's degree	31.3%	27.8%	28.2%	29.5%	26.5%	29.4%	26.6%	24.5%
Master's degree or above	34.7%	23.5%	24.3%	49.6%	50.0%	49.3%	22.1%	20.0%
Master's degree	24.5%	15.1%	18.8%	28.0%	28.2%	26.7%	15.4%	14.0%

Median Household Income

	Watertown	Boston	Waltham	Cambridge	Belmont	Newton	Metro region	MA
Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months (In 2020 Inflation-adjusted Dollars)								
Median household income	\$ 100,434	\$ 76,298	\$ 95,851	\$ 107,490	\$ 140,500	\$ 154,398	\$ 94,468	\$ 84,385

Percentage of Population in Labor Force, 2020

	Watertown	Boston	Waltham	Cambridge	Belmont	Newton	Metro region	MA
In labor force:	73.9%	69.8%	69.3%	69.5%	68.2%	65.2%	69.3%	67.2%

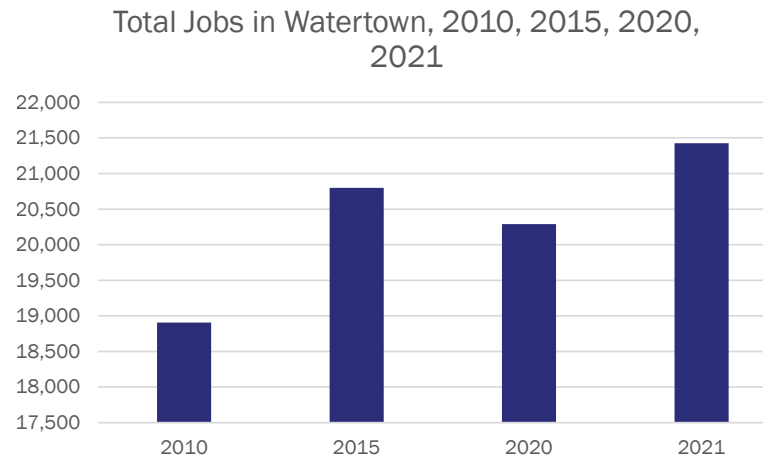
Source: 2016-2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Businesses in Watertown

The growing local employment base is undergoing a shift in job composition. Between 2019 and 2022:

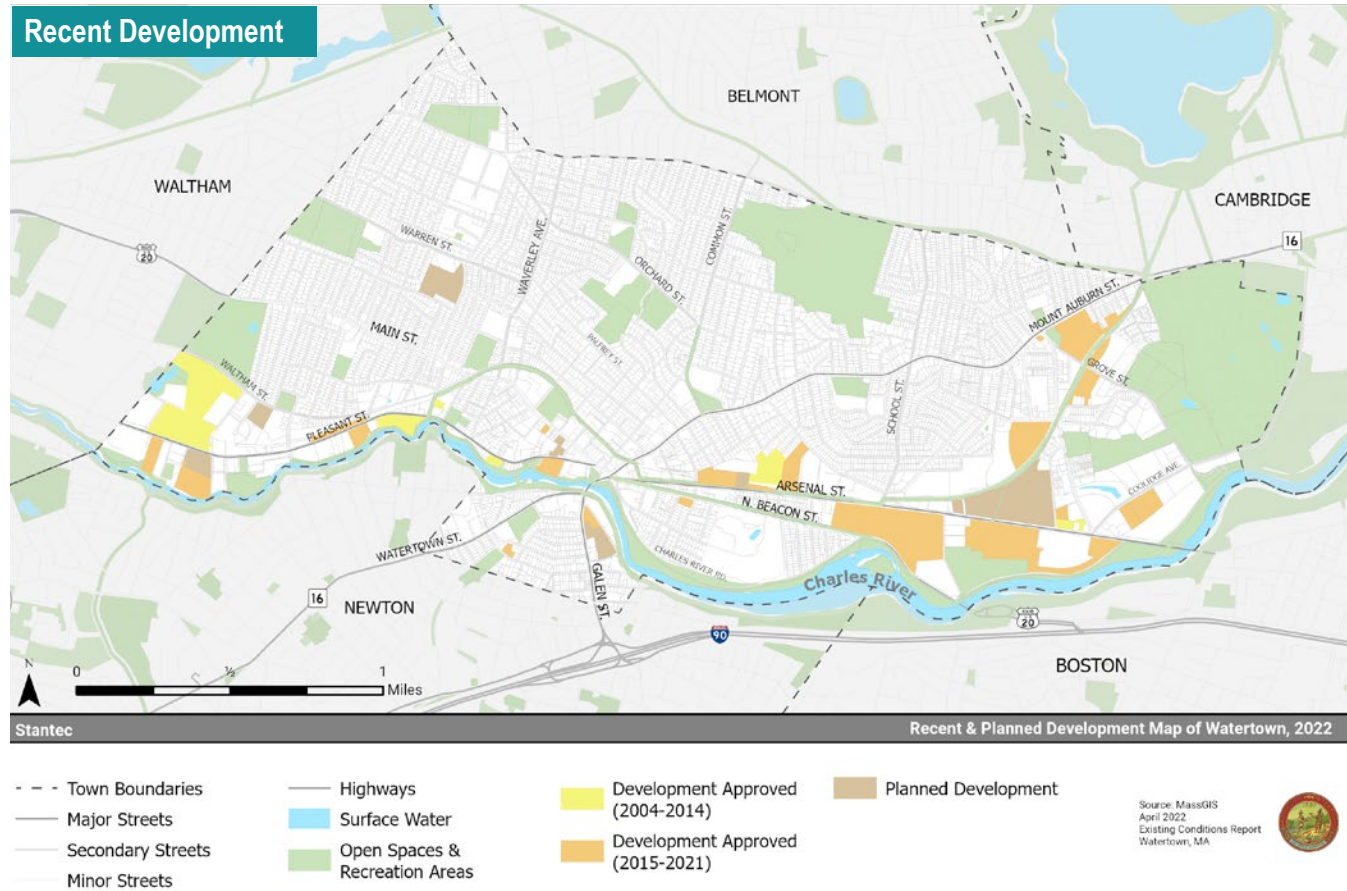
- Watertown lost two of its largest employers (Tufts Associated Health Plans and Edassist/Bright Horizons). A third, athenahealth, announced they will be moving in 2023.
- Watertown gained new office/lab employers such as tenants at the LINX facility on Nichols Avenue, SQZ Biotechnologies at Arsenal Yards, and Arranta Bio on Pleasant Street

Total Jobs in Watertown



Source: MA Dept of Economic Research, ES-202 Reports

Watertown At A Glance



Development in Watertown is almost exclusively the redevelopment of aging single-use industrial and commercial sites into new mixed-use, life science, and/or multifamily housing buildings.

- 2004-2014: 1,172 housing units and 122,500 sq ft of commercial in eight major projects approved
- 2015-2021: 839 housing units and ~2.9 million sq ft of commercial in twenty major projects approved

Source: City of Watertown

Community Preservation Act

Watertown residents approved the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in 2016 to support open space, recreation, historic preservation, and community housing needs. CPA funds can be used to acquire, create, and preserve assets in these categories, and to rehabilitate open space, natural resources, or community housing if acquired or created through CPA. They typically cannot be used for operations, maintenance, or programming.

The CPA is a new funding source since the 2015 comprehensive plan to help implement the strategies. The CPA surcharge is presently generating \$2,000,000+ annually for the community's CPA fund which has a balance of \$15.7 million in 2023. A minimum of 10% of Watertown's annual CPA revenue must be spent or allocated to each of the three categories: open space and recreation, historic preservation, and community housing.



Planning Framework

Planning Framework

The comprehensive plan will guide our city to 2030 and beyond. It will inform decision-making and provide a basis to track progress over time. It is also a living document that will be revisited periodically as strategies are completed or conditions change. The plan framework is structured around an overall vision which is supported by goals and implemented by specific strategies. The framework builds on the Baseline Assessment document which serves as the data foundation for this plan.

Vision and Goals

The Vision Statement succinctly summarizes key features of Watertown's desired future. It is a broad, overarching guiding statement for the comprehensive plan. The process to create this vision statement began with the vision statement from the 2015 comprehensive plan. Small group exercises at the visioning forum and online survey questions gave residents the opportunity to review that statement and offer their ideas for potential changes. Inclusiveness, sustainability, and fostering connections among people were frequently mentioned additions, as well as a greater focus on the city's traditional commercial districts. The vision statement was revised based on this feedback to provide updated guidance for the comprehensive plan.

The goals are aspirational statements which support our vision. The eight goals provide a structure to organize strategies that is generally aligned with topics like housing, transportation, and economic development. These goals are informed by previous plans, especially

the 2015 comprehensive plan, as well as priorities expressed in community input.

Action Plan

Each of the goals is supported by a series of strategies which form the action plan to achieve our goals and realize our shared vision. These strategies are based on planning analysis and community input. Many strategies support one or more additional goals, demonstrating the interdisciplinary and cross-cutting nature of many actions. Implementing one strategy may help us reach multiple goals but may also create new action items that need to be addressed. Each strategy is given a specific City department and a general timeline based on priorities, funding, and relative need to allow for other action items to be achieved. Many of the goals and actions are based on current data and expected outcomes, so progress will be tracked over time to make adjustments as needed in the coming years.

Future Land Use

The Future Land Use Vision and Map show how the vision, goals, and strategies apply to areas of the city. They provide a diagrammatic expression of the key land use issues and changes that emerge from the strategies. The Future Land Use Map is not a zoning map but should guide future zoning considerations to help implement the plan. It can be found in the "Future Land Use" section at the end of this plan.

Our Vision

Watertown is an inclusive and sustainable city that has vibrant neighborhoods, a mix of new development and rejuvenated traditional commercial districts, and that embraces the Charles River. Watertown continues to foster and strengthen community, anchored by a built environment with diverse institutions, high quality schools, celebrated arts and cultural amenities, and recreational facilities that each foster connections important to the community.

Our Goals

1. Be a leader on municipal sustainability and managing climate change impacts.
2. Enhance the character and quality of life in Watertown's neighborhoods, squares, and along the corridors that connect them to help build community.
3. Cultivate a mix of diverse businesses that strengthens our community by providing jobs, services, and support for City infrastructure.
4. Provide safe, efficient multimodal transportation options that provide access to homes, jobs, amenities, and services.
5. Facilitate a range of housing types and affordability.
6. Ensure high-quality parks, recreation, and open spaces that meet the needs of residents and the environment, and encourage active and passive use.
7. Support community wellness through inclusive programs and events, diverse arts and culture, enhanced natural and historic resources, and livelier public and private spaces.
8. Proactively maintain and improve infrastructure and services.



Photo Credit: City of Watertown

Action Plan

Each of the eight goals is described in more detail in the following section. A summary of baseline conditions, issues, and opportunities precedes a table of strategies that support each goal. These strategies form the action plan to implement the comprehensive plan.

Organization

RELATED GOAL(S) – Identifies any other goals that are also supported by the strategy

LEAD(S) – Identifies the lead entity (or entities) responsible for carrying out the policy or strategy, typically a City department

PARTNER(S) – Identifies any other City departments, boards, commissions, or other entities that assist the lead entity in carrying out the strategy

WHEN – Identifies the general timeframe to begin implementation. Timelines may shift based on funding availability, staff capacity, or other factors.

- “Ongoing” are regular, sustained efforts that should continue over the life of the plan.
- “Near-term” denotes 1-3 years
- “Mid-term” denotes 4-6 years
- “Long-term” denotes more than 7 years

Blue boxes provide additional information about a general topic or specific strategy.

Acronyms for “Lead(s)” and “Partner(s)”

DCDP – Watertown Department of Community Development and Planning

DPW – Watertown Department of Public Works

DPB – Watertown Department of Public Buildings

Fire – Watertown Fire Department

Health – Watertown Health Department

Police – Watertown Police Department

Rec – Watertown Recreation Department

CC – Watertown City Council

PB – Watertown Planning Board

ZBA – Watertown Zoning Board of Appeals

Bike-Ped – Watertown Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee

CPC – Watertown Community Preservation Committee

PACC – Watertown Public Arts and Culture Committee

WE3C – Watertown Environment and Energy Efficiency Committee

WBC – Watertown Business Coalition

WTMA – Watertown Transportation Management Association

CRCC – Charles River Chamber of Commerce

DCR – Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

1. Be a leader on municipal sustainability and managing climate change impacts.

The need to be more sustainable and resilient and to mitigate climate change impacts is a pressing issue to maintain quality of life for Watertown's residents and businesses. The physical, economic, and social impacts of climate change grow with each passing year. Taking bold steps now will pay dividends long into the future. That is why the City adopted the *Resilient Watertown Climate and Energy Plan* in August 2022 after a year-long community engagement process. The strategies listed under this comprehensive plan goal are meant to reflect the general intent of Resilient Watertown.

Watertown is already a regional leader in proactively addressing sustainability, resiliency, and climate change



Photo Credit: City of Watertown

issues. It was designated as a Green Community in 2010, one of the first 50+ communities in Massachusetts to receive that designation. In 2020 Watertown achieved Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Community certification as well. The City adopted an ordinance in 2015 requiring LEED-certifiable (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) construction and expanded it in 2018 mandating “LEED Silver Certifiable” standards for new development in commercial, industrial, and mixed-use districts that requires site plan review. It is the first New England city to require solar panels for 90% of the area of parking garages and 50% of roof coverage on new or redeveloped buildings over 10,000 square feet or more than 10 housing units. When it came time to replace the aging Hosmer and Cuniff school buildings, Watertown designed and built two of the first Net Zero Energy school buildings in the Commonwealth which are designed to produce more energy in a year than they consume. Watertown also adopted the state’s Specialized Stretch Energy Code in 2023.

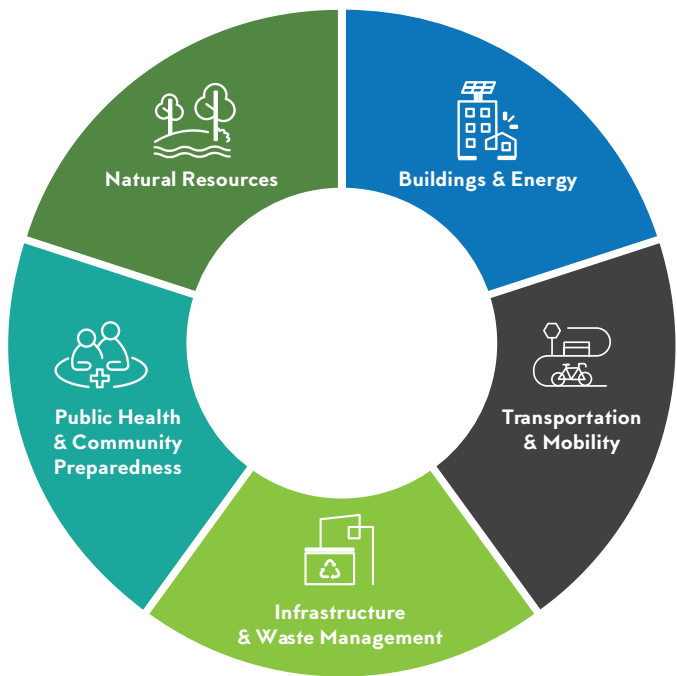
While a series of strategies are described in this section, sustainability and resiliency principles are integrated throughout the comprehensive plan goals and strategies. For example, sustainability is an important aspect of our open spaces and transportation choices. Resilient infrastructure is key to recovering quickly from events and managing investment wisely. And resiliency is more than just an environmental consideration – social resiliency built on interpersonal relationships contributes

to community wellness. A resilient economy has the flexibility to adapt to changes like COVID-19 or evolving consumer preferences. These principles are an important lens to view decisions across all elements of the comprehensive plan.

Baseline Conditions

Watertown is committed to taking action on climate change while preserving and strengthening our unique neighborhoods, natural resources, and diverse communities. The strategies in this goal support the general intent of the more detailed actions in the *Resilient Watertown Climate and Energy Plan*. That plan organizes goals and actions under five elements: buildings and energy, transportation and mobility, infrastructure and

The *Resilient Watertown* plan's five elements



waste management, natural resources, and public health and community preparedness.

A Greenhouse Gas (GHG) inventory was conducted for the Climate and Energy Plan. It estimates that about 55% of Watertown's emissions come from building energy use, primarily the use of natural gas for heating and hot water. Transportation makes up the second largest share at about 40%, mostly from the use of gasoline in vehicles.

Issues and Opportunities

A two-pronged approach is needed to reduce GHG emissions: by reducing building energy use and vehicle miles traveled, and by increasing the use of renewable energy sources and non-vehicular travel options. Strategies that support housing near jobs and amenities like shopping and parks can reduce the need to drive. Strategies that expand the multi-use trail network and improve bicycle and pedestrian comfort levels on streets can encourage people to leave their car behind for more of the 41 percent of trips that started and ended in Watertown (latest available data from Fall 2019).

Climate hazards including storm intensity, flooding, drought, and heat waves are most likely to increase in Watertown in the future. These can lead to more frequent and longer power outages; blocked roadways due to floodwater or downed trees and power lines; water scarcity that can impact the city's tree canopy, landscapes, and water supply; and heat stress, especially for households without air conditioning, seniors, and people with underlying health issues. However, Watertown can mitigate the impact of these shocks by taking actions now to build physical and social resilience.

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
1. Be a leader on municipal sustainability and managing climate change impacts.					
A	Implement the <i>Resilient Watertown Climate and Energy Plan</i> . Regularly revisit and update plan as needed in response to changing conditions.	-	DCDP	DPW CC	Ongoing
<i>Buildings and Energy</i>					
B	Promote energy- and water-efficient new building construction that models sustainability practices and applies lessons learned from high-performance buildings like the net zero energy schools.	Infrastructure/ Services	DCDP	DPW	Ongoing
C	Implement deep energy- and water-efficient retrofit strategies in existing public buildings as extensive renovations and/or equipment upgrades are required.	-	DCDP/DPW/ DPB	WE3C Library Senior Center	Ongoing
D	Encourage energy- and water-efficient retrofit strategies in existing private buildings by educating owners about incentives and benefits.	-	DCDP	WE3C	Ongoing
<i>Transportation and Mobility</i>					
E	Expand the network of non-vehicular transportation options like bicycle and pedestrian routes to reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions.	Multimodal Transportation	DPW/DCDP	Bike-Ped	Near-Term
F	Ensure that new development is designed to prioritize walking and biking.	Character/QoL Multimodal Transportation	DCDP	Bike-Ped	Near-Term
G	Develop an electric vehicle (EV) roadmap to guide future investment, including electrifying the City fleet over time, and promote equitable distribution and access to charging stations.	Multimodal Transportation	DCDP	WE3C DPW	Ongoing
<i>Natural Resources</i>					
H	Ensure equitable distribution of climate mitigation and adaptation investments like tree canopy and green stormwater infrastructure to prioritize environmental justice neighborhoods (those with higher proportions of low-income and minority residents).	Community Wellness Parks/Open Space	DCDP/DPW	DPB	Ongoing
I	Encourage regenerative landscape design in public and private projects to plant appropriate species, provide pollinator habitat and edible landscapes where feasible, and minimize need for watering and fertilizing.	Parks/Open Space	DPW/ DPB/ DCDP	Property Owners	Near-Term

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
<i>Infrastructure and Waste Management</i>					
J	Implement resilient design strategies in new and upgraded infrastructure projects.	Parks/Open Space Infrastructure/ Services	DPW	DCDP	Near-Term
K	Increase residential and commercial waste reduction programs such as composting.	-	DPW	DCDP DPB School Department	Mid-Term
<i>Community Preparedness</i>					
L	Promote climate literacy among all residents by improving communications about City climate change threats and sustainability policies.	-	DCDP	DPW WE3C Library Senior Center	Ongoing
M	Ensure equitable access to climate-related health risks and preparedness resources through community connectivity and resilience hubs.	Wellness	DCDP	Health	Ongoing

Resilient Watertown goals:

- Achieve synergies across multiple Plan Element goals and enable implementation of all strategies and actions
- By 2050, 100% of electricity is sourced from renewables
- By 2050, Watertown's buildings are efficient, resilient, and carbon neutral
- By 2050, non-vehicular transportation options are accessible, affordable, and connected throughout Watertown, and personal vehicular travel miles are reduced by 50%
- By 2050, 100% of all vehicles in Watertown are electric
- By 2050, Watertown's natural assets and green space are enhanced, equitably distributed, and delivering full ecosystem benefits
- By 2050, Watertown has achieved net zero waste community status
- By 2050, Watertown's infrastructure is well-maintained and resilient to the impacts of climate change
- By 2030, Watertown is a model for community resilience to climate change

2. Enhance the character and quality of life in Watertown's neighborhoods, squares, and along the corridors that connect them to help build community.

Watertown is a densely populated, compact city where over 35,000 people live and more than 22,000 people work in just over four square miles. As a result, the character of the built environment and the quality of life it supports is especially important. Residents, workers, and visitors from nearby communities appreciate the variety of places to enjoy. Neighborhoods with a mix of housing types and nearby parks appeal to a range of residents. Watertown and Coolidge Squares as well as smaller neighborhood retail areas host restaurants, services, and shops that residents and workers value. Bustling street corridors like Arsenal, Pleasant, Mt Auburn, Main, and others have attracted new businesses



and jobs, and serve as important connections for the community.

As businesses change hands or close, our residents move, and more people live and work here, change is inevitable. A priority of this comprehensive plan is to better use this change to generate broadly shared benefits. Watertown already requires large redevelopments to provide amenities like publicly accessible open space and bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure, but residents expressed interest in seeing a greater variety of benefits.

Baseline Conditions

Residential uses make up about half of the land use in Watertown, a mix of types that includes primarily one-to three-unit housing in neighborhoods, higher-density apartment and condominium complexes, and a variety of mixed-use districts. Almost one-quarter of land use is mixed-use, commercial, or industrial. Watertown has a legacy of industrial sites whose use has declined over time, making them ripe for redevelopment. Many of these sites, as well as aging or underused commercial sites, have been transformed into new employment uses, mixed-use, housing, and open space.

From 2015 to 2021, there were 20 major projects approved with a total of 839 housing units and almost 2.9 million square feet of new commercial space (lab, office, retail). One well-known example is Arsenal

Action Plan

Yards, a lively mixed-use and entertainment area that transformed an underused site into a local and regional destination. In recent years, development has shifted from mainly residential to include more commercial and mixed-use redevelopments. Demand for life science space in particular has significantly increased the amount of commercial development, including the conversion of outdated office buildings into life science space. Housing continues to be in high demand as well, but competition for limited sites makes providing enough of it at a range of price points an ongoing challenge.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts adopted new multifamily zoning requirements for MBTA communities in early 2021 as part of an economic development bill. To comply, Watertown must identify at least one zone of sufficient size near transit where multifamily housing is allowed by-right. Local planning for this will provide an opportunity to identify appropriate locations where residents will be close to bus transit and other amenities to encourage non-vehicular travel and reduce transportation costs. Watertown Square is the obvious location to explore further due to the convergence of multiple bus routes and history as the city's business center.

Issues and Opportunities

Watertown Square was clearly identified by participants as a priority to improve as a treasured community gathering place. It is challenged by the busy roadways that pass through it but can leverage this visibility to benefit businesses. Storefront and building conditions in many locations are in need of investment and repair, but improvements will create the next generation of space for new businesses and residents. Its proximity to the Charles River is largely under-appreciated today and can become an important connection. As Watertown's primary crossroads and downtown, Watertown Square is the neighborhood that belongs to our entire City and serves as a defining feature for the community. Despite many excellent attributes, the square needs additional planning to address streetscapes, multi-modal circulation, and small business success. Land use regulation in the square has also been a primary issue of discussion. The MBTA Communities zoning requirement provides impetus to undertake a planning study of the square that addresses housing but also takes a holistic approach to the many elements that make a successful and vibrant place.

Coolidge Square is a thriving and regionally popular Watertown neighborhood retail center known for its diverse retail and services, including ethnic and specialty food stores and restaurants, banking, small shops, and other services. It is generally more stable and successful than Watertown Square, but it does face some challenges. These include a lack of signage, issues with parking location and wayfinding, and insufficient public gathering spaces.

Action Plan

Redevelopment in Watertown is an ongoing process as underused formerly industrial or commercial properties are transformed into new uses. Old sites, many with environmental issues from their industrial past, are seeing reinvestment to create space for new jobs, housing, and retail. This process creates other opportunities, such as opening up better public access to the Charles River through formerly closed off industrial properties. It also can change travel patterns or the character of streets, as empty sites see new workers and residents coming daily or shorter industrial or retail buildings are replaced with taller buildings. The City already has zoning requirements in place to manage this change but there are opportunities to consider what the most important types of amenities and mitigation are provided as community preferences and the economy continue to change.

Neighborhood quality of life is influenced by many things including the maintenance of existing housing, character of renovated or new housing, traffic patterns, and proximity to amenities like parks or restaurants. Residential neighborhood change is typically slower and more incremental than in the city's commercial and industrial areas. Zoning and code enforcement are the two primary tools the City uses to regulate neighborhoods. Considerations for building height, setbacks, design character, and other factors should guide substantial renovations and new construction.



Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
2. Enhance the character and quality of life in Watertown's neighborhoods, squares, and along the corridors that connect them to help build community.					
<i>Watertown Square</i>					
A	Develop a neighborhood plan for Watertown Square that comprehensively addresses streetscapes (including placemaking, public art, public spaces, street design); multi-modal circulation (including walking and bicycling facilities, traffic and parking strategies); land use regulation (including housing opportunities and historic preservation); and small business success. 1. Evaluate zoning to comply with requirements of the "MBTA Communities" legislation (Section 3A of MGL c. 40A) by allowing multi-family housing by-right near transit. 2. Study redevelopment opportunities for City-owned properties. 3. Study transportation in Watertown Square to identify achievable strategies to prioritize safety for all users and improve pedestrian and bicycle conditions while managing traffic congestion. 4. Explore options for reinforcing Watertown Square as a destination, building on anchors like the Watertown Free Public Library and City Hall. Look at options for additional anchor(s) that could include restaurants, music/entertainment, institutional, educational, or other cultural uses. 5. Study infrastructure and utility improvements needed to support Watertown Square.	Diverse Businesses Community Wellness	DCDP	PB CC DPW	Near-Term
B	Encourage more housing in and near Watertown Square to increase the residential population within a short walk of local businesses.	Housing	DCDP	CC PB	Near-Term

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
<i>Public Realm Improvement in Squares and Corridors</i>					
C	Support existing squares and growing commercial areas with public improvements that enhance a distinct sense of place and attract customers: 1. Build new gathering spaces and provide seating, shade trees, lighting (including building, ornamental, and solar). 2. Install public art and provide programming. 3. Add new streetscape elements including banners and signage. Any new public improvements must include a plan for maintenance. The City will seek to have private developers and landowners participate in maintenance of public infrastructure where appropriate.	Diverse Businesses Parks/Open Spaces	DPW/DCDP	Bike-Ped Property & Business Owners	Mid-Term
D	Improve convenient walking and biking access and connectivity between the squares, major corridors, and neighborhoods for residents and workers. 1. Install clear wayfinding linking Coolidge Square and Arsenal Street via the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway. 2. Install clear wayfinding linking Pleasant Street to Watertown Square via the Charles River Greenway and the Watertown Community Path. 3. Install clear wayfinding and completion of the Watertown Community Path to connect east and west greenways through and to Watertown Square. 4. Identify strategic points along multi-use trails for small-scale business activity ("trail-oriented development") to reduce the need for short auto trips. 5. Install bike share stations near employment and retail clusters, working with the bike share vendor and private developers to implement the best strategy for funding installation and maintenance of additional stations.	Diverse Businesses Multimodal Transportation Community Wellness	DPW/DCDP	Bike-Ped	Ongoing

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
E	Continue implementing Parking Management Plan recommendations in Watertown and Coolidge Squares to support customer and business needs (public parking awareness, signage and wayfinding, on-street parking pricing/availability, etc.).	Diverse Businesses Multimodal Transportation	DCDP	DPW Traffic Commission	Ongoing
<i>Managing Redevelopment</i>					
F	Ensure large scale development and redevelopment projects provide shared benefits that support the needs of residents and workers and that improve the community. 1. Review and update design guidelines and standards for commercial buildings, including R&D and labs. 2. Continue to require on-site amenities as part of new development, such as publicly accessible open spaces, transportation improvements, new connections to the Charles River, and sustainable design features. 3. Continue to require off-site measures that mitigate development impact and provide community benefits. 4. Encourage other community benefits such as providing/reserving lower-rent space for local businesses and creative economy users, providing public art, and/or including live-work units.	Diverse Businesses Parks/Open Space	DCDP	PB ZBA	Near-Term
G	Improve predictability and transparency for community and for developers in analyzing project impacts (including stormwater, sewer, and transportation) and setting mitigation criteria for large projects.	Infrastructure/ Services	DCDP/DPW	City Manager	Near-Term

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
<i>Neighborhoods</i>					
H	Conduct a zoning assessment that looks at building heights, buffers, setbacks, and parking. 1. Review setback and building height transitions in areas between industrial/commercial, mixed-use, and residential neighborhoods. 2. Review maximum building coverage, floor area ratio, and impervious area requirements 3. Align zoning with existing uses, especially for pre-existing retail and commercial uses in residential zones. 4. Consider residential design guidance for renovations, additions, and infill development, including revisiting the draft residential design guide.	Diverse Businesses Multimodal Transportation	DCDP	PB CC	Mid-Term
I	Promote quality of life in residential neighborhoods through small-scale interventions such as: 1. Continue incorporating traffic-calming techniques as part of complete streets implementation to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety, especially on cut-through streets. 2. Preserve and expand tree canopy in residential neighborhoods, particularly those with less tree coverage.	Sustainability Parks/Open Space Community Wellness Multimodal Transportation	DCDP/DPW	Bike-Ped Police Fire	Near-term

Fifteen-Minute Neighborhoods

Urban planners have championed the concept of a 15-minute neighborhood where most daily needs such as work, shopping, education, medical, and recreation can be reached by a 15-minute walk or bike trip. Watertown aspires to use its streets and paths to make that true for residents in every neighborhood. The 15-minute neighborhood is a unifying theme for tying together our squares, corridors, and neighborhoods and promotes the climate and community wellness goals elsewhere in this plan.

<https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2021/02/08/defining-15-minute-city>

3. Cultivate a mix of diverse businesses that strengthens our community by providing jobs, services, and support for city infrastructure.

Our local economy was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and is continuing to change. Most retail and dining businesses shut down or transitioned to take-out or delivery only for a period of time. For those that survived and slowly reopened, features like outdoor dining and online shopping became more important elements of their business. Other storefronts remain empty due to limited demand, staffing shortages, outdated physical space, or poor location and visibility. Offices and many workplaces also emptied out for a significant period. These employees adjusted to remote work and many are eager to keep the greater flexibility of working from home at least a few days per week. This

new reality affects both the neighborhoods in which they live and the areas in which they work, shifting the customer base for businesses that cater to workers.

Maintaining and enhancing Watertown’s high quality of life plays an important role in building a community that is attractive to employers and employees. Good local jobs at a range of skill and salary levels, a mix of business types and sizes, and training programs that equip residents with in-demand knowledge and skills are key elements of a healthy and sustainable business environment.

A priority of this comprehensive plan is to better support existing commercial districts like Watertown and Coolidge Squares. These places are not only economically important but also key aspects of the city’s identity and character. Their success and growth has been a theme among community input throughout the planning process.

Baseline Conditions

Watertown’s employment base has shifted significantly over the past few years, losing three of its largest employers while gaining a variety of new life science employers. It will continue to grow and evolve, and is projected to gain more than 6,200 new jobs over the next ten years, again mostly in life science businesses. This is driven in part by strong regional fundamentals,



Action Plan

including access to a robust labor pool and skilled talent, proximity to research institutions, and continued growth in e-commerce, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and healthcare.

The Boston/Cambridge area is one of the strongest life sciences/lab markets in the country. Watertown has established itself as a growing sub-market in recent years, due in large part to its proximity to Kendall Square and I-90, the availability of redevelopment opportunities, and an average lease rate that is slightly lower than Kendall or Boston. However, the significant pipeline of planned or approved projects in the region has increased supply and, at least temporarily, played a role in softening demand. Difficulty finding enough skilled workers means some companies may not be able to grow as fast as they want, also reducing absorption of new space.

The retail market is undergoing a period of significant transition driven by changing consumer preferences and lifestyles, new technology, and lingering COVID-19 impacts. Several nationwide trends indicate the increasing move away from traditional brick-and-mortar retail in commercial districts to a wider set of uses that complement retail and that create unique in-person experiences that cannot be replicated digitally. Experiential retail and unique local businesses, food, and artisans are likely to drive growth. While online shopping can expand a retailer's audience and drive sales, it does so without significantly contributing to the life and vitality of commercial areas.

Retail in Watertown ranges from regional attractions like Arsenal Yards, Target, and Home Depot to small businesses that enliven and diversify the squares. New supportable retail, derived from estimates of annual retail

sales lost to other communities and reasonable capture rates of that spending, is estimated at only 80,000 square feet. Over 60 percent of that figure (50,100 sq ft) is in food services and drinking places or food and beverage stores, uses that are well suited for the local commercial districts. The relatively small amount of new supportable retail overall suggests strengthening existing retail areas rather than greatly expanding where retail is located. It also suggests the importance of marketing and the need for retailers to improve and/or update offerings.

The character and physical condition of commercial areas plays an important role in the customer experience. Visually appealing, well-maintained, and comfortable streetscapes together with inviting storefronts and clear signage impact the vitality of a commercial district. Amenities like public gathering spaces and outdoor dining offer experiences that support community and cannot be replicated online. Three key components are critical to the success of commercial districts:

- Public Realm: Sidewalks, street trees and lighting, benches, gathering spaces, roadbed and crosswalks, district wayfinding and signage
- Private Realm: Storefronts and awnings, building facades, outdoor displays and dining, business signage, and building lighting
- Accessibility: Available travel mode(s) to districts, parking, pedestrian and bicycle connectivity

Issues and Opportunities

Solid fundamentals are important to weather economic ups and downs. In 2023, the economy is continuing to adapt to changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic

Action Plan

while responding to rising interest rates and inflation. Life science companies are reconsidering the amount of space they need, providing more opportunities for mid-size companies to grow but potentially slowing the absorption of new space. Ongoing changes in the retail industry are impacting local businesses that form the foundation of commercial areas.

The City can play a bigger role in helping small businesses navigate these challenges. The City can implement public realm and pedestrian/biking/ADA improvements to better support Watertown and Coolidge Squares and other commercial areas. The City can take a lead in improving accessibility options for customers, housing options within walking distance of shops, and new gathering spaces in which to meet neighbors and friends and spend time. This will support the local economy as well as the vitality of the squares. The City must also review zoning, permitting, licensing and parking requirements to ensure that our small businesses survive and hopefully thrive in this challenging environment.



As Watertown's new life science/R&D buildings are leasing up, it is a good time to work with the new employers. It is in the City's best interest for these companies to flourish—and become connected to our community. At the same time, the City should consider how to attract other 21st century industries that may require different job and building types.

It is also important to recognize how economic development aligns with all our other goals. Increasingly, employers follow the pool of skilled workers and workers look for great places to live, work and play. Workers, like residents, increasingly look for ways to travel without a car. Meanwhile, the increase in remote work potentially means more residents are here during the day and making short trips within the city. These trends present an opportunity: when residents and workers are able to easily walk and bike to Watertown's squares and corridors that means more customers are drawn to our small businesses.



Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
3. Cultivate a mix of diverse businesses that strengthens our community by providing jobs, services, and support for City infrastructure.					
<i>Leadership for Economic Development Initiatives</i>					
A	Create a new staff position (e.g., economic development senior planner) to lead initiatives that support small business and attract/retain a mix of businesses. Responsibilities should include: 1. Focus on maintaining a thriving small business community serving residents and other customers. 2. Provide a single point-of-contact for businesses, including assistance with permitting and maintaining up-to-date business resource information online 3. Focus on diversifying Watertown's innovation economy, by industry cluster and company size.	Character/QoL Infrastructure/ Services	DCDP/City Manager	CC	Near-Term
<i>Innovation Industries</i>					
B	Support the existing lab and life science cluster in Watertown so that it is successful and more connected to the community. 1. Promote a distinct Watertown identity for the cluster. 2. Provide amenities that both help companies attract and retain workers and that benefit residents. E.g., public gathering places that also help companies and employees collaborate and exchange ideas. 3. Encourage diversity in lab space sizes so that companies can start and grow in Watertown. 4. Support partnerships between Watertown Public Schools and local companies to provide apprenticeships, high school and middle school mentorship, and other opportunities for industry exposure. 5. Continue to monitor and reassess safety requirements for life science buildings as needed (e.g., existing requirement that new labs do not exceed biosafety level 2 and are reviewed by fire and other inspectors with lab specialization).	Character/QoL Community Wellness	DCDP	Lab and life science companies School Committee	Ongoing

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
C	Continue to diversify our economic base beyond the robust life science cluster by supporting and attracting other industry clusters, particularly those that require varying job and building types. 1. Develop a new study to update the 2011 <i>Strategic Framework for Economic Development</i>, which identified four target clusters (life sciences, information and media, design, and advanced manufacturing). 2. Build on industries already in Watertown and/or areas of regional growth (such as climate-tech, management and technical consulting services, medical devices, advanced manufacturing, digital health and information technology-related industries).	-	DCDP	PB CC	Mid-term
D	Support expansion of the jobs pipeline by connecting new employers to workforce development organizations and local schools. Promote local/ regional skills training programs to encourage residents to develop the skills needed in well-paying, in-demand fields.	Community Wellness	DCDP	Community groups and non-profits School Committee	Near-term

3B. Industry-Community Connections

CoLAB is a partnership between Watertown Public Schools and numerous life science companies. Over the last two years, CoLAB has grown from tentative conversations to a non-profit dedicated to helping Watertown students understand what is involved in life science careers through career presentations, site visits, mentoring, summer internships, and job shadowing experiences. To date, CoLAB has focused exclusively on fostering connections with Watertown High School. This may expand to other WPS sites in the future. In the last two years there have been 102 career presentations; 7 field trips to companies; 4 mentoring partnerships; 2 summer internships; and 2 job shadowing experiences.

3C. Economic Diversification

About 15 years ago, Watertown started an economic development review to think about how best to attract new businesses that would bring needed tax revenue and help clean up its aging and vacant industrial parcels. That plan targeted four potential industry clusters (including life sciences) and positioned Watertown for the present economic boom. Now is the time for a new study on the city's commercial future. While market forces largely drive locational decisions, the City can influence the calculus.

<https://tinyurl.com/5n6thcte>

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
<i>Small Business Support (including woman-, minority-, and immigrant-owned)</i>					
E	Develop a toolkit of policies, programs, and funding opportunities to support small business owners. 1. Provide assistance for facade or interior store improvements – storefront design best practices, technical design assistance, matching grants, low-interest loans, etc. 2. Review licensing and regulation of small businesses to simplify and expedite these while ensuring health/safety/welfare of customers. 3. Provide technical assistance for business planning and navigating permitting/licensing or other needs. 4. Develop incentives for affordable commercial space set-asides in new development. 5. Build mentorship opportunities from other business owners.	Character/QoL Community Wellness	DCDP	WBC Charles River Chamber of Commerce City Clerk Health	Mid-term
F	Update parking requirements to align with actual use, allow for local business growth, and support public space activation. 1. Eliminate parking requirements for seasonal outdoor dining. 2. Identify circumstances to reduce or eliminate parking requirements in support of business development, such as adaptive reuse of existing storefronts undergoing a change of use, or for community priorities like restaurants and cultural destinations. 3. Reduce minimum parking requirements in zoning to align with industry best practices and growth in local patronage.	Character/QoL Multimodal Transportation	DPW/DCDP	Bike-Ped PB CC	Mid-Term

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
G	Improve the diversity of neighborhood-serving options within the business districts by reducing or eliminating hurdles to market entry for small businesses. 1. Expand the list of allowable and “as-of-right” uses in zoning to include neighborhood-oriented commercial uses and specific types of ‘light industry’ as an accessory to retail uses that are increasingly neighborhood-serving, including breweries and specialty food manufacturing (e.g., coffee roastery, small-batch ice cream). 2. Revisit the definition of “fast food establishments” to ensure that higher quality quick service food concepts and catering that appeal to residents are allowed.	Character/QoL	DCDP	PB CC ZBA	Mid-Term
H	Revisit first floor retail and commercial requirements outside of our core commercial areas where sustaining first floor retail is not likely feasible. 1. Consider reducing or eliminating first floor requirements where physical conditions are not conducive to business success (side streets) or if there is insufficient demand. 2. Consider allowing alternative active ground floor uses (e.g., live-work, maker space, art gallery) and/or ground floor residential with design standards.	Character/QoL	DCDP	PB CC ZBA	Mid-Term
I	Encourage property owners to address vacant storefronts using strategies such as temporary pop-up vendors and, art displays. 1. Consider, along with the tool box for small business owners in strategy 3E, ways to help property owners make their vacant storefronts more attractive to new tenants, (e.g., by upgrading interior space through technical assistance, low-interest loans, or matching grants).	Character/QoL	DCDP	WBC CRCC	Near-Term

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
<i>Marketing Watertown Businesses</i>					
J	Develop branding and marketing campaigns over time to promote Coolidge Square, Watertown Square and other neighborhood business districts and raise their local and regional profile. Each district should have a marketing strategy that fits its identity. Develop the necessary organizational capacity and funding to support this initiative.	Character/QoL Community Wellness	DCDP	PACC Watertown Businesses	Mid-term (Coolidge Square) Long-term (Watertown Square and others)
K	Define gateways at major entry points to Watertown and to key commercial areas such as the Squares, Arsenal Street, and Pleasant Street, using wayfinding, banners, landscape or streetscape elements, lighting, or other design elements.	Character/QoL	DCDP	DPW	Near-Term
L	Support improvements to business signage city-wide by developing and promoting updated illustrative design guidelines and by revisiting allowable sign types (e.g., sidewalk A-frames).	-	DCDP	-	Near-Term
M	Help property and business owners build organizational capacity and improve stewardship of commercial districts. Explore the formation of commercial district organizations.	Infrastructure/ Services	DCDP	WBC CRCC	Mid-Term (Coolidge Square) Long-Term (Watertown Square and others)

3M. Commercial District Stewardship

Examples include Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Cultural Districts, Parking Districts, or merchant organizations where property owners and business owners can lead self-directed efforts, including but not limited to marketing and branding of their district, aesthetic improvements, and maintenance of outdoor spaces.

Figure 1: **Potential Gateways**



-  Potential Gateways
-  Parks & Open Spaces

Source: MassGIS
February 2023
Gateways
Watertown, MA



Better identifying gateways to Watertown will enhance its identity, support local businesses, and beautify key corridors.

4. Provide safe, efficient multimodal transportation options that provide access to homes, jobs, amenities, and services.

Streets make up a significant portion of public space in any city so how they are designed and used directly impacts community character. The City maintains most local streets while balancing the needs of all users, including drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, people with disabilities, transit, freight, and deliveries. Streets designed to efficiently move people by all modes, including but not exclusively drivers in cars, provide more mobility options for everyone. Street improvements in commercial areas can foster economic development and create places where people want to spend time instead of simply passing through. Slowing local traffic on neighborhood streets can improve safety and quality of life for residents.



Photo Credit: City of Watertown

The City of Watertown encourages active transportation like walking, biking, and micro-mobility to help reduce traffic congestion from short local trips and to improve both air quality and public health. It supports transit including MBTA bus service and private shuttles to connect more residents and workers to destinations without using a single-occupancy vehicle. It also recognizes that many people still need to drive on a regular basis. Providing more and better multimodal transportation options encourages more non-single occupancy vehicle trips to help meet climate and sustainability goals.

Baseline Conditions

Two regional roadways travel through the city: U.S. Route 20 from west to east (Main Street and North Beacon Street) and MA Route 16 from northeast to southwest (Mt Auburn Street). These roadways provide local access to Interstate 90 and Interstate 95. The majority of streets in Watertown are smaller, more residential streets, and there is no road that provides continuous north-south access which leads to circuitous routing for drivers. Pre-pandemic, just over half of all trips were taken by private automobile and another nine percent as a passenger in an automobile. While Watertown's population has increased by 7 percent from 2000 to 2020, vehicle registrations are down nearly 20 percent in that time. Local traffic count data since 2016 shows an overall decrease in vehicle

Action Plan

traffic beginning before the pandemic and dropping further during the first year of it.

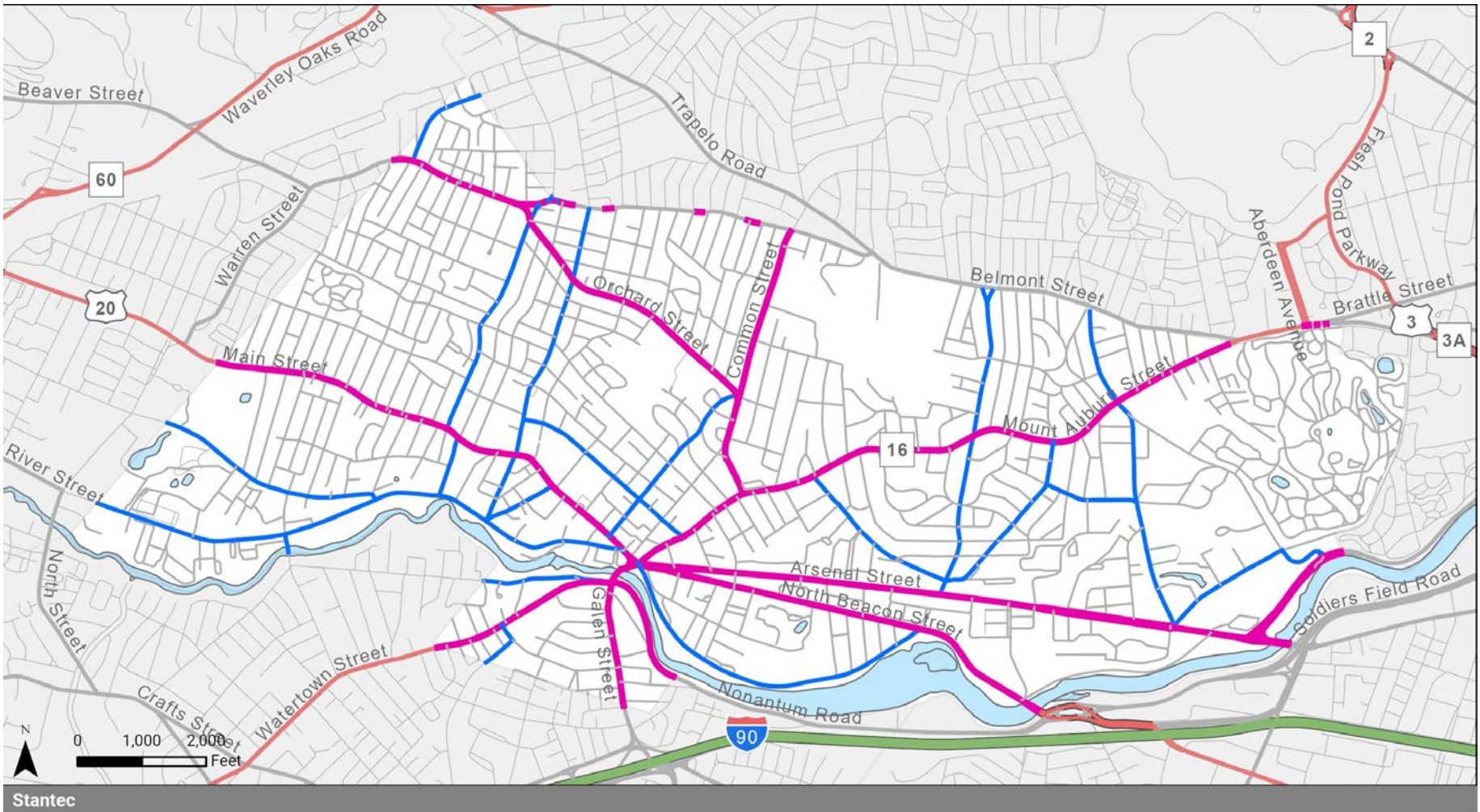
Facilities for people walking and rolling are generally available throughout Watertown, including sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian signal heads, curb ramps, and detectable warning panels. Pre-pandemic in 2019, about 22 percent of all trips in Watertown were taken by walking. Several key intersections in the city have relatively long crossing distances, including in Watertown Square and Coolidge Square, which can deter people from walking as they may not feel safe and/or experience significant delay in getting across the street. This is often due to large turning radii at corners, complicated intersections with more than four streets, and multiple lanes of traffic, including parking lanes, and represents a hierarchy at intersections that prioritizes vehicle movement.

Watertown has a growing network of shared-use, off-street paths including high-quality facilities such as DCR's Watertown-Cambridge Greenway, the Paul Dudley White shared use paths along the Charles River, and the City's Watertown Community Path. On-street facilities are more limited and there are significant gaps in the network where a bicyclist would need to ride in mixed vehicle traffic, something that decreases user comfort for most riders and discourages use. Watertown also has seven bike share stations which are part of the regional bike share network including Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Newton, Arlington, and other communities. These stations, mostly in the southern and eastern parts of the city, supported 12,000 rides in 2021.

Transit service is provided by the MBTA and the Watertown Transportation Management Association (WTMA). The MBTA currently provides nine fixed bus routes that pass through Watertown, with eight of the nine passing through either Watertown Square or Watertown Yard on the southern side of the Charles River. Three routes connect east-west, ultimately bringing travelers to the MBTA's Red Line at either Harvard or Central Squares. Ridership patterns show that Watertown Square is by far the busiest stop for bus riders in the city while Coolidge Square is also relatively busy. The 71 (Mt. Auburn St) and 73 (Belmont St) bus routes are designated "key" high-frequency bus routes and met their reliability targets in Spring 2022, the only two routes in Watertown to do so. The 57 (Watertown Square) and 70 (Main St/Arsenal St) are also designated high-frequency bus routes but fell short of their reliability targets. Other routes including the 504 Express also did not meet their reliability targets which make them less reliable for riders. In addition, several MBTA commuter rail stations are in adjacent communities, including Waverley, Waltham, Newtonville, and Boston Landing. The Watertown TMA provides shuttles to complement MBTA services, with connections to Harvard and Watertown Square. There are currently two shuttle routes serving Arsenal and Pleasant Streets which are open to employees and residents of participating apartment communities. In addition, the City provides the Watertown Senior Shuttle to support older residents.

The City recently completed several plans that address how people move around the city. The *Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan* (2021) and the *Complete Streets Prioritization Plan* (2018) recommend actions citywide. The *Parking Management Plan* (2019) focuses on

Figure 2: **Roadway Functional Class**



Roadway Functional Class

- Arterials
- Collectors
- Local Roadways

Source: MassGIS
April 2022
Existing Conditions Report
Watertown, MA

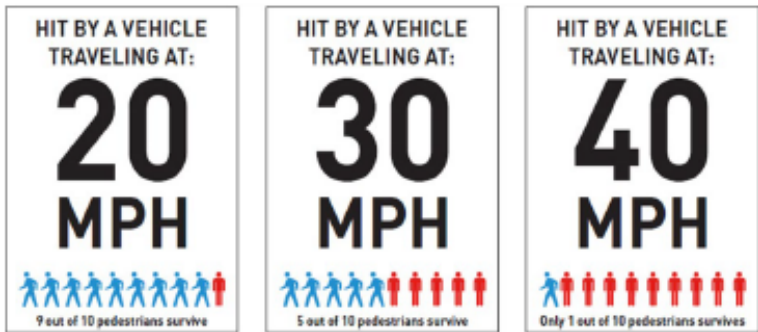


Watertown and Coolidge Squares to recommend parking improvements that better support customers, businesses, and the physical environment.

Issues and Opportunities

Each investment in street improvements should be grounded in clear policies developed by the City that consider the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders, as well as drivers. Transportation decisions that ensure the safety and comfort of all users will encourage more non-vehicular local trips, provide mobility options to residents and employees who do not drive or have access to a vehicle, and reduce emissions. Tracking metrics will help staff and residents understand the performance and impacts of changes on all road users.

Watertown Square is a challenging intersection that impacts local businesses and placemaking. Main Street/N Beacon Street (US Route 20), Mt Auburn Street/Galen Street (MA Route 16), Charles River Road, and Arsenal



Pedestrian fatalities increase dramatically at higher vehicle speeds.
Image Source: Seattle Department of Transportation

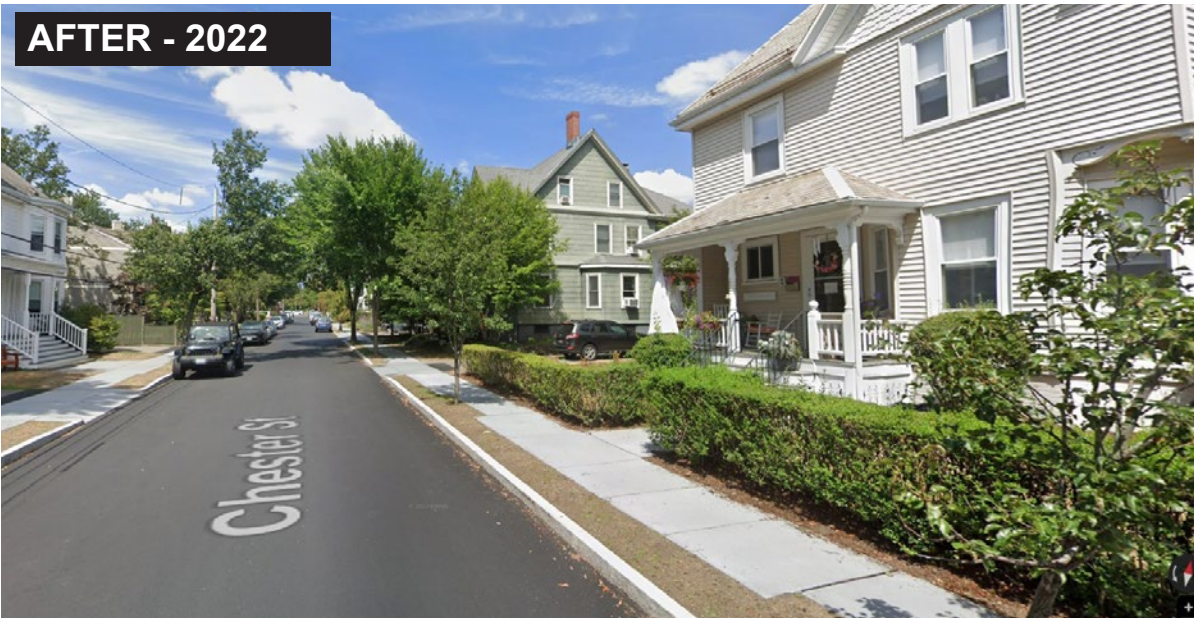
Street all intersect in Watertown Square. This creates a complex, busy intersection in the traditional core of the city and has contributed to this area being a pedestrian crash cluster per MassDOT.

Filling gaps in the bicycle and pedestrian network will be important to encouraging more non-vehicular short trips. The City will need to prioritize locations for improvements to maximize the impact of investments and link existing sections together.

Residents expressed concerns about speeding and cut-through traffic in neighborhoods, parking in the squares, traffic at peak hours, and difficulty navigating certain intersections whether on foot, bike, or driving.

Planning now for mobility changes like increased use of electric vehicles, rideshare, and micro-mobility is important to harness the benefits of new technologies while minimizing negative impacts.

Finally, for many years Watertown did not install granite curbs on streets that did not have them. The traditional planter strip that serves as a buffer between the sidewalk and the street was allowed to be filled in and used for parking cars. This reduced green space, increased runoff, limited areas for tree planting, and created an unpleasant space for pedestrians to walk. The City has, in recent years, redesigned these streets and returned traditional sidewalks, planting strips and curbs. As more streets are upgraded, continued efforts to improve these conditions will make for better neighborhood streets for all users.



A recent roadway project added granite curbing, a planter strip, and a concrete sidewalk to beautify the street and improve the pedestrian experience.

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
4. Provide safe, efficient multimodal transportation options that provide access to homes, jobs, amenities, and services.					
A	Implement mobility-related plans including the <i>Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan</i> , the <i>Complete Streets Prioritization Plan</i> , and the <i>Parking Management Plan</i> . Regularly revisit and update plans as needed in response to changing conditions.	Sustainability Character/QoL Community Wellness Infrastructure/ Services	DCDP DPW	Bike-Ped	Ongoing
<i>Multimodal Policy</i>					
B	Adopt multimodal policy goals and metrics, including for specific street types like arterials, neighborhood streets, and mixed-use squares. Update the <i>Complete Streets Prioritization Plan</i> . Identify minimum roadway standards for all modes including pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and vehicular uses.	Sustainability Character/QoL Infrastructure/ Services	DCDP	Bike-Ped DPW WTMA	Near-Term

4B. Consider using metrics for success, such as:

- Increase in active transportation mode share (biking and walking)
- Percentage of residents living within a five- to ten-minute walk (approx. quarter-mile) of a bike share station
- Percentage of residents within a ten-minute walk (approx. half-mile) of a transit option
- Linear feet of improved sidewalks and bicycle facilities

In addition, *Resilient Watertown* establishes two goals for 2050:

- Reduce personal vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 50%
- Have 100% of Watertown-registered vehicles be electric

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
C	Develop a Vision Zero policy at the municipal level and implement strategies (e.g., “thickly settled” designation and 25 mph speed limit) to reduce crashes and eliminate traffic fatalities.	Community Wellness	DCDP/Police	CC DPW	Mid-Term
D	Develop policies for “sharing the curb” among competing uses, including parking, ride hailing, bike accommodation, loading/deliveries, transit lanes and stops, and outdoor dining.	Character/QoL Diverse Businesses	DCDP DPW	Traffic Commission	Near-Term
<i>Parking</i>					
E	Manage parking availability as part of overall community access. 1. Continue to pursue shared parking arrangements between property/business owners in commercial areas, especially Watertown and Coolidge Squares. 2. Monitor use of public parking and actively manage parking supply based on data to use existing parking more efficiently and better distribute parking demand. 3. Use parking data to understand impacts of trading out curbside parking for bicycle infrastructure, transit lanes, outdoor dining, or other uses, and to proactively plan for where that demand could go.	Character/QoL Diverse Businesses	DCDP/DPW	Police Parking Clerk	Near-Term

4C. Vision Zero “acknowledges that many factors contribute to safe mobility -- including roadway design, speeds, behaviors, technology, and policies -- and sets clear goals to achieve the shared goal of zero fatalities and severe injuries.” Safety is directly related to vehicle speed, which impacts crash severity. Designating Vision Zero areas within Watertown may help achieve the shared goal of reducing vehicular speeds while providing safer bicycling and walking networks in key areas such as near schools and the Main Street corridor.
<https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/>

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
F	Review vehicle and bicycle parking requirements for new development: 1. Update as needed to reflect actual usage trends, allow flexibility in meeting demand, and accommodate short- and long-term bicycle parking. 2. Evaluate design requirements (parking location on the site, its visibility from the sidewalk/street, screening elements, safety, security, covered bicycle parking, and other factors).	Character/QoL Housing	DCDP/DPW	Parking Clerk	Near-Term
G	Conduct a loading study to identify any viable locations to establish loading zones as part of curb management in commercial areas.	Character/QoL	DCDP/DPW	Police Parking Clerk	Mid-Term
H	Evaluate on-street parking policy, the “Winter Parking Ban”, and parking during snow/ice events, in the context of citywide and neighborhood-specific public safety requirements and conflicting demands.	Character/QoL	DCDP/DPW	Police Parking Clerk	Mid-Term
<i>Pedestrian and Bicycle</i>					
I	Enhance neighborhoods by improving walking and biking connections to retail areas, parks, and other community amenities. E.g., Identify opportunities for placemaking along sidewalks, streets, and at intersections.	Character/QoL Diverse Businesses	DCDP/DPW	Bike-Ped	Near-Term

4G. Consider piloting paid loading zones in key locations (see Philadelphia’s Smart Loading Zone program: <https://www.phila.gov/programs/smartcityphl/smart-loading-zones/>)

Consider incentivizing or partnering with freight agencies to use smaller vehicles, including bicycle freight (see DHL Cubicycles), especially in developing areas (see Boston Delivers pilot program: <https://www.boston.gov/departments/transportation/Boston-delivers> or NYC Commercial Cargo Bicycle Pilot Program: <https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/bicyclists/commercial-cyclists.shtml>)

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
J	Prioritize and implement pedestrian and bicycle network improvements. 1. Continue progress toward completion of the Watertown Community Path and ensure local connectivity to it. 2. Close gaps in the network, improve user safety, and expand ADA accessibility. 3. Review existing bicycle parking and bikeshare locations, inventory types of parking (racks, corrals, bike lockers, other interior parking), and add additional parking to improve access. 4. Pursue sustainable funding source for additional bike share stations in key locations such as near commercial, job and housing clusters on main corridors like Pleasant and Arsenal Streets, along multi-use trails, near key bus stops parks, and schools. Partner with surrounding communities to expand the bike share network. 5. Align snow removal policies to plan for travel by all modes, by investing in sidewalk/bicycle facility clearance equipment and staff. 6. Continue annual capital plan commitments to upgrade connector roads and local streets with new sidewalks, planting strips, street trees, and curbs, thereby improving pedestrian safety.	Sustainability Character/QoL Diverse Businesses	DCDP/DPW	Bike-Ped WTMA	Ongoing
K	Improve safety and comfort levels for pedestrians and bicyclists, especially in the squares and along major corridors. Use data on high-crash locations from MassDOT to prioritize design changes that address issues in those locations.	Community Wellness	DCDP/DPW/ Police	Bike-Ped	Near-Term

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
<i>Transit</i>					
L	Increase transit access in Watertown. 1. Analyze transit service levels and headways needed to meet existing demand (and desired mode shares) and new demand associated with development and look at innovative tools for bus prioritization. 2. Continue to direct investment into a Watertown-operated transit/shuttle service, through the existing TMA or considering an on-demand shuttle and micro-transit service option open to everyone. 3. Advocate with MBTA for improved service to address gaps in the network, such as access to Boston Landing commuter rail, service on Pleasant Street, and north-south routes through Watertown.	Sustainability Character/QoL Diverse Businesses	DCDP	WTMA	Mid-Term
M	Identify “last-mile” solutions and infrastructure to support access to high-frequency MBTA routes, such as the proposed T57, T70, T71 and T73. This may include: 1. Prioritize investment in bus shelters, benches, amenities and safe, accessible walking access to high ridership stops along these routes. 2. Prioritize investment in secure bicycle parking at high ridership stops along these routes. 3. Consider options for shared stops for both MBTA and last-mile solutions such as shuttle service to increase access.	Sustainability Character/QoL	DCDP	DPW WTMA	Mid-Term
<i>Emerging Technology</i>					
N	Plan for electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure to support transition to lower-carbon transportation, including for electric City vehicles as well as buses and shuttles. Prioritize investment in publicly available EV charging network, including in disadvantaged neighborhoods.	Sustainability	DCDP/DPB/ DPW	WE3C WTMA	Near-Term
O	Prepare for connected and “smart” mobility by planning for more electricity at the curb, including information and communication technologies (ICT). Develop policies around user data, road safety, and other areas to prepare for “smart” mobility.	-	DCDP/DPW	WTMA	Long-Term

5. Facilitate a range of housing types and affordability.

Watertown, like most communities in the Greater Boston region, is experiencing rising housing costs driven by strong demand and limited supply. Its location near Boston and Cambridge, attractive character and amenities, and growing job base all contribute to this demand. Watertown is also a built-out community where new housing and other development most often replaces a previous use, adding to the cost and complexity to build.

Future housing should be encouraged in areas near transit and other everyday needs. Costs for housing and transportation are typically the two largest components

of a household's budget. Lower transportation costs due to having convenient transit and/or comfortable walking and bicycling options nearby, and by living closer to everyday needs like jobs, groceries, and medical care, can help reduce the overall burden of housing and transportation costs. Housing in walkable locations also helps lower carbon emissions from transportation, encourages healthy lifestyles, and builds social capital among residents.

Baseline Conditions

Watertown has more than 17,000 housing units today, an increase of 15 percent since 2000. This growth rate is less than that in Boston and Cambridge but is higher than other neighboring communities or the State average. Neighborhoods have a large share of housing units in two- to four-unit buildings, just over 40 percent. About one-fifth of units are single-family detached houses and another fifth of units are in buildings with more than 20 units. The neighborhood housing stock is older as well – over 40 percent of housing units were built before World War II and 80 percent prior to 1979. Newer units, especially multifamily, are mostly located in former industrial or commercial areas along Arsenal and Pleasant Streets.

Rising housing costs are a regional issue but impact Watertown's residents directly. Homeowners are increasingly trying to expand the living space in



their single-family homes. Some building owners are enlarging existing two-families and converting them into condominiums. At the same time, owners and small-scale developers are also converting single family homes into two-unit houses. This is happening when about 43 percent of renters and 26 percent of homeowners in Watertown are considered cost-burdened, spending more than 30 percent of their gross household income on housing costs. This limits the amount of money left to spend on other essentials like food, medicine, and transportation.

Watertown has 1,233 units of affordable housing included on the State's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) which meet the requirements of the state's affordable housing law (Chapter 40B). The Watertown Housing Authority operates 589 public housing units. Other affordable units have been created through the City's inclusionary zoning requirements as part of larger mixed-income housing developments.

Watertown updated its *Housing Plan* in 2021, which sets six goals for 2021-2025. These include increasing affordable housing opportunities for households earning less than 80 percent and 60 percent of area median income, increasing housing for seniors and individuals with disabilities, creating a variety of housing types at a range of price points, preserving existing housing affordability, and increasing community engagement around these important issues. Watertown's Affordable Housing Trust was established in 2022 and will begin working to facilitate the creation and preservation of affordable housing.

Issues and Opportunities

Housing is fundamental to the vitality, character, and appeal of the city whether for current residents looking for new housing options or prospective residents looking to move to Watertown and enrich our community. Harnessing the demand for new housing in coming years is a key opportunity for Watertown. The growth of housing units in the City is projected to increase another 5 percent by 2025. Projected commercial development alone is associated with a need for an additional 968 new homes (including 360 affordable housing units for low-, moderate-, and middle-income households). By encouraging a range of housing types and price points in walkable locations near everyday amenities like jobs, schools, parks, and local businesses, new housing growth can help the City achieve multiple goals. For example, increasing the number of residents living within a short walk of retail will support businesses and enliven sidewalks in the squares.

Affordability is perhaps the biggest housing issue in Watertown and the greater Boston region. Rising costs limit housing options for younger residents to find a place of their own, families to grow, and older residents to downsize. It is a challenge to house many of the workers who hold jobs here or would like to fill open positions, particularly those in lower wage jobs like retail sales and food service. This results in long commute times which add to local traffic and increase greenhouse gas emissions. The cost of land and construction makes building new affordable housing a challenge and typically requires layering multiple funding sources, increasing

Action Plan

the complexity and time needed for new projects. One new source of funding is the linkage fee approved by the City Council in early 2023 that will be charged to new commercial development. It will provide funding to help construct housing for employees to address the growing need as more companies locate here.

The types of housing units needed by a changing population is also an issue to address. More senior and supportive housing will be needed as the population grows older. Aging in place allows residents to maintain their social ties while enriching the community with their experiences. Seniors, along with Gen Z and Millennials who are more likely to live in one- or two-person households, are driving demand for smaller units like studios and 1- and 2-bedroom units. This reflects a long-term trend of the percent of one-person households more than doubling nationwide since 1960. While families traditionally drive demand for larger 3+ bedroom units or houses, families are smaller now than they have been historically and fewer live in two-parent households. As a result, many of these homes are being converted to two or more smaller units, are occupied by unrelated renters who can afford to pay more than a single household, or are occupied by one or two aging homeowners whose families have grown and moved out.

The location of new housing is an important consideration as well. Multifamily housing near transit options and other amenities helps to reduce household transportation costs. The City will be required to comply with the state's MBTA Communities legislation requiring Watertown and 174 other communities to provide at least one zoning district that allows multi-family housing as of right. Watertown Square is a prime candidate to study for rezoning that meets these new requirements.



Photo Credit: City of Watertown

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
5. Facilitate a range of housing types and affordability .					
A	Implement the <i>Watertown Housing Plan</i> . Regularly revisit and update plan as needed in response to changing conditions.	-	DCDP	-	Ongoing
<i>Housing Types and Supply</i>					
B	Focus multifamily housing within walking distance of high-frequency transit stops, major employers, and daily services. 1. Identify area(s) like Watertown Square where multi-family housing should be allowed as of right to meet requirements of the “MBTA Communities” legislation (Section 3A of MGL c. 40A) 2. Evaluate parking requirements for multi-family housing throughout the City and recalibrate the requirements based on demonstrated need and usage 3. Consider zoning incentives like increased density to focus housing growth in the key transit-centered locations of the city	Character/QoL Multimodal Transportation	DCDP	PB CC	Near-Term
C	Maintain and expand a range of housing types throughout Watertown, such as micro-units, family-size units, and supportive housing. Consider necessary zoning changes to allow more housing types. 1. Explore allowing accessory dwelling units (ADU) in one- and two-family neighborhoods 2. Promote small- to mid-scale infill housing development (“missing middle”) like two- and three-family housing and small apartment buildings	Character/QoL	DCDP	PB CC	Ongoing

MBTA Communities Multi-Family Zoning Requirement (Section 3A of MGL c. 40A)

Watertown is classified as a “MBTA Adjacent Community.” It will be required to have at least one zoning district in which multi-family housing is permitted as of right, without age restrictions and suitable for families with children. This district must have a minimum land area of 24 acres and a zoned capacity for 1,701 multifamily units (which is 10 percent of its 2020 housing stock of 17,010 units).

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/multi-family-zoning-requirement-for-mbta-communities>

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
D	Participate in regional and state advocacy efforts to support greater housing production and affordability.	Character/QoL Diverse Businesses	DCDP	CPC Affordable Housing Trust	Ongoing
<i>Affordability</i>					
E	Address costs of affordable and workforce housing production by leveraging available resources: 1. Leverage public funds such as Community Preservation Act (CPA) and future linkage fees 2. Consider offering underused or surplus City-owned land and buildings at low or no cost for affordable housing development	Character/QoL Diverse Businesses Community Wellness	DCDP	CPC Affordable Housing Trust	Mid-Term
F	Evaluate regulatory tools to increase production of affordable and workforce housing, especially in locations near transit, jobs, commercial areas, and parks. 1. Revisit inclusionary zoning requirements 2. Consider zoning approval and permitting changes that provide design flexibility and streamline the review process for 100% affordable housing projects	Character/QoL Diverse Businesses Community Wellness	DCDP	PB CC	Mid-Term
<i>Aging in Place</i>					
G	Expand housing supply that caters to needs of older residents. 1. Increase supply of units specifically designed to accommodate the needs of older residents 2. Encourage universal design and visibility standards in new development 3. Connect seniors and individuals with disabilities with appropriate services	Community Wellness	DCDP	Council on Aging Commission on Disability	Ongoing

6. Ensure high-quality parks, recreation, and open spaces that meet the needs of residents and the environment, and encourage active and passive use.

Watertown's open space and recreational areas provide important social, economic, and environmental benefits. They contribute to the wellbeing of residents with opportunities to play, socialize, and exercise. In a dense, urban landscape like Watertown, private open space associated with a residence is limited, so these shared resources also provide access to needed green spaces. Strong evidence shows that people practice healthier lifestyles when they have access to parks¹. Additionally, contact with the natural world is shown to improve both physical and psychological health.

¹ Nurtured by nature (apa.org) Weir, Kirsten. *Monitor on Psychology*, 2020



Photo Credit: Natalie Nigito Photography

The provision of green space in urban areas provides substantial environmental benefits as well. Trees reduce air and water pollution, help to keep cities cooler, and help manage stormwater runoff and erosion. City parks also produce important social and community benefits by providing gathering places for all ages. They are also tied to economic development, with park availability an important quality of life consideration for companies choosing where to locate their facilities and workforce.

Baseline Conditions

There are 468 acres of open space and recreation land in Watertown, just over 20 percent of the total land area. Of this open space area, about 25 percent or 117 acres are city-owned open space and recreation land. Private ownership accounts for 62 percent of the total, with much of it open to the public (notably, Mount Auburn Cemetery and Gore Estate). Most of the remaining open space and recreation land is owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) along the Charles River.

Watertown has recently implemented a number of open space and recreation improvements such as equipment replacement, aesthetic improvements, and amenity expansions. Reconstruction of the City's elementary schools is also creating new, modern playgrounds and play spaces. The City is making progress on completing the Watertown Community Path which will link the

Charles River Greenway to the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway.

Two DCR facilities are important recreation and transportation amenities. The Watertown-Cambridge Greenway opened in 2022 and provides a new off-street, multi-use trail connection between School and Arsenal Streets to Fresh Pond in Cambridge and beyond. The Paul Dudley Bike Path along the Charles River is a significant local and regional asset, providing a scenic walking and biking for residents, workers, and visitors.

Maintaining a healthy and well-distributed urban tree canopy is recognized as an important factor in improving public health and overall wellness. The presence of trees, for example, can reduce stress for those living or recreating nearby. Trees also serve critical environmental functions like improving air quality, absorbing stormwater, and reducing the urban heat island effect. These trees can be located along streets, in parks, or on private property.

Urban stormwater runoff is a major source of pollution in Watertown's waterways. Approximately 57 percent of Watertown's land area is impervious, generating a large amount of stormwater runoff from rainfall and snow melt that carries chemicals, litter, and sediments directly into local wetlands, ponds, streams, and the Charles River.

The City of Watertown updated its *Open Space and Recreation Plan* (OSRP) concurrently with this comprehensive plan. Its goals are to provide access to high-quality parks, recreation and open spaces; support the environmental benefits of parks and open spaces; and ensure sustainable management of these resources. The OSRP provides more detailed recommendations and a seven-year action plan for improvements.

Issues and Opportunities

As a built-out urban area, there is very limited land available to create new open spaces or outdoor recreational areas in Watertown. Walker Pond in western Watertown is one such opportunity which the City has acquired for public use. Another opportunity is for private developers to provide publicly-accessible open space within large redevelopment projects, a requirement that is already in place but could be expanded or further detailed to ensure these spaces are of the size, design, and number to meet the needs of residents.

Responding to the changing needs of an aging and diversifying population will require parks and recreation areas to incorporate a wider variety of amenities, programs, and features. Increasing development activity puts added pressure on the city's existing natural resources, public spaces, and recreational areas as well. Local parks need to accommodate a variety of uses and people within a limited amount of space. The city is exploring more multi-purpose facilities that can accommodate different activities or change uses between seasons.

Nature-based solutions (NBS), also referred to as "green stormwater infrastructure," incorporate features like plants and landscape design to manage, store, and filter stormwater before it enters waterways. Well-designed NBS installation can complement or even replace existing "gray infrastructure" like storm drains and outfalls while also beautifying sites and providing public education opportunities. There are many examples of various sizes already in Watertown, such as bioswales along

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Edenfield Avenue and bioretention basins at Beacon Park, but continued development of these features will be important.

Safe, convenient access to parks and open spaces will better connect residents to these resources. The growing network of off-street multi-use paths can also support new trail-oriented housing and businesses. Thoughtfully designed building renovations or redevelopment along these trails can take advantage of convenient non-vehicular transportation and recreation options while also providing passive surveillance along the trail for users.



Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
6. Ensure high-quality parks, recreation, and open spaces that meet the needs of residents and the environment, and encourage active and passive use.					
A	Implement the <i>Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)</i> . Update plan at least every seven years to address changing needs and meet statutory requirement.		DCDP/Rec	Commission on Disability	Ongoing
<i>Open Space Network/Access</i>					
B	Increase the number of and access to parks and open spaces throughout Watertown, especially in areas with limited access to existing resources. Seek out opportunities to add new open space or recreation amenities, via cost-effective acquisition or within new development. Take advantage of both public land/funding and private development opportunities.	Sustainability Character/QoL	Rec/DCDP	DPW CC	Mid-Term
C	Improve accessibility to parks and recreation areas. 1. Sidewalk connections and marked crosswalks near resources 2. Curb ramps and ADA parking for people with disabilities 3. Secure bicycle parking and bike repair stations at resources 4. Wayfinding and signage to direct people to resources 5. Evaluate parking regulations at parks and playgrounds	Community Wellness	DPW	DCDP Commission on Disability	Near-Term
<i>Open Space Enhancements</i>					
D	Expand access to and recreational use of the Charles River through continued partnerships with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and private developers.	Character/QoL	Rec	-	Mid-Term

6B. Pocket Parks

Identifying locations for “pocket parks” is one approach to add open space in neighborhoods with limited existing access. These small open spaces may include features like shade trees, native plantings, community gardens or edible landscapes, stormwater infiltration, seating, and/or gathering space while beautifying underused areas.

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
E	Ensure recreational areas and programs respond to local needs and support active lifestyles in a variety of ways: 1. Add more amenities to existing parks and green spaces to meet local needs (community gardens, seating, splash pads, etc.) 2. Increase the amount of flexible space in existing parks for unstructured or creative play, community events, or other activities 3. Add more programming and expand existing programming where demand exists (adult sports leagues, youth/teen programs, adaptive recreation programs, farmer's market, etc.)	Community Wellness	Rec/DPW	DCDP LWW	Mid-Term
F	Incorporate universal design concepts and other considerations to make parks and recreation areas more accessible to a range of ages and abilities.	Community Wellness	DCDP/ Rec/ DPW	Commission on Disability	Ongoing
<i>Environmental Benefits</i>					
G	Preserve the existing tree canopy on public land. Expand the tree canopy in public spaces and areas with less tree coverage. Use diverse non-invasive substitute species when adding trees.	Sustainability	DPW	DCDP Rec	Near-Term
H	Address climate change threats to open space and recreation resources by adding green infrastructure, native landscaping, and other nature-based solutions.	Sustainability Infrastructure/ Services	DPW/DCDP	-	Mid-Term
<i>Resource Management</i>					
I	Ensure timely maintenance of and upgrades to playing fields and hard surface courts.	Infrastructure/ Services	Rec/DPW	DCDP	Near-Term
J	Continue to work with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to ensure the Charles River Reservation is well-maintained and meets community needs.	Character/QoL Infrastructure/ Services	Rec/DPW/ DCDP	-	Ongoing

6G. Trees serve many roles such as helping to mitigate the urban heat island effect, absorb stormwater, clean the air, and beautify areas. Environmental Justice (EJ) communities (defined by high concentrations of lower income, racial minorities, and/or language isolation) often have fewer trees which lead to warmer air temperatures, localized flooding, and greater air pollution. Adding trees can be part of an equity-based approach to improving quality of life.

7. Support community wellness through inclusive programs and events, diverse arts and culture, enhanced natural and historic resources, and livelier public and private spaces.

Supporting community wellness requires a holistic, collaborative approach to a wide range of issues. Individual health and wellness are affected by many things—personal and social factors as well as external circumstances like the built environment. Watertown’s needs and preferences are evolving as our population continues to grow, diversify, and age. This calls for greater attention to wellness so that our sense of community is strengthened, not weakened, by change.

Community wellness also includes arts, culture, and historic resources that enrich our daily experiences; natural resources that support physical and mental health; and gathering spaces that encourage social

interaction among people. An increase in the number of events that reflect our growing diversity and gathering spaces that encourage people to come together are two ways to support community wellness.

Baseline Conditions

The 2019 *Community Health Needs Assessment* surveyed a variety of Watertown residents to explore questions of health and wellness. Participants described a broad vision of community health, one where there is collaboration, engagement, mutual support, and connection among diverse residents. Social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These conditions include measures like income, housing, education, and employment, which impact individual health differently. The physical environment also influences community health through factors including the presence or absence of mature trees in different neighborhoods and the availability of safe walking and biking routes to encourage active transportation. Buildings impact individual and community health as well, such as older homes that still have lead paint, residences with poor indoor air quality from building materials and furnishings, or whether housing has accessibility features that allow aging in place. Live Well Watertown (LWW), a City-run healthy community coalition established in 2012, offers public wellness programs and initiatives in coordination with its partner network.



Photo Credit: City of Watertown

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The 2020 *Public Arts Master Plan* guides the commissioning, creation, selection, and care of public art. It calls for integrating public art into schools, parks, open spaces, streets, and sidewalks, as a way to celebrate our local identity. The Public Arts and Culture Committee was formed in 2021 to lead many of the recommendations in that plan. A key recommendation is to cultivate relationships with community organizations to support public arts projects that highlight Watertown's unique neighborhoods, historic and cultural heritage, and cultural diversity.

Watertown is host to a variety of community events and other programming throughout the year. These include the annual Faire on the Square, the Watertown Arts Market, the free Summer Concert series, and many more. Live Well Watertown offers a variety of wellness programs including the Watertown Farmers' Market which was established in 2013. Recognized as a community asset, the 20-week market is a gathering place that supports local agriculture, businesses, and artisans, addresses food insecurity, and serves as a site for local agencies to provide resources to the community. In addition, Arsenal Yards hosts outdoor fitness classes, movies, and other activities that are open to everyone. These events invite residents to come together to see neighbors, support businesses and artists, and foster a greater sense of community.

Watertown has a rich history embodied in many older buildings and sites. The Watertown Arsenal Historic District encompasses the Watertown Arsenal, a complex that is being adaptively reused today as The Arsenal on the Charles. The Mount Auburn Street Historic

District extends from Summer Street to Lincoln Street and includes a portion of Marshall and Palfrey Streets. It was designated in 2002 to preserve the distinctive architecture reflecting the character of Watertown's rich cultural, social, economic, and political history. The Charles River Reservation Parkway provides open space, recreation opportunities, and wildlife habitat. Mount Auburn Cemetery is a National Historic Landmark, designated for its importance as the first rural or "garden" cemetery in the country. Other important historic resources include the Commander's Mansion, Old Burial Ground/Arlington Street Cemetery, Administration Building murals, Edmond Fowle House, and the original main library building.

Issues and Opportunities

Community health needs identified in the 2019 needs assessment include mental health, substance use, and the stresses of meeting basic needs including finding affordable housing and equitable access to services. Inclusive services and spaces for youth and seniors are of particular importance due to the vulnerability of these groups. The *Resilient Watertown* plan identifies other health impacts driven by climate change, including heat stress due to an increased number of hot summer days, isolation due to more intense winter storms or flooding events, and breathing difficulties due to air quality issues.

There are numerous opportunities to apply placemaking principles to enhance streetscape projects, park improvements, and multi-use trail designs. Public arts considerations can be better integrated into planning

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and development to ensure that resources, artisans, and opportunities are connected. These support community wellness by encouraging social interaction, connecting people to place, and building civic pride.

Watertown lacks a comprehensive inventory and prioritization of historic resources. This makes it challenging to identify where to spend limited funds for the greatest impact or to plan for future projects. Adaptive reuse offers another pathway to give new life to historic buildings. Examples like the Arsenal on the Charles demonstrate the potential to preserve history while accommodating modern uses. Efforts to preserve these resources and integrate them into the daily life of residents and workers support community wellness by maintaining a link to the city's past.



Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
7. Support community wellness through inclusive programs and events, diverse arts and culture, enhanced natural and historic resources, and livelier public and private spaces.					
<i>Wellness and Inclusivity</i>					
A	Design and program public open spaces and publicly accessible private open spaces to encourage social interaction. 1. Provide a variety of seating types and arrangement. 2. Consider age-, ability-, and culturally-aware design elements.	Character/QoL Diverse Businesses	DCDP	PB CC	Near-Term
B	Increase public events and other programming led by the City and neighborhood groups. Encourage diverse event types that appeal to a broad range of people.	Character/QoL	DCDP	PACC Library LWW	Ongoing
C	Encourage healthy lifestyles through design of streets and parks, access to food and healthcare, and other means. 1. Provide active transportation options 2. Ensure accessible parks and programs 3. Promote community gardens and edible landscapes 4. Provide programs for seniors and youth to encourage social connection	Character/QoL Multimodal Transportation Parks/Open Space	DCDP/Health	Rec Council on Aging LWW	Near-Term
D	Explore AARP's Age-Friendly Community designation as a means to continue making Watertown a welcoming, livable, and age-friendly community where people can grow up and grow older in a thriving environment together. This means creating an environment that supports the health, well-being, and independence of older adults.	Character/QoL	DCDP	Council on Aging DPW Rec LWW	Mid-Term
E	Support and expand mental health and stress management resources. Strive to reduce substance use through social services, programming, and other resources.	-	Health	Watertown Cares Network Wayside	Near-Term

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	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
F	Celebrate diversity and cultural traditions through public art, community events, formal recognition, and other appropriate means. Formal recognition of Watertown's commitment to arts and culture as integral to city life may include the designation of a cultural district.	Character/QoL	DCDP	PACC Library	Ongoing
<i>Arts and Culture</i>					
G	Implement the <i>Public Arts Master Plan</i> . Regularly revisit and update plan as needed in response to changing conditions.	Character/QoL	DCDP	PACC	Ongoing
H	Integrate arts and cultural considerations into planning and development review processes including streets and sidewalk projects, parks and open spaces, schools, new development, and other initiatives.	Character/QoL	DCDP	PACC	Ongoing
I	Continue to develop and implement a Public Art Policy and track metrics to evaluate alignment with program values.	-	DCDP	PACC	Ongoing
J	Identify a variety of funding sources to sustainably support arts and culture planning and projects e.g. percent-for-the-arts, state and regional programs, sponsorships, and more.	-	DCDP	PACC	Near-Term
K	Support partnerships between City departments, other civic stakeholders, the arts community, and the general public to promote and support arts and culture in everyday experiences.	-	DCDP	PACC Library LWW	Near-Term

7D. Livability Factors for Age-Friendly Communities (AARP):

- Housing (affordability, availability, accessibility)
- Neighborhood (proximity to destinations, safety, support for mixed-uses)
- Transportation (convenience, safety, options)
- Environment (air and water quality, energy efficiency, hazard mitigation)
- Health (healthy behaviors, exercise opportunities)
- Engagement (voting, cultural engagement, broadband availability)
- Opportunity (job availability, graduation rates, income inequality)

<https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/scoring>

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
<i>Historic Resources</i>					
L	Inventory historic assets and consider using a city-wide historic preservation plan to set priorities.	Character/QoL	DCDP	CPC	Mid-Term
M	Promote local history and historic resources as a way to tell Watertown's story and enrich the public realm through interpretive signage and education (e.g., local "Hero Squares").	Character/QoL	DCDP	Historical Commission Historic District Commission Historical Society Library PACC	Mid-Term
N	Encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings to maintain link to past while giving them new life.	Character/QoL	DCDP	Historical Commission Historic District Commission PACC	Near-Term

8. Proactively maintain and improve infrastructure and services.

Public infrastructure encompasses streets, sidewalks, water, sewer, stormwater, public buildings, and public services like police, fire, trash, recycling, and others. Public education is provided by Watertown Public Schools, supported by but separate from the City. Utilities like electric and gas are provided by private companies.

Some public infrastructure investments support existing neighborhoods and commercial areas by maintaining and/or improving service. These are critical to quality of life, ensuring that existing sidewalks, roadways, and other services are maintained in good working condition. Other investments help support new private investment, such as a water or sewer line upgrade that provides

capacity for a new business, or improve resiliency to increasing climate hazards, like green infrastructure that slows stormwater and reduces the quantity that enters the system during a storm event. These are important to facilitate ongoing growth and in some cases are partly paid for by mitigation funds from developers of large projects.

The City has a long track record of taking proactive steps to maintain infrastructure. Limited funding often forces difficult decisions or can delay improvements, however. Recognizing fiscal constraints while keeping a long-term perspective in mind helps City departments prioritize what needs to be done when. Increasing the resiliency of our systems is an investment in their long-term viability by mitigating the impact of major events and allowing faster recovery.

Baseline Conditions

Public facilities in Watertown include the Administration Building, Watertown Free Public Library, the Senior Center, Police Department, three fire stations, the John. A. Ryan Skating Arena, the Department of Public Works, and Commander's Mansion.

Watertown's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is an important implementation tool for the comprehensive plan. It provides funding to maintain and improve infrastructure, facilities, and equipment. The Fiscal Year 2024-2028 CIP totals \$246 million, including an



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additional \$100 million from the previous CIP for the new high school (total of \$200 million loan order as of 2022).

The Mount Auburn Street Complete Streets project is being led by the Department of Public Works in coordination with MassDOT. It is developing a new street design that better balances the needs of all users so that this major roadway supports multimodal transportation as well as local businesses.

Watertown Public Schools is implementing its “Building for the Future” program. Two elementary schools, Cunniff and Hosmer, were rebuilt as Net Zero Energy facilities. A third, Lowell, is undergoing extensive renovation and an addition also to Net Zero Energy goals. All three were funded within the confines of Proposition 2 ½. A new Watertown High School is progressing through the design and bidding process at the State level with construction expected to begin in the summer of 2023. This project includes funding from the Commonwealth and does not require a local debt exclusion as it will be funded within the confines of Proposition 2 1/2. The City’s 2024-2028 CIP includes approximately \$3 million for the Middle School.

Issues and Opportunities

The City owns two former public buildings that require a new use. The former police station, located in Watertown Square behind Fire Station 1 and next to the library, is being considered for demolition with a municipal reuse of the site. The former North Branch Library is a one-story brick structure at the corner of Orchard Street and Waverley Avenue. The City is currently

exploring municipal uses for this property, including as a community arts space.

Several municipal buildings, notably the Administration Building, lack adequate workspace and long-term storage and have aging building systems. Energy efficiency upgrades are needed, both to implement a recommendation of the *Resilient Watertown* plan but also to improve user comfort and reduce operating expenses. As the city grows and changes, staff capacity is also an issue in departments like community development and planning, recreation, and public works. If staffing numbers increase to better meet growing needs, office and workspace will be further impacted. The City has recently taken a first step in matching demand for and supply of usable municipal space by acquiring the former Parker School building to become a new annex building for City services.

The City should continue to evaluate the type and availability of City services in light of changing population characteristics and community expectations. Local government is being asked to do more, and the City must have the staff and operational resources to meet the expected tasks. These priorities may include: more resources for youth programming outside of school time, senior programs, as well as other programs and services for residents in need. City programs need to be more responsive, inclusive, and reflective of the greater diversity of the population, particularly our younger residents. The City should carefully evaluate which services are best provided by local government and which are best provided by supporting local non-profit community organizations. City leadership should also continue to evaluate the operations of government to make sure that Watertown continues to deliver innovative yet cost-effective city services.

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
8. Proactively maintain and improve infrastructure and services to responsibly meet current and future needs.					
<i>Facilities and Infrastructure</i>					
A	Make Watertown's infrastructure more resilient to the impacts of climate change as repairs are made and new projects completed.	Sustainability Character/QoL Parks/Open Space	DPW	DCDP Utility Companies	Ongoing
B	Improve and modernize public buildings by applying energy efficiency strategies and enhancing accessibility.	Sustainability Community Wellness	DPB/DPW	DCDP	Ongoing
C	Complete a municipal space use analysis to quantify current and future space needs. Use findings to explore reuse opportunities for unused or underused municipal properties and buildings.	-	City Manager	DCDP CC	Mid-Term
D	Prepare for Smart City technology applications and ensure equitable digital access, including consideration for public WiFi in key locations.	Diverse Businesses Community Wellness	City Manager/ Information Technology	DCDP	Near-Term

8D. Smart Cities

Smart Cities should be about more than just technology or the latest digital trends. A “people first” approach should consider how technology can provide the conditions to deliver the outcomes our community needs, like reducing the impacts of climate change, driving equity and inclusion, building a robust economy with jobs and innovation, and realizing carbon reduction targets.

Action Plan

	Strategy	Related Goal(s)	Lead(s)	Partner(s)	When
E	Complete new construction and renovations planned for schools. Ensure DPW and DPB have adequate personnel and expertise to operate and maintain these highly sophisticated net zero energy buildings appropriately so their resource-efficiency goals are met or exceeded.	Sustainability	Schools/DPB	CC	Ongoing
<i>Public Services</i>					
F	Identify and implement innovative strategies and best practices in municipal government. Evaluate range of services offered by City to identify any critical gaps or opportunities to reallocate resources.	Character/QoL Community Wellness	City Manager	City Departments	Mid-Term
G	Improve City communications with residents using a variety of methods (including 311) and partnerships with community groups to promote resources, events, and opportunities.	Character/QoL Community Wellness	City Manager/ Information Technology	City Departments	Near-Term
H	Support the mission and vision of the Watertown Public Schools and support the implementation of the district improvement strategy.	Community Wellness	City Manager	CC	Ongoing
<i>Capacity</i>					
I	Identify staff capacity and needs across City departments in response to increased population, and the increased expectations of the community for high-quality public services (e.g. Public Works, Public Safety, Community Development and Planning, Library, Senior Center).	Character/QoL Community Wellness	City Manager	City Departments	Near-Term
J	Implement charter revisions to increase diversity of members on City boards and committees, staff, and leadership. Track progress over time and provide updates to the community.	Community Wellness	City Manager	Community Groups	Ongoing



Future Land Use

Photo Credit: Natalie Nigito Photography

Future Land Use

Future Land Use Vision

The future land use vision is a diagram that provides a generalized depiction of areas to preserve, enhance, and transform through the implementation of this plan.

Most of the city—including its low- and medium-density residential neighborhoods—are areas to generally preserve. This still allows for improvements such as traffic calming, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, or increased tree canopy. Context-sensitive retrofitting may be appropriate in some neighborhoods to modestly increase housing supply, such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or subdividing larger houses into two- or three-family units. Changes like these can improve quality of life for existing residents and help welcome new residents.

Other areas are intended to be enhanced over time. The small retail clusters that animate neighborhoods and streets like Mt Auburn and Main should be improved to better support businesses, customers, and residents while building on the existing character of these areas. Changes may include public realm improvements, enhanced connections to neighborhoods, better parking management, or new public art.

Places to transform represent portions of the City that are expected to be dynamic over time. The degree of change will vary depending on the location. Our traditional center, Watertown Square, is one area to transform by revitalizing it as the lively mixed-use core of the city. The improvement of adaptive reuse of existing buildings and thoughtfully designed new

buildings should enhance the existing character by incorporating pedestrian-friendly features using either traditional or contemporary aesthetics. Growing the residential population with new housing will support local businesses and take advantage of the transit routes that converge through the square. Other changes may include public realm improvements, better connections to neighborhoods, new public gathering space, and public art.

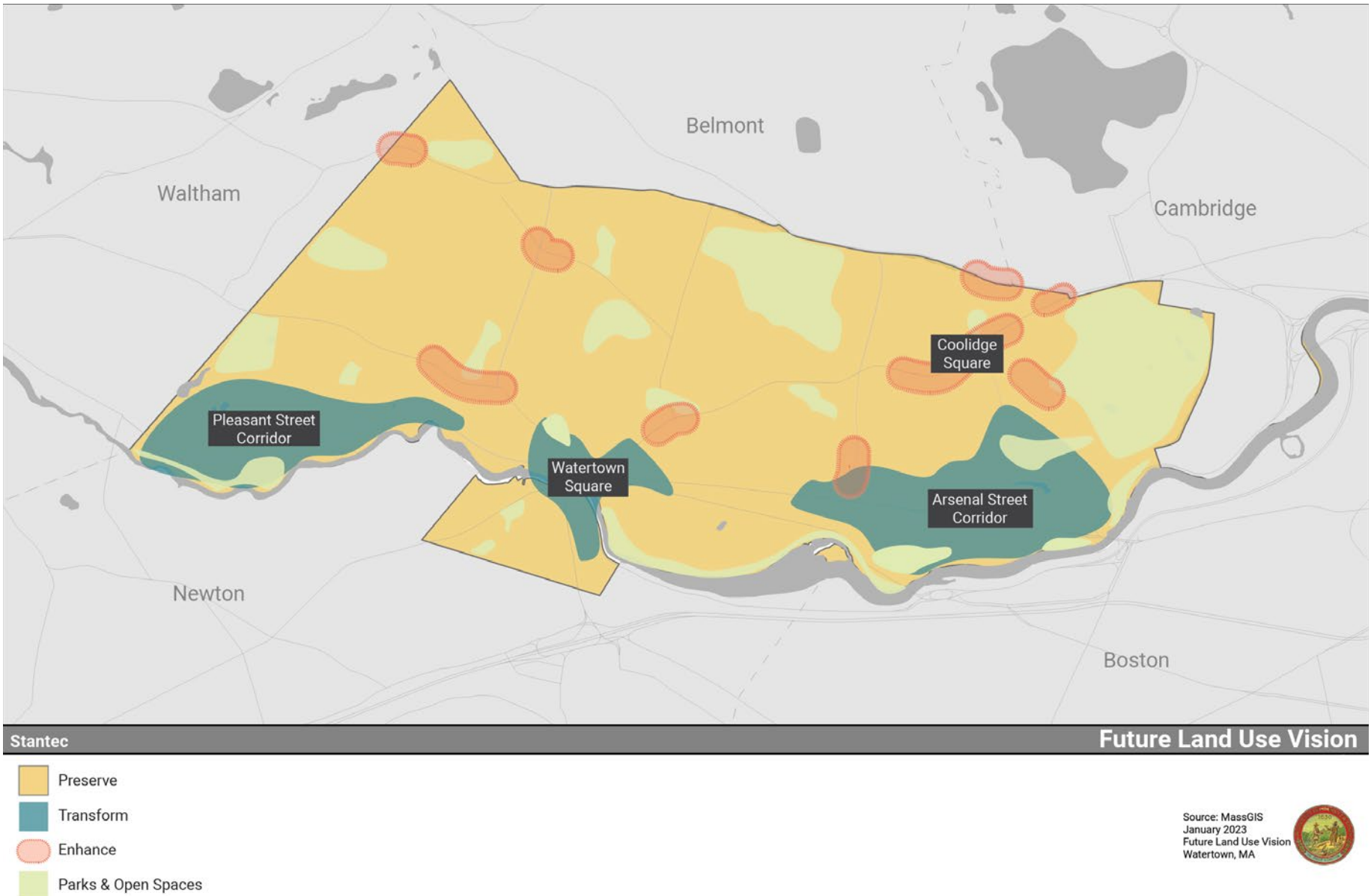
Portions of Pleasant Street and Arsenal Street are two other areas to transform. A desired outcome of these transformative efforts is to better integrate new development into the fabric of the community. The older existing uses, especially light industrial properties, tend to be isolated from their surroundings. Redevelopment provides an opportunity to better connect new uses to nearby streets, sidewalks, and open spaces and to provide amenities for neighbors and others.

The eastern portion of Arsenal Street is intended to continue its evolution as regional-scale mixed-use with a different character than Watertown Square. The primary strategy here is new construction that replaces outdated single use retail and commercial development with higher density mixed uses set in a walkable street network.

Pleasant Street west of Howard Street is intended to transform from primarily light industrial to more commercial and industrial mixed-use with some housing in limited areas. Better connections to the Charles River and to nearby neighborhoods are important strategies to pursue here.

Future Land Use

Figure 3: **Future Land Use Vision**



Different types of transformative change is envisioned for three distinct areas: Watertown Square, the historic mixed-use core of the city; Arsenal Street, an emerging regional mixed-use area; and Pleasant Street, a primarily commercial-light industrial mix. Enhancements are desired for neighborhood retail areas including Coolidge Square. The city's neighborhoods are areas to generally preserve while improving quality of life for current and future residents.

Future Land Use Map

The future land use map is a way to delineate geographically how the plan’s vision, goals, and strategies might look. Each “character area” generally depicts desired future conditions and not necessarily existing

zoning or uses. This map is a tool to inform future zoning revisions and amendments to better align zoning with the comprehensive plan. The ten character areas are described below:

- **Low Density Residential** – This designation denotes portions of neighborhoods with the largest typical lot sizes in Watertown, generally between 6,000 and 10,000 square feet. These areas are primarily single-family houses.
- **Medium Density Residential** - This designation denotes portions of neighborhoods with typical lot sizes between 5,000 and 6,500 square feet. These areas are generally a mix of single-family and two-family houses.
- **High Density Residential** - This designation denotes portions of neighborhoods that are primarily multi-family apartment buildings and cluster residential.
- **Residential Mixed Use** - This designation denotes corridors to enhance with higher-density multi-family development, often in larger buildings, to increase housing supply. These sites typically include a limited amount of complimentary retail or commercial use, often occupying a portion of the ground floor. Building location and site design should support walkable, bikeable sidewalks and streets.

- **Neighborhood Commercial** - This designation denotes small-scale retail and commercial areas to enhance throughout the city. Pedestrian-oriented design is a defining feature of these areas. Retrofits and infill development should generally complement the existing scale and character.
- **Commercial Mixed Use** - This designation denote areas to enhance with a variety of medium to higher density commercial, retail, light industrial, and research and development uses, creating a vibrant business atmosphere. A limited amount of higher density multi-family residential development may be appropriate in some areas either to support nearby businesses and/or take advantage of locations near community amenities. Building location and site design should support walkable, bikeable sidewalks and streets.
- **Office/Industrial Mixed Use** - This designation denotes commercial and industrial areas to enhance with a mix of office, light industrial, and research and development uses. Building location and site design should accommodate safe pedestrian and bicycle movement to and through them so these areas do not create barriers to active transportation networks.

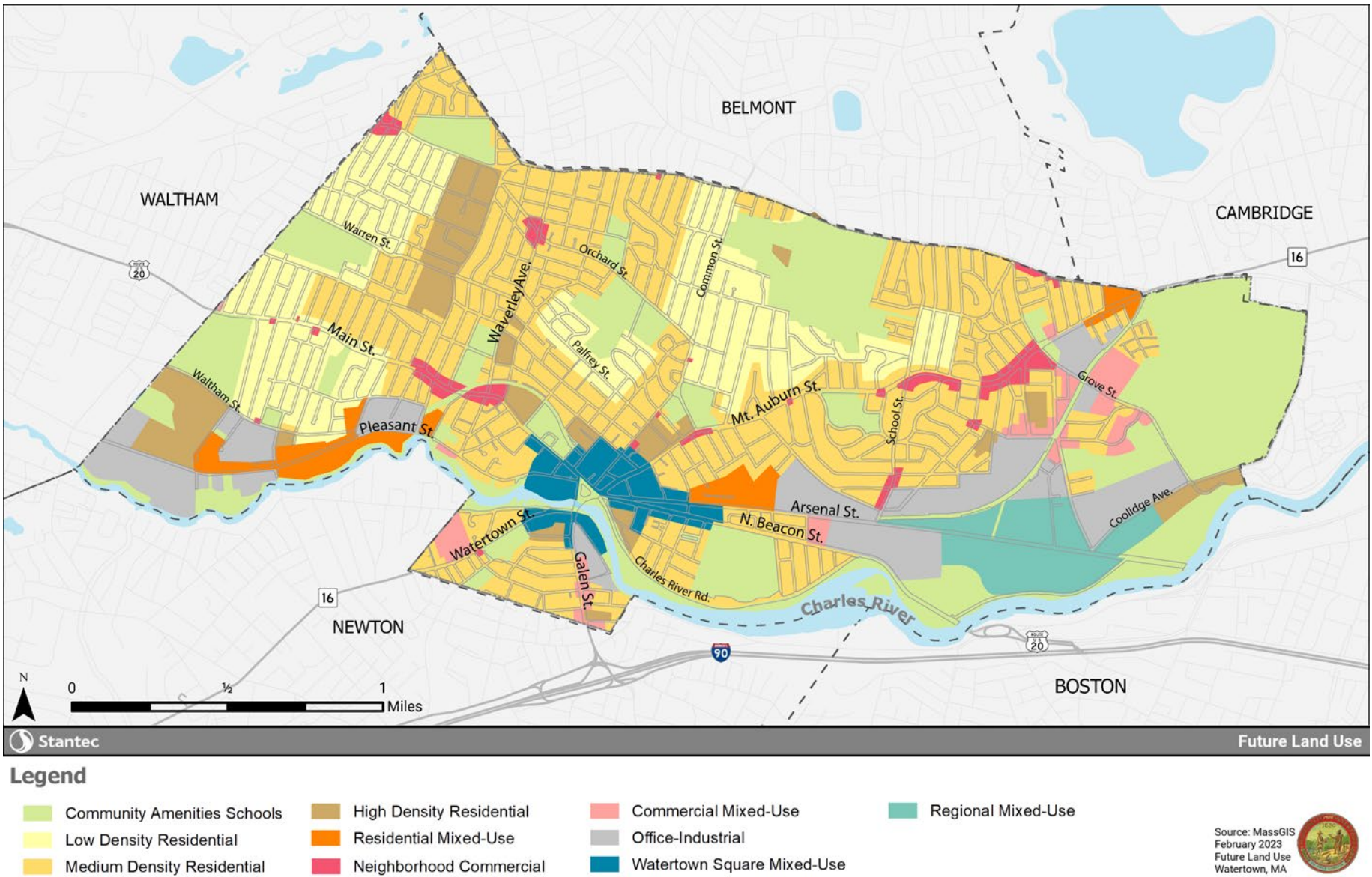
Watertown Square Mixed Use - This designation supports the revitalization of the traditional mixed-use core of the city. A complementary mix of medium to higher density uses including retail, multi-family residential, office, and institutional uses supported by public gathering spaces and other community amenities is encouraged. Pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly connections to adjacent neighborhoods and the Charles River are desired, as well as uses and development patterns that take advantage of the transit connections here.

Regional Mixed Use - This designation supports the transformation of outdated, single-use commercial or light industrial areas into a mix of higher-density complementary uses including multi-family residential, retail, offices, hotel, and research and development, supported by open spaces and other community amenities. The creation of walkable block sizes and a connected street grid is encouraged to support pedestrian- and bicycle-oriented design that better integrates these sites into the surrounding area.

Community Amenities – This designation is intended to preserve parks, open spaces, cemeteries, municipal facilities, and schools, as well as certain private or non-profit owned open spaces or campuses. These community amenities should be maintained and enhanced as needed to continue meeting the needs of residents.

Future Land Use

Figure 4: **Future Land Use**





"Founded in Peace"

WATERTOWN
MASSACHUSETTS