



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts  
Department of Planning and Development  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

Telephone  
(617) 796-1120  
Telefax  
(617) 796-1142  
TDD/TTY  
(617) 796-1089  
[www.newtonma.gov](http://www.newtonma.gov)

Barney S. Heath  
Director

---

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 8, 2019

TO: Councilor Susan Albright, Chair  
Members of the Zoning and Planning Committee

FROM: Barney Heath, Director of Planning & Development  
James Freas, Deputy Director of Planning & Development  
Rachel Blatt Nadkarni, Chief of Long-Range Planning

MEETING DATE: July 15, 2019

SUBJECT: **#165-19 Washington Street Vision Plan**

CC: Planning & Development Board  
City Council

---

Based on feedback from the City Council at the May 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Planning Department has created a DRAFT Washington Street Vision Plan amendment to the City of Newton Comprehensive Plan for the Council's consideration. This document will draw on the Hello Washington Street Report submitted by the Principle Group and has been modeled on the Needham Street Area Vision Plan amendment to the Comprehensive Plan.

The draft submitted this evening is scheduled for a first discussion at the July 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Zoning and Planning Committee and is anticipated to be discussed further at the July 29<sup>th</sup> meeting, in order to prepare a version of the document for public hearing in the fall.

Please be aware that this draft is without all of the graphics and illustrations anticipated. As was the case with the Needham Street Vision document, photos and diagrams will be utilized throughout this document to illustrate the text. Page cross-references are also still incomplete and are labeled as "refer to page XX" throughout the document. Based on feedback from the Committee at the July 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, staff will be preparing an updated and more fully illustrated version for distribution ahead of the July 29<sup>th</sup> meeting.

## Table of Contents

# WASHINGTON STREET VISION PLAN

A CITY OF NEWTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT

DRAFT 07.08.2019

1	I. Introduction
11	II. A Vision for Washington Street
105	III. Implementing the Vision Plan
111	IV. Summary of Guiding Principles

**NOTE: Illustrations & captions  
are still in production**



# **I. Introduction**

---

**A Vision for Washington Street**

**What is a Vision Plan?**

**Where is this applicable?**

**Why plan now?**

**How was this plan developed?**

**How will this plan be used?**



## *Introduction*

- this page intentionally blank -

# A Vision for Washington Street

## Washington Street will showcase Newton's values.

- The villages of West Newton and Newtonville will be lively
- Washington Street will be safe for everyone
- Diverse housing options will be available
- Newton residents will have places to connect with their community
- Decisions will be sensitive to climate and environmental necessities
- Excellence in placemaking principles will be incorporated

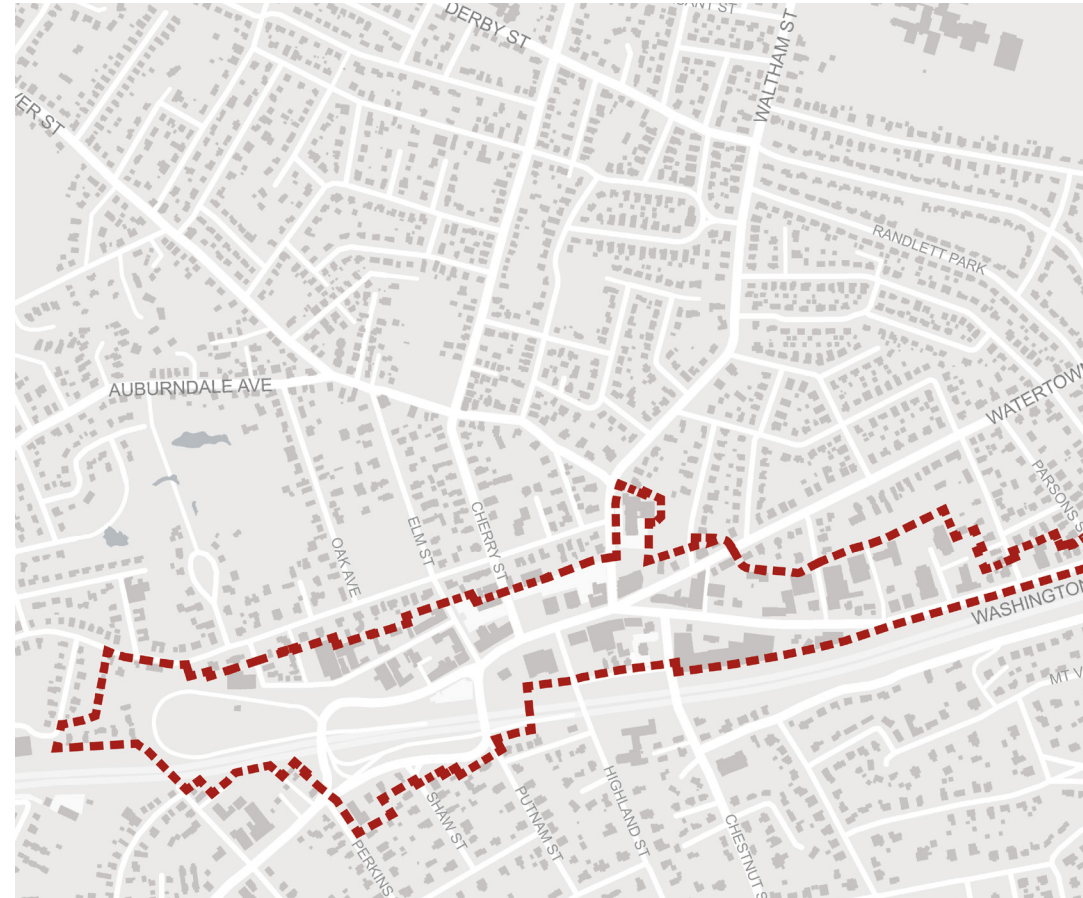
## Introduction

# What is a Vision Plan?

A vision plan is a guide to assist future decision-making regarding a specific area, in this case the area along Washington Street through West Newton and Newtonville, that brings together and expands upon citywide policies and goals with input from community members.

The Washington Street Vision Plan is the result of a year-long engagement program led by the City of Newton Planning Department and its consultant team at the Principle Group. The Principle Group produced a Vision Report documenting the work and ideas developed through that effort.

This document, the Washington Street Vision Plan, [has been] adopted by the Newton City Council as an amendment to the City of Newton Comprehensive Plan. Like the broader Comprehensive Plan and the other recent amendments, this plan is intended to be used by the City Council as well as staff in the City's departments to inform discussions about public investments and to guide private development to align with Newton's priorities.



## Where is this plan applicable?

Washington Street stretches across Newton from Boston to Wellesley connecting the village centers of Newton Corner, Newtonville, West Newton and onward through neighborhoods in Auburndale to the village center in Lower Falls. This Vision Plan discusses priorities





## Introduction

# How was this plan developed?

The Hello Washington Street planning process spanned an entire year and involved hundreds of Newton residents in developing ideas for the area along Washington Street and in refining the vision. Community members participated in large events, small meetings, and by providing their thoughts online. Community input forums were structured to collect input from as broad a range of stakeholders as possible and for participants to provide feedback in a range of settings to ensure that as many voices as possible could be heard. Community input has been reviewed along with a study of existing conditions, planning and design best practices, and the current real estate market to create this Vision Plan.

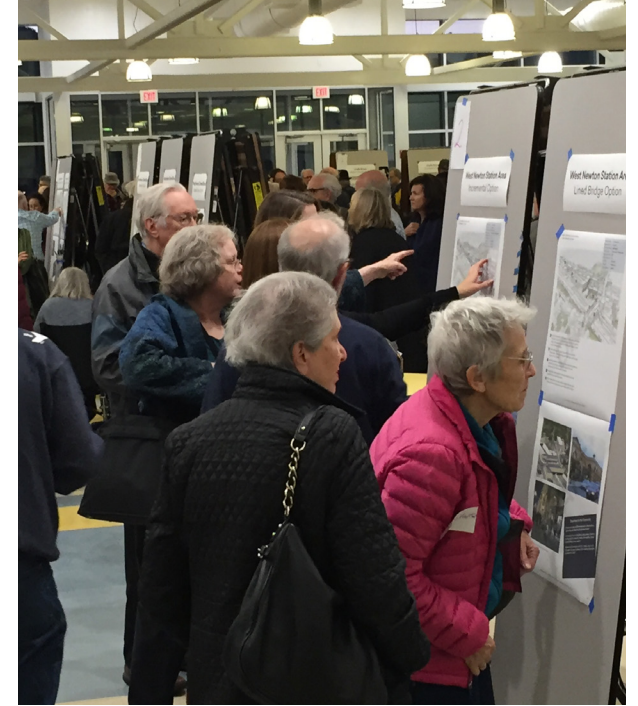
The City of Newton worked with consultants from the Principle Group on the Hello Washington Street Process. The process concluded with the Hello Washington Street Report and a draft zoning ordinance for the area. The report has been used to inform this Washington Street Vision Plan that [has been] incorporated as a Comprehensive Plan amendment.

## Timeline of Community Involvement:

- May 1, 2018 – Launch Event at Second Church in West Newton
  - Surveys gathered responses online through late June; 1,345 surveys completed
- June 5 – 12, 2018 – Public Design Week several events and open-studio in West Newton
  - Over 75 hours of public engagement; 400+ individual visitors
- October 24, 2018 – First Draft released at the Plan Open House at Newton North High School
  - Month-long comment period; 2,672 comments from 317 individuals
- November 2018 – Four open drop-in sessions at City Hall
- February 11, 2019 – Second Draft released at City Council and community preview event
  - Month-long comment period; 1,017 comments from 97 individuals & 50+ emails/ letters
- March 2019 – Three drop-in sessions at City Hall







## **How will this plan be used?**

The Washington Street Vision Plan [has been] adopted by the City Council as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan because it is a basis for future decision-making by the City Council, the Mayor and City staff, and other decision-making bodies.

Many of the ideas described in this Vision, including the public investments proposed, require additional discussion by the City Council before they can be implemented. The Planning Department, along with other City staff, the Mayor, and the City Council will carry the conversation forward in the coming months and years.

The City Council will also be able to use this Vision to guide decision-making on proposed private-sector development projects. Private-sector proponents will be encouraged to use the Vision Plan when preparing their proposals in order to align with this adopted vision for Washington Street.

This Vision Plan will additionally be used to shape zoning for this portion of Washington Street. As the zoning ordinance draft development continue, this Vision Plan will serve as a guiding document.

- this page intentionally blank -





## **II. A VISION FOR WASHINGTON STREET**

---

**Vibrancy in the Village Centers**

**Safe Multimodal Transportation**

**Housing Diversity**

**Global Climate and Local Environment**

**Excellence in Placemaking and Design**

- this page intentionally blank -

## **A. VITALITY IN THE VILLAGE CENTERS**

---

**Promote Unique and Vital Village Centers**

**Design for Engaging Walks**

**Invest in Public Art and Programming**

**Strengthen the Business Climate**

# Promote Unique and Vital Village Centers

Newton is committed to building up its historic strengths, one of which is the uniqueness of its village centers. Not only has the pattern of village centers surrounded by walkable neighborhoods been a defining feature of Newton for more than a century, this pattern is also one of Newton's competitive advantages. Ensuring that West Newton and Newtonville continue to be unique centers within the community, each with its own character and mix of activities, is a recipe for success in the future. There are several ways that Newton can continue to strengthen each village center.

## Guiding Principles:

- Encourage a mix of activities 18-hours a day
- Give entrepreneurs an assist
- Connect businesses to Newton customers and workforce
- Ensure community gathering is allowed and encouraged

## Encourage a mix of activities 18-hours a day

One of the strengths of the village centers in Newton is that they are lively after 5:00pm. When Rockport chose to locate its global headquarters on Washington Street, the company cited the value they found in West Newton's mix of shops and restaurants. As a company that was moving from a traditional office park, the opportunities to walk to lunch out, gather with colleagues after work, or stop for dry cleaning or groceries on the way home were all part of the attraction.

That mix could be strengthened by investing in economic development to support a broad range of businesses in each village center, with a focus on mixing daytime office activities

with lively evening and weekend destinations. The pattern in both West Newton and Newtonville is for the business hubs to be at the outer edges of the villages and the shops and restaurants to be located in the cores. There is already a small cluster of offices and industrial activities at the Crafts St intersection in Newtonville and a cluster of office and industrial businesses at Elm St/Border St and east of Chestnut St in West Newton. In each case this puts the office hubs in easy walk of the civic cores of the villages but not at the heart of the villages. Zoning for Washington Street could build upon this pattern to expand opportunities for the village center edges.



## *Promote Unique and Vital Village Centers*

### Give entrepreneurs an assist

Throughout the Hello Washington Street process residents remarked on how beloved their local home-grown businesses are in the community and their desire to invest in keeping them in West Newton and Newtonville. Creative tools to bolster existing businesses should be explored further in conjunction with the City's economic development strategy. The strategy lists ideas like expanding small business services within the Newton Innovation Center and creating a one-stop inventory of small business assistance programs.

Looking toward the future and new local business creation along Washington Street, there are additional tools available to support up-and-coming entrepreneurs to start their businesses in West Newton and Newtonville. The creation of low-cost business space emerged as a priority strategy to further explore since there are opportunities to support both existing and emerging local businesses by helping defray the costs of real estate in Newton. There is a particularly interesting opportunity to create low-cost incubator space in kiosks on public land along the Mass Pike side of Washington Street (see pg. XX).

## Connect businesses to Newton customers and workforce

The Economic Development Strategy highlights two aspects of Newton's workforce: first that Newton's highly-educated workforce is a strength that should be promoted to attract new businesses and second that Newton needs more affordable housing to retain the diverse workforce that Newton has today. The strategy notes that the Washington Street corridor is a place that can accommodate the development of flagship offices and labs that in turn

will support Newton's commercial tax-base and a place to develop multi-family housing with a range of affordability.

Already almost 6000 Newton residents commute within the city (US Census - ACS 2015). This is second only to Boston. Promoting intra-city commuting is part of a larger strategy of reducing the transportation impacts of new business or residential development. Expanding transportation options to connect

residents with businesses in the village centers with safe walking and biking connections, transit options, and also convenient short-term customer and long-term employee parking will help to bolster the local economy in each village center. The Economic Development Commission, Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce, and the local Transportation Management Associations are potentially strong partners in facilitating connections between businesses and residents.



## *Promote Unique and Vital Village Centers*

### Ensure community gathering is allowed and encouraged

The village centers in Newton are where community life happens, including civic activities and private gatherings. The City of Newton supports community gathering through existing programs like the West Newton Farmers' Market organized by the Parks and Recreation Department and Newtonville Village Day organized by the Newtonville Area Council. In addition to events, each village has civic organizations and public buildings that anchor the core of the village: the courthouse and police station in West Newton, the

Senior Center and Masonic Hall in Newtonville. Houses of worship further organize community life in each village.

Community social life also goes hand in hand with a range of private businesses and non-profits intended for smaller gatherings: cafes, restaurants, theaters, retailers, and art institutions all host community events and gatherings of families and friends. The City's zoning ordinance plays a key role in promoting or disincentivizing these types of uses in

village centers. The current parking rules for instance have been cited as a barrier for new restaurant creation in Newton.

The City of Newton will continue to explore new ways of supporting community life in the village centers of West Newton and Newtonville including developing new programming ideas through the upcoming Arts and Culture Master Plan effort and modifying the zoning ordinance to reduce barriers to community gathering focused land uses.



# Design for Engaging Walks

## Guiding Principles:

- Use buildings and trees to make a more comfortable environment
- Activate the 'Pike edge
- Create narrow and transparent shopfronts
- Incorporate opportunities for outdoor dining
- Design streets and plazas as places to linger

Vitality in the village centers is in part measured by how much activity is visible on the street. Are people walking from shop to shop strolling with an ice cream cone, or are people hidden away in buildings, emerging only when absolutely necessary? A place that has vitality is one where the life of the place is bursting out into public - It could be the frenetic energy of a business center spilling out into sidewalk cafes or the peaceful quiet of a residential street with front yards full of flowers. No matter the place's character – a place with vitality is one where it is interesting to go on a walk. Washington Street has some blocks that have a lot of interest, but over and over again the planning team heard that walking on Washington Street, particularly walking for fun, could be so much better.

### Use buildings and trees to make a more comfortable environment

Human senses evolved to allow us to understand our environment and navigate it safely. The physiology of the human species means that there are some universal principles to creating comfortable environments for people – among them designing spaces to appeal to our “wall-hugging” nature. There is a near universal preference for spaces with edges. Cognitive science and urban planning researchers Ann Sussman and Justin B Hollander write, “When edge conditions are ill-defined, we instinctively go on alert...clear edge conditions, on the other hand, do so much: they can release us from anxiety, enable our subconscious construction of mental maps, suggest a way forward that fits our bipedal frame, and our preferred way of holding our head, all the while helping us conserve energy” (Cognitive Architecture, 26).

Buildings, trees, and even street furniture can all be used to help define public spaces and give spaces comfortable edges. Streets are part of the public space network that benefit from having a



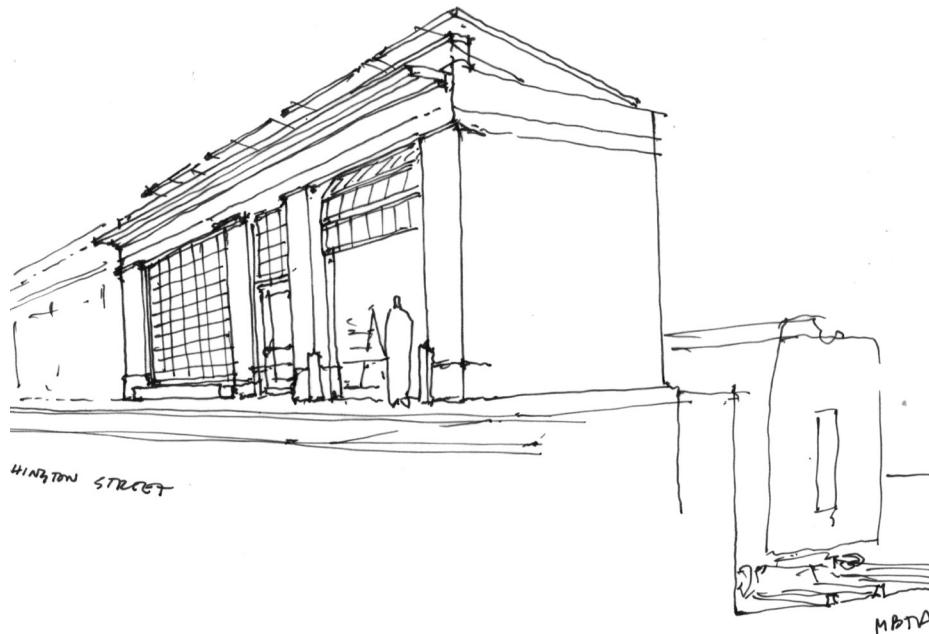
clearly defined edge. The ratio of building height to street width is well established principle of designing for walkable comfort so much so that the LEED – Neighborhood Development standards require a minimum height-to-width ratio of 1:3 for a portion of any project meeting the standard and encourage 1:1 ratios in some cases. Street design experts have had varying perspectives on what ratio is best, but generally 1:1 is considered to be a strong sense of enclosure with high pedestrian comfort, while 1:3 is moderately comfortable, and therefore an acceptable minimum.

These principles of creating comfortable edges are recommended to be integrated into the setting of height standards in zoning for the Washington Street corridor. The Mass Pike adds a unique challenge to defining edges for Washington Street. Right now, the views are very open such that one can see all the way to the south side of the Mass Pike, which is a substantial distance in some portions of the corridor. There are many reasons to create a defined edge along the Mass Pike, among them giving Washington Street more comfortable edges.



## Activate the 'Pike edge

The Mass Pike edge of Washington Street is an opportunity hiding within a challenge. Throughout the Hello Washington Street planning process, participants commented on the negative effects of living and working so close to the Mass Pike – the noise, the air pollution, the unsightly views. One of the most well received ideas coming out of the design week was the idea of creating more than just sound walls along the Mass Pike edge and thinking more creatively about how the south side of Washington Street could be better than today.



An idea developed to create small scale storefronts along the Mass Pike edge where space allows. These pavilions would serve as a sound barrier with a thick wall at the back, could have south-facing solar panels on the roof to generate electricity, and serve as low-cost start-up space for new entrepreneurs. Retail-focused planning research has found that retailers generally do better when there are shops on both sides of a street, so, where possible, extending the village center experience to the south side of Washington Street along the Mass Pike will strengthen the village shopping experience.



### Create narrow and transparent shopfronts

Narrow shopfronts are a common feature of the retail blocks in West Newton and Newtonville. Some of these storefronts are as narrow as 20-25 ft. Not only are narrow storefronts a typical feature of these two village centers, but a typical feature of many of the great retail streets around the world. Narrow storefronts generally means there are more retailers in a business district, that there are more doors, and more diversity in the window displays. When walking our pace is slow

enough for our eyes to take in details: great sign, a flowerpot, or a window display; so, creating opportunities for detail and diversity in the retail environments makes for great walking.

Frequent doors and large clear-glass windows offer connections to the shops within. These physical and visual connections between shops and sidewalks have benefits to both the passersby and the retailer. Retailers thrive on foot-traffic,

and clear windows into stores encourage passersby to stop in and explore the shop. Having clear windows out to the street also means that those inside can see out and help monitor activity outside, the all-important “eyes on the street.”

Zoning rules can be used to mandate new development in these village centers extend the traditional pattern of narrow storefronts with large windows.





## Incorporate opportunities for outdoor dining

Newton already allows outdoor dining in village centers, but the sidewalks are not always wide enough to allow for accessible sidewalks and outdoor dining. The Walnut Street Enhancements Project in Newtonville will substantially widen the sidewalks to create new outdoor dining opportunities for restaurants and cafes along the street. Along Washington Street, there are generally wider sidewalks but there may still be physical limits relating to the configuration of furniture and infrastructure.

There are two approaches to expanding outdoor dining opportunities that are worth further investigation: allowing seating at the far side of the sidewalk and allowing seating in “parklets.” Newton has not yet allowed restaurants to block off curb-edge space for outdoor dining, but with a wide enough sidewalk, that space can sometimes be the more efficient way of providing outdoor dining while meeting accessibility goals. This approach should be considered where sidewalks are wider than 16 ft, which is



common in parts of West Newton Square and will be a new condition on Walnut Street after the Enhancements project. A similar result can be achieved with parklets – seasonal sidewalk expansions into parking spaces. Lexington Center has a public parklet that has seating and table space accessible to everyone. Private parklets are also common in many communities – Montpelier Vermont has several private parklets that

are built and maintained privately by restaurants for seasonal outdoor dining.

Both strategies need to be considered in the context of site-specific layout topics but are opportunities to create more restaurant-managed outdoor dining space. Public seating programs could also include seating with tables to further open up outdoor dining opportunities in village centers.

### Design streets and plazas as places to linger

A great walk often includes stopping. Creating places for people to sit and talk when out for a walk in West Newton and Newtonville is an investment in community life and village vibrancy. The City can support residents by giving them places to sit with a group of friends or even to just pause and finish a phone conversation. A variety of seating options should be provided, with some furniture

oriented to groups included where space is generous enough to accommodate it. Movable and playful furniture is also worth the investment since it gives people a reason to engage directly with the items and some control over how they use the space. Both the West Newton Square and Walnut Street Enhancements projects will include new seating areas in the village centers and new plazas are being built

at Austin Street, Washington Place, and the Sunrise Senior Living Center closer to Newton Corner. The zoning ordinance can require mid-large-scale projects to include new neighborhood plazas along Washington Street and as the street design project continues seating areas should be dispersed along Washington Street.



# Invest in Public Art & Art Programming

## Guiding Principles:

- Promote West Newton and Newtonville artists
- Allow for arts production, presentation, and artist housing
- Design for music and community events in public spaces

West Newton and Newtonville are home to some of Newton's most active arts organizations and artist-led businesses. Part of the identity of the Washington Street corridor is the arts and culture community that has chosen to locate here. The City of Newton is on the cusp of an Arts and Culture Master Plan process that will strategize about supporting Newton's arts community at a broader level; the ideas here are based in the findings of the Hello Washington Street planning process and are intended to be refined by this forthcoming work.



## Promote West Newton and Newtonville artists

The arts is one of Newton's most highly concentrated economic sectors and the Economic Development strategy found that a significant portion of those in this sector (as much as 20%) are self-employed - these artists are in-fact independent local business owners. Connecting artists into Newton's economic development programs and supporting and promoting their work is a link between economic development and arts and culture planning that could be further explored.

The City could also explore public art programs to showcase local artists from the area. Whether in the form of temporary installations and live-arts programs or commissioning and installing a permanent piece, the City could lead in promoting the local arts communities by bringing locally produced art into the village centers.

## Allow for arts production, presentation, and artist housing

The practicalities of making art can mean different things depending on one's craft – dancers need large open spaces with high ceilings, musicians need sound proofed practice rooms if sharing walls with neighbors, and sculptors may need access to a metal or woodworking shop. Artistic production and presentation spaces often involve a combination of traditional land use categories that appear in zoning that can prove challenging for artists to navigate when seeking new workspaces. Zoning for Washington Street should clarify the standards for arts spaces to make permitting processes clearer for artists.

Artist housing should also be given special consideration. Artist-specific housing models, like the Claflin School Studios off of Lowell Ave, often combine units with studio spaces or offer an array of studios and practice spaces within the building and even sometimes publicly accessible galleries and performance spaces. As the Arts and Culture Master Plan process develops, local artists should be engaged directly in identifying needs that can be met either through zoning standards or partnership development projects.



## Design for music and community events in public spaces

Arts programming does not always need to be formal; it could be someone who simply brings their guitar and their friends to a park or plaza. Not all public spaces are equal though when it comes to supporting music. Spaces need to be large enough for the musicians to be out of the path of travel of passersby and quiet enough for their music to be heard. For event music, electrical outlets for amplifiers and electric instruments may be needed.

The West Newton Square Enhancements and the Walnut Street Enhancements projects are both creating spaces that

could work well for casual music and small gatherings in the village centers. The new plaza at Austin Street will add another community space for slightly larger events.

One of the challenges that the Mass Pike and Commuter Rail presents is the noise level, which can be prohibitively loud for music events at times. Among the ideas developed in the Hello Washington Street process is the idea of encouraging new development to create publicly accessible courtyards tucked between buildings and away from

the Washington Street edge. Guidelines and mechanisms for encouraging music and community activities in those courtyards should be developed.

Another idea explored during the process is the idea to eventually create large deck parks over the Mass Pike in Newtonville and West Newton. These new “village green” style parks were shown to be shielded from the Mass Pike with buildings on the edges. As this idea is developed in the coming years, attention should be given to ensuring the parks can accommodate large community events.

# Strengthen the Business Climate

## Guiding Principles:

- Promote the village centers' competitive advantages
- Create clusters of office & lab activity in each village
- Explore incentives and investments in locally-owned businesses

In many respects Newton has a strong local economy, but there are also aspects of the Newton economy that recommend active investment in supporting economic growth. Newton is in many respects a jobs center, with more workers commuting into Newton each day than residents commuting out. Additionally, Newton is an attractive place to locate new jobs: job growth in Newton outpaced the Boston regional average for the 10-years between 2007 and 2017 (14% vs. 9% growth over 10-years).

Many residents are still concerned about the relationship between the local economy and the City's tax base. The Economic Development Strategy found that "compared to its seven neighboring communities, Newton has the second lowest combined commercial and industrial property values as a share of total real property value. Lagging commercial development relative to residential indicates that the city's residents may bear an increasing share of the property tax burden into the future" (Newton Economic Development Strategy, AC-2). The Washington Street corridor has many competitive advantages for economic development that could support a stronger commercial tax base and reduce the share of residential taxes in the city.

## Promote the village centers' competitive advantages

Newtonville and West Newton have many attractive features to companies looking for business space. The mix of supportive amenity businesses in each village make for lively places to locate a new office space. Local coffee, lunch, dry-cleaning, gyms, and gift shops all are ancillary businesses that residents as well as employees at major companies find beneficial. Highlighting the range of collocated businesses in each village can be an inducement to companies looking to move into lively business locations.

Beyond the local business mix, West Newton and Newtonville offer a better than typical range of transportation options for the Greater Boston Area. The mix of commuter rail, express bus service, and highway

access is an advantage. Highlighting existing transportation diversity and continuing to expand options is another way the City can promote this area to businesses.

Finally, highway visibility along the Mass Turnpike is a potentially substantial benefit to companies locating along Washington Street. Ensuring that prominent yet appropriate signs are allowed along the Turnpike edge are possible for major employers is a third way that Newton can promote business growth on Washington Street. Thinking critically about sign placement, size, and lighting is important to ensuring that new signs along the Mass Pike demonstrate Newton's commitments to excellent placemaking while also showcasing the businesses that choose to locate on Washington Street.



## Create clusters of office & lab activity in each village

One of the successes of both traditional downtowns and 20th-century office parks is the clustering of employers together. Major employers tend to seek out cluster locations where there can be economies of scale in transportation and infrastructure as well as collaborative networking effects as employees from company A intermingle with employees from company B in the

neighborhood. Newton can support the development of economic clusters through permissive zoning and through supportive networking programs, like those run by the Chamber of Commerce.

These cluster locations do not need to be limited entirely to office/lab activities. There are many supportive activities

that are beneficial within an office cluster – among them restaurants and cafes, personal and business service companies, and even hotels. Hotels, including small boutique hotels, within walking distance of office/lab locations make it easy for a company to host visiting staff or consultants.



## Explore incentives and investments in locally-owned businesses

Locally owned businesses are among the most important assets of Newtonville and West Newton. These individual stores, services, and restaurants help to make each village center a unique destination.

As redevelopment or rehabilitation occurs, and as the overall vitality of the villages improves, commercial rents will rise, and these locally owned businesses may struggle to afford to stay. The City will need to study a range of approaches for fostering and encouraging existing and new locally-owned businesses and, while this issue exists across all of Newton's villages, those along Washington Street offer an opportunity to pilot different approaches in concert with new zoning and public and private investments in the corridor.

Zoning, through requirements or incentives, can be the most direct way to influence the opportunity for locally owned businesses in new developments. Ideas to consider include regulations on formula style businesses, conditions related to reduced rent spaces reserved for

locally owned businesses, and incentives that allow for greater density or a greater range of allowed uses where space for locally owned businesses are provided.

Small business assistance programs are another effective means of encouraging locally owned businesses. Through the Director of Economic Development in the Planning Department, the City already provides assistance to businesses getting started or expanding in the City. Some communities have gone further to expand these assistance programs to include basic market analysis information, connections to existing state or federal business lending programs, and other creative business support services.

Finally, village-based business associations can be a strong support system for small locally owned businesses, allowing these businesses to aggregate resources for the creation of marketing programs that advertise the village as a destination and create events and programming that draw people to the village centers.

## **B. SAFE MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION**

---

**Prioritize People, Safety, and Comfort**

**Create More Route Options**

**Advocate for the Rail Vision**

**Slow Down Traffic Speeds and Improve Flow**

**Actively Manage Driving & Parking**



# Prioritize People, Safety, and Comfort

Washington Street is one of the major east-west connectors through Newton. In both West Newton and Newtonville, Washington Street is a “Main Street” environment where locals gather together, go out for dinner, and do their shopping. Between village centers, Washington Street is lined with residences and civic spaces. These multiple functions mean that there are competing demands for space and priority in the road design. As the street design process moves ahead, Newton envisions a Washington Street where people are the priority. Prioritizing people means thinking about the human element of all transportation: the experience. Making sure that safety and comfort are always top of mind no matter if the discussion is about transportation on foot, by bike, bus, or car.

## Guiding Principles:

- Make room for people-powered transportation
- Design sidewalks for year-round comfort
- Improve the bus experience

## Make room for people-powered transportation

Despite the fact that Washington Street is a major connector in Newton, it does not have complete sidewalks on both sides of the street. Along the Mass Pike side of Washington Street there are long stretches without sidewalks. This makes it difficult for those who park or take the bus on that side of the street to safely make their way in and out of vehicles or just walk along the road. In addition to the inconvenience this routinely causes, the lack of sidewalks is counter to accessibility goals and standards that Newton stands by. As the street design project moves forward, the Street Design Guide and accessibility standards should be utilized to ensure that Washington Street has accessible sidewalks along both sides for its entire length that are also wide enough to navigate by wheelchair or with a stroller.

Infrastructure for residents who bike is also worthy of further consideration. During the public design week, those who routinely bike through the area joined members of the Principle Group team to describe their concerns on Washington Street. Generally, Washington Street was found to be a high stress biking environment. With no dedicated space for cyclists to be, conflict with drivers is frequent and because drivers can at times exceed 40 miles per hour, those conflicts have the potential to be deadly. The Street Design Guide includes a range of recommendations for low-stress bikeway design that are applicable to Washington Street as well as the side streets that connect Washington Street into the neighborhoods.





## *Prioritize People, Safety, and Comfort*

### Design sidewalks for year-round comfort

Another challenge is to ensure that walking is comfortable throughout the year with adequate street lighting, shade for summer heat, and furniture along the road. The West Newton Square and Walnut Street Enhancements Projects will greatly improve walking comfort in Newtonville and West Newton village centers. Combined these projects are expected to add more than 80 new trees to the village centers, widen sidewalks, add unique furniture, and upgrade the lighting for both the roadway and the sidewalks. All in – the village center walking experience will improve substantially within the next couple years.

There will still be substantial areas of Washington Street that could use more comfortable sidewalks. The walk between Chestnut St and Walnut St or Walnut St and Crafts St would benefit from routinely spaced benches and trash receptacles and improved lighting for winter evenings. There are two ways in which the City of Newton can pursue these features – by working with new development to upgrade the sidewalks in front of their buildings (as is the case with Washington Place) or by directly investing in sidewalk comforts, which could be done as part of the street design project.





## Improve the bus experience

Washington Street has several well utilized express buses that run from a variety of locations to the north, then along Washington Street to the Mass Pike, and ultimately into Boston. The Principle Group explored the idea of dedicated bus lanes on Washington Street and ultimately recommended against pursuing that approach in the street design discussion because these bus function as local buses along Washington Street picking up passengers every few blocks. Instead, the Principle Group recommended making investments in a better bus experience for Washington Street riders.

Some of the ideas already described would substantially improve the bus ride experience; having sidewalks connecting to the eastbound bus stops and adequate lighting on the sidewalks and roadway for instance. Additionally, the City can further improve the bus experience by:

- Providing crosswalks at every bus stop to make it easy to get from the neighborhoods to and from the eastbound stops on the south side of Washington Street
- Working with the MBTA to make sure that stops are placed conveniently but not too frequently along Washington Street
- Incorporating transit-signal priority technology to move buses through intersections faster
- Investing in bus shelters and real-time wait information at major stops along Washington Street



# Create More Route Options

Transportation starts with a destination: a need to go somewhere. Then there are three basic questions involved in deciding to go to that destination: what time should I go, what method should I use to get there (walk, bike, drive, transit, or combination), and what route should I take. These three questions have to be considered simultaneously since the available options and the travel time-cost estimate will change depending on when one makes the trip. In addition to creating the infrastructure to make all modes of travel viable options for Washington Street area residents and employees, all modes benefit when there are a variety of routes to choose.

## Guiding Principles:

- Break up mega blocks
- Connect Washington Street to the Charles River Greenway
- Consider building more bridges over the 'Pike
- Make way for crosswalks

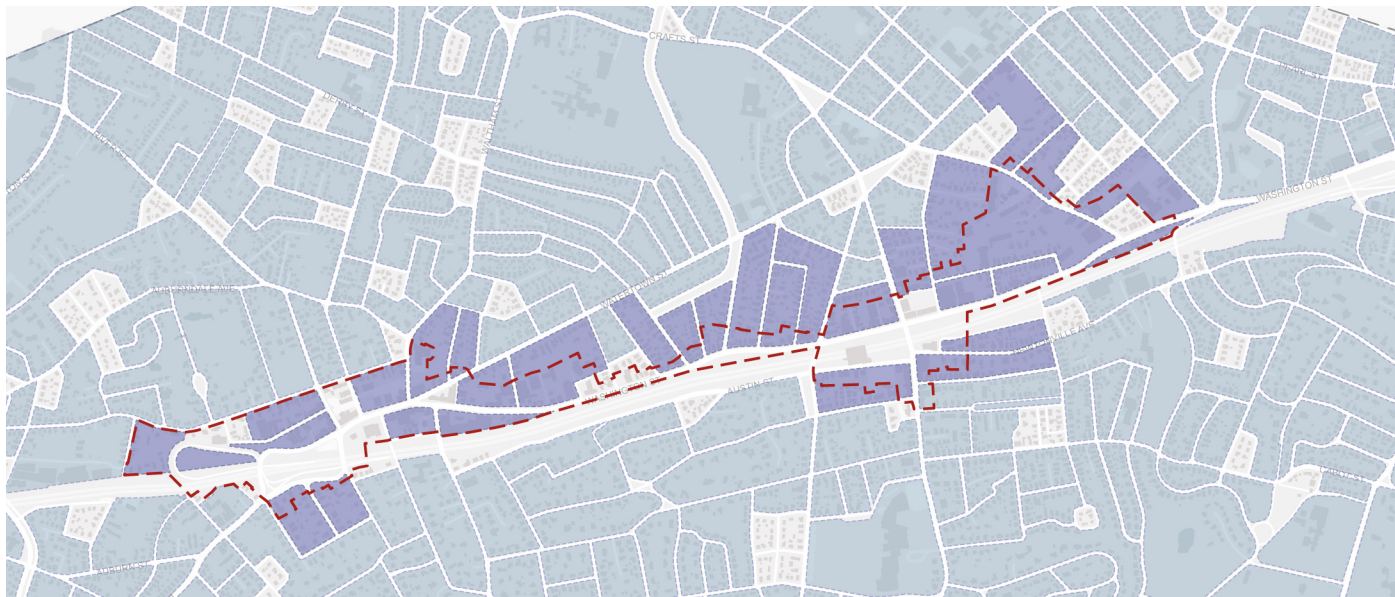
## Break up mega blocks

One of the strongest indicators of a walkable place is the density of intersections per square mile. Venice, Italy has an intersection density of 1500 intersections per square mile while, Irvine California, a quintessential 20th-century suburb, has just 15 intersections per square mile (EPA-EnviroAtlas). In order to increase intersection density – a community needs smaller blocks. Blocks with more than ¼ mile in perimeter are considered too big and are designated as mega-blocks. Many of the blocks along Washington Street have this designation.

Smaller blocks within neighborhoods help to distribute traffic as each pedestrian, cyclist, or driver takes the route that's

most direct to and from their home to their destination. These smaller blocks also mean more direct and faster response times for emergency services. Keeping any pass-through traffic on small neighborhood blocks moving slowly and safely is critical but breaking up mega-blocks can in fact contribute to improved traffic conditions within neighborhoods as well.

The process for building new routes through existing blocks is not always simple. The Zoning Ordinance can play a role in ensuring large-scale development does not perpetuate mega-blocks. Additionally, the City can track opportunity sites to create new public connections between blocks.





## Create More Route Options

### Connect Washington Street to the Charles River Greenway

The Charles River Greenway is a key link in the regional commuter and recreational biking and walking network connecting to Waltham Center, Watertown Square, the Arsenal Mall in Watertown, and ultimately into Boston and Cambridge. During the design week, intrepid bicycle commuters described the routes they take from the neighborhoods along Washington Street to the Charles River and highlighted connections that could be enhanced for riders seeking a low-stress experience.

Improved bicycle connections northward to the Charles River Greenway were suggested at the following locations:

- between Washington Street and Albemarle Rd (route TBD) with bicyclists then following Albemarle Rd up to the Greenway and the Greenway Bridge
- along Watertown St between Washington St in West Newton Square to Nonantum and onward to the Greenway connection in Watertown Yard
- on Crafts St and North St up to where the Greenway connects in Waltham



## Consider building more bridges over the 'Pike

When the Mass Pike was developed in the 1960s, several of the older bridge connections across what was then just the railroad were lost. In West Newton Shaw and Putnam Streets connected more seamlessly into West Newton Square and Felton St (now the driveway to Rockport's headquarters) connected across from Washington St to Austin St. Mount Vernon Street connected from West Newton hill across to Brookside Ave through what is now Walker Park. In Newtonville there was also a pedestrian bridge from

Bowers St to Central Ave that provided access to the Newtonville rail station.

The Principle Group explored several ideas for re-establishing connections across the Mass Pike. Their easiest to implement recommendation was for a pedestrian and bicycle bridge between Mount Vernon Street and Brookside Ave, integrating the bridge into a new design for Walker Park. Longer term, they recommended creating deck parks over the Mass Pike at two locations, each of which would be

edged by road and sidewalk connections. These deck schemes would re-establish the Central Ave to Bowers St connection in Newtonville and the Putnam St and Shaw St connection to West Newton Square.

Each of these recommended ideas requires additional investigation and substantial financial planning before it could be implemented. As a first step, the City of Newton could invest in a finance strategy to understand the process involved and the resources required to bring these proposals to reality.

Map of bridges from 1917 atlas



## Create More Route Options

### Make way for crosswalks

One of the top safety concerns voiced by those who walk and those who drive, is the lack of crosswalks on Washington Street. People crossing from the parking on the south side of Washington Street to Cabot's Ice Cream and other Newtonville destinations was an area of particular concern. One of the challenges of Washington Street is that there are few four-way intersections. To the north there are a number of intersections to neighborhood streets, but to the south there are no connecting streets. Even still

there are many reasons to cross to the south side of Washington Street – on-street parking lines the south side in some areas, the bus stops to go east into Boston on are on the south side, and in a few locations there are indeed shops on the south side. Safe crossings are needed to guide people who need to cross the street.

The National Association of City Transportation Officials writes that “in general, if it takes a person more than 3 minutes to walk to a crosswalk, wait

to cross the street, and then resume his or her journey, he or she may decide to cross along a more direct, but unsafe or unprotected, route.” The Principle Group suggested that for Washington Street, crossings should be located approximately every 400 feet. This recommendation should be considered along with the Street Design Guide's recommendations with respect to key contextual considerations when developing a new design for Washington Street.

# Advocate for the Rail Vision

## Guiding Principles:

- Support new accessible stations
- Advocate for service every 15-minutes all day in both directions
- Participate and advocate heavily for early implementation of the Rail Vision

The neighborhoods along Washington Street were built for rail commuting. In the 1890s, when Newtonville saw a wave of growth, the village was accessible by the commuter service on the Boston and Albany Railroad (now the commuter rail) and trolley services south as far as Needham, north to Watertown, and west as far as Waltham (Newtonville Historic District Study Report, 7). Over the 20th century trolley service was replaced by bus service and the commuter rail service eroded. There is a long-standing interest to bring back the rail services that West Newton, Newtonville, and the neighborhoods once enjoyed, but modernized for the 21st-century. That vision dovetails well with the MBTA's current effort to develop a Rail Vision to guide the transformation of the commuter rail system across the Boston region into a robust service. While Newton does not have control over how the commuter rail service is developed, the City and community can and should advocate for a vision that includes robust service to the stations along Washington Street.

## Support new accessible stations

The Newton commuter rail stations at Newtonville, West Newton, and Auburndale are among the 32 remaining non-accessible commuter rail stations in the MBTA network. The MBTA's system wide accessibility initiatives include the Plan for Accessible Transit Infrastructure (PATI) which is slowly but surely working toward upgrading all stations to accessible designs; the Newton Highlands T-station accessibility project is also part of this program.

A June 2019 statement from the MBTA's Department of System-Wide Accessibility notes that the scope of their current Newton commuter rail project is to "produce a design to make all three stations accessible via a high-level platform at each station on the northern embankment. Each station will have ramps to access the high-level platform." The other update from the statement is that a design firm has been selected and a timeline is in the works. The City of Newton can continue to work closely with the MBTA to ensure that the new plan can be implemented cost-effectively, expediently, and will not preclude future service expansions.



## Advocate for service every 15-minutes all day in both directions

The station replacements described above do not address the fact that the three Newton Stations are served from just one side of the tracks. Today the stations only provide access to the south side of the tracks, and in the proposed accessible station design plan, there would only be access to the north side of the tracks. This prohibits the MBTA from providing service in both directions. While accessibility is the City's top priority, it is important that no investments are made that preclude the ability to get access to both sides of the tracks in the future.

The MBTA's Rail Vision outlines seven alternatives for the future of the Commuter Rail. In four of them, all of the Newton Stations are shown to be upgraded to have access to both tracks and service is shown to be upgraded with trains every 15-minutes in each direction throughout the day. Such an investment would be transformative for the Washington Street area. The MBTA is still considering which alternative to pursue, and the City of Newton is actively advocating for the options that bring new service to Newtonville, West Newton, and Auburndale stations.



## Participate and advocate heavily for early implementation of the Rail Vision

The MBTA's Rail Vision, while potentially transformational for Newton's stations, does not currently have a timeline for implementation. The most comparable recent investment in the MBTA system is the Green Line Extension into Cambridge, Somerville, and Medford. That project was initiated with a binding resolution in 1990 but languished for nearly three decades until funding was secured. In 2016 the timeline almost slipped again, except that Cambridge, Somerville, and the regional transportation agency all stepped in as financial partners to ensure the project moved forward. Knowing how valuable this investment will be not only to Newton residents, but to all communities along the Worcester Line, the City can work in partnership with its neighboring municipalities and local representatives in the state and federal legislatures, to secure funding to bring the Rail Vision investments to fruition sooner than later – ideally within the next ten years instead of the next thirty.



# Make Traffic Speeds Safe and Improve Flow

## Guiding Principles:

- Pilot reconfiguring Washington Street as a boulevard
- Promote slow streets in adjacent neighborhoods
- Test before the City invests

Driving on Washington Street is generally the safest option today, but even then it is not exactly a great experience. Signals are not coordinated, so at times it feels like there is gridlock between intersections. Then in sections without signalized intersections, drivers can end up swerving around left-turning vehicles waiting to cross two lanes of oncoming traffic on the other side of the road. Speeds may vary from 0 – 45 mph in a single trip and the speeding and abrupt stopping behavior creates uneven gaps in the flow of vehicles that reduce the road's efficacy. Drivers often express frustration and crashes are commonplace. As new road designs are considered, improving the safety and experience of driving on Washington Street has to be considered along with all of the other priorities. The driver experience can be aligned with improving the experience for those walking and biking by reducing conflicts, encouraging everyone to behave predictably, and focusing more on a smooth drive experience than on a fast drive through Washington Street.



## *Make Traffic Speeds Safe and Improve Flow*

### Pilot reconfiguring Washington Street as a boulevard

The Principle Group explored a range of design options for Washington Street. One that has resonated is the idea of designing Washington Street as a boulevard with a strong emphasis on landscaping. A typical boulevard has one lane of traffic in each direction separated by a planted median that becomes turn lanes where needed. There are many benefits to this type of roadway configuration:

limited conflict between drivers going in opposite directions, simplified crossings for pedestrians because of the median, and additional spaces on the edges for bikeways and parking.

The boulevard approach would be studied in depth as part of a roadway design project for Washington Street along other alternatives. Washington

Street in the study area ranges in width from approximately 75 ft up to 95 ft. That variability means that the design will need to be responsive to changing conditions block-by-block. Across the board there is substantial width to work with and Washington Street is considered to be a rare opportunity to develop a world-class street.

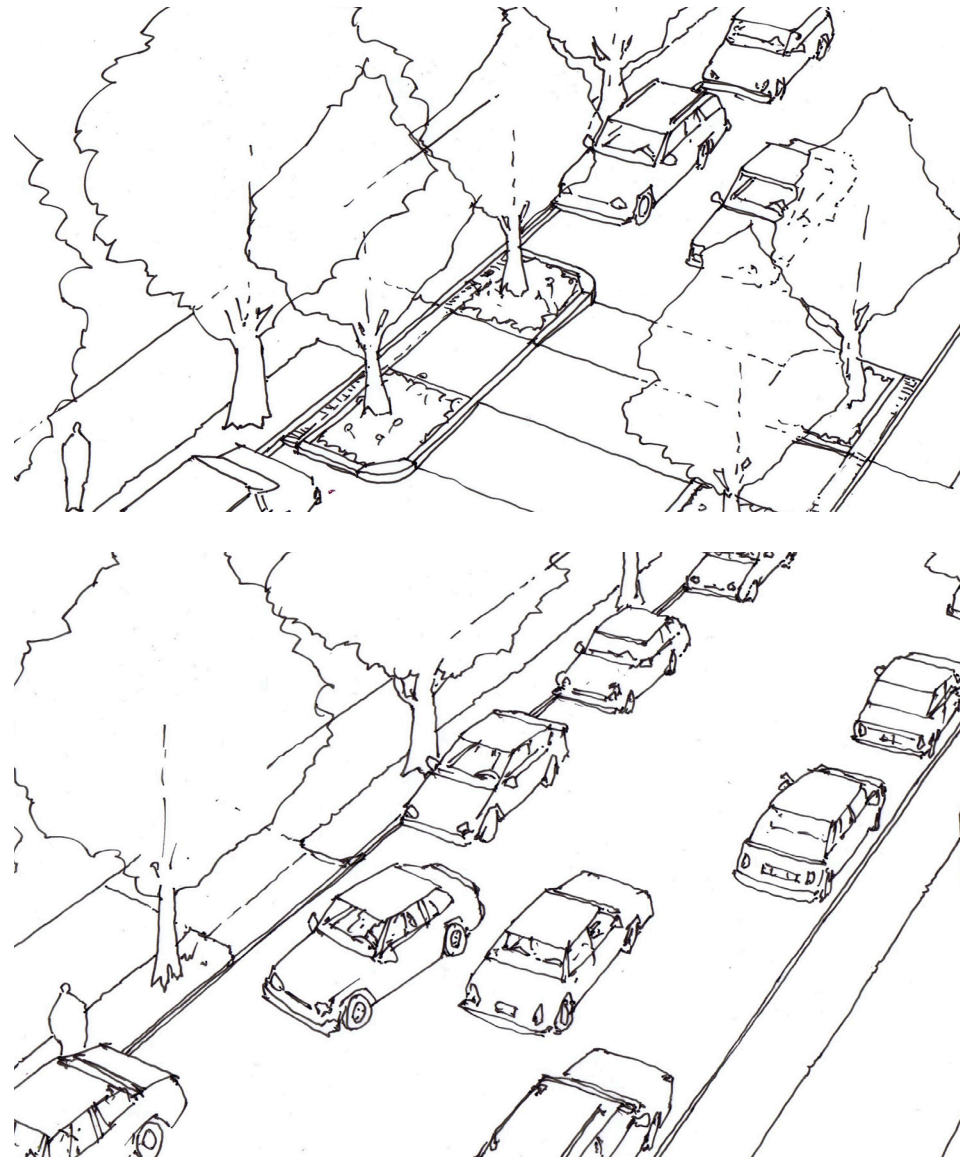


## Promote slow streets in adjacent neighborhoods

During the Public Design Week, the Principle Group worked with the advocacy group WalkBoston to conduct a Walk Audit of Washington Street from Chestnut St to Lowell Ave. A few residents in the neighborhoods along Washington Street participated in the audit and pointed out issues with how the neighborhood streets intersect with Washington Street throughout the walk. Safety was the top concern – particularly speeding on streets where children play.

The team from WalkBoston recommended tightening up the curb-radii at the neighborhood streets that intersect with Washington Street to force drivers to slow down as they turn onto the neighborhood streets. They also recommended adding crosswalks across the entrances to the neighborhood streets to improve visibility between pedestrians and drivers and to take the opportunity to update the accessible ramps at each of these corners.

Beyond the entrances, traffic calming strategies could be employed to slow drivers to the speed limit of 25 mph and encourage them to take it even slower. Residents noted concerns that Waze sometimes guides through traffic to their streets; slowing the speeds would make cutting through the neighborhoods less attractive and reduce the chances of algorithms like Waze guiding drivers through the neighborhoods.



## Test before the City invests

The idea to reconfigure Washington Street will require substantial investment and take several years to implement. In order to test the idea of a boulevard on Washington Street, the City will first lead a trial of the layout on the portion of Washington Street from Chestnut Street to Lowell Avenue. A relatively short-term test of the idea will allow the engineering team to adjust the layout and improve upon the design before the project is fully implemented. Newton has used short-term trials of road designs before with good success.

The trial implementations not only allow the design team a chance to test details of the layout but also allows the public an opportunity to experience a pared down version of the design. The test before invest strategy has worked well in communities large and small for projects as complex as Washington St and as simple as a corner sidewalk widening. Burlington VT has a tactical urbanism guide that outlines the materials and approaches used in “test before invest” trail projects. Boston has also built a program that brings

in community voices to decide where to try new ideas. Their neighborhood slow streets program allocates funding to neighborhoods that are willing to work with the City to implement trial traffic calming on their streets. Residents nominate their streets to the program and if selected they have a role in reviewing ideas and trial implementation projects. Such an approach could be a way of bringing in Washington Street area residents into the slow street implementation described on page XX.



# Actively Manage Driving & Parking

## Guiding Principles:

- Actively manage village parking
- Develop and implement a public parking garage strategy
- Shape where and how much parking is in private developments
- Require transportation demand management by developers
- Track and prepare for driverless technology

Driving and parking go hand in hand – but routinely people say both that there is too much traffic and not enough parking, not connecting that every parking space encourages driving. Of course, not all parking is created equally, and there are well tested techniques to creating enough parking for those who need to drive while not disincentivizing other transportation options.



## Actively manage village parking

In addition to private off-street parking, Washington Street and the village centers have a variety of public parking resources. The West Newton Square and Walnut Street Enhancements projects will include new smart meter technology that will enable the City to more nimbly adjust parking regulations in the village centers and better track how the metered parking is utilized. This new infrastructure along with the kiosks in the public lots, and the Passport pay-by-phone service will soon provide the City the data needed to dynamically respond to parking demand in each village with changes in price or time limits.

As parking regulations are updated in the village centers, the City should also develop expanded management plans

for the neighborhood streets that immediately surround the village centers. The City can build on successes in Auburndale, Waban, and Newton Highlands to incorporate the needs of residents and village center businesses in district parking plans for West Newton and Newtonville.

Finally, these parking plans should also address the quick access curbside uses – loading areas for delivery vehicles, passenger pickup/drop-off locations, and 15-minute quick visit parking that is needed for some businesses like dry-cleaners and take-out restaurants. If not actively incorporated in curbside management/parking plans, these vehicles are likely to double park and can cause backups in traffic and safety hazards for all involved.



## Develop and implement a public parking garage strategy

One way the City of Newton can support smaller-scale buildings with limited or even no on-site parking is to expand the supply of public parking in the area. The Principle Group recommended several locations that could become municipal public parking or privately-owned but publicly accessible parking: among them, building up a municipal parking garage as part of a project on the MBTA parking lot in West Newton Square or working with the owner of the Rockport Garage at the corner of Chestnut Street and Washington Street to open it up to the public on nights and weekends. These can be found in Chapter 3 of the Vision Report.

Financing a new parking garage is a particularly expensive challenge, as each space in an above ground parking garage costs between \$30,000 and \$50,000, and even more for an underground garage. The expense of creating new garage parking is one factor that can drive up development costs for new buildings exacerbating the cost of newly constructed housing. These costs also mean that any new municipal project to build a parking garage will take time to finance. The City of Newton can start by building up funds for municipal garage projects on Washington Street and work on developing potential partners, for instance, the MBTA or property owners who wish to have access to the garage for long-term parkers from their properties (e.g. residents/employees) instead of providing it on site.



## Actively Manage Driving & Parking

### Shape where and how much parking is in private developments

The Principle Group explored several topics related to parking in developments along Washington Street, and one of the standout areas of consensus throughout the process was that no one wanted to see buildings shaped by parking built on Washington Street. The buildings currently being built on Pleasant Street in Watertown with large above ground garages hidden behind apartments were often cited as examples of what residents did not want to see on Washington Street. Instead there was generally a preference for smaller buildings and diverse building

shapes intermixed with new pocket green spaces to match the varied character seen on Washington Street today.

Newton currently requires a minimum of two parking spaces for every residential unit and at least XX per square foot of new office space, placing Newton among the communities with the highest parking requirements in the Boston region. The parking requirement is often at odds with the City's priorities to reduce drive-alone trips, to reduce the community's climate impacts, and on Washington Street to see

smaller and diverse buildings with open civic spaces. Zoning for Washington Street should include revised parking standards that align with the community priorities. The Principle Group recommended that Newton consider removing the minimum parking requirement entirely as has been done for a range of uses in village centers in Ipswich, Salem, Framingham, and Gloucester. Determining an appropriate parking standard should be considered within a broader zoning ordinance update for Washington Street.



## Require transportation demand management by developers

Transportation demand management strategies aim to create parity between the incentives to drive and the incentives to walk, bike, or take transit. So much of the cost of driving is hidden from view that it feels like an easier and cheaper choice than taking transit for a particular trip. For instance, driving to Trader Joe's from Crafts St appears to only cost as much as the gas it takes to go the 1.2 miles (approx. \$0.15) while the same trip on the bus would cost \$1.70 for the local fare. In total the costs associated with driving that one mile and parking at Trader Joe's far exceeds the \$1.70 spent on the bus: there's the cost per mile of maintaining the car, the opportunity cost of using the land for parking, the environmental costs associated with the pavement and the pollution from the car. Getting to a point where the perceived costs of driving and taking the bus are equal requires reducing the cost and increasing the convenience of taking the bus and/or making visible the true costs of driving the car.

Ensuring that non-driving options are available and that buildings are positioned to make walking up to the building as easy as driving up to the building are essential first steps as well. Managing transportation demand is then an operational challenge that requires ongoing monitoring to ensure that incentives to not drive continue to work. Strategies can vary depending on the available transportation options near a particular development and whether the strategies are aimed at residents, employees, or shoppers. The zoning ordinance could be used to ensure that these first steps happen as new development occurs and that large development projects include ongoing management.



## Track and prepare for driverless technology

Driverless technology is being tested on the road as close as Providence and Boston. In Providence, driverless shuttles are circulating through downtown, and in Boston driverless vehicles are being tested in the Seaport District. There are still many questions about what driverless technology will mean for the design of Washington Street, but the City of Newton is starting by tasking staff to follow trends in technology development and consider how it will be deployed and regulated in Newton.

## **C. HOUSING DIVERSITY**

---

**Attract All Ages, All People**

**Seek Affordable Housing Opportunities**

**Link Housing and Transportation**



# Attract All Ages, All People

Like much of the United States, Newton has an aging population. In 2014, seniors comprised at least 10% of the population in all the neighborhoods along Washington Street (Census, ACS 2014 5-year estimate). By 2030, it's anticipated that 1 in 3 residents in Newton will be seniors. The City's recognition of its changing demographics led Newton to join the World Health Organization and AARP's Age-Friendly Communities Network in 2016. While AARP is an organization that works specifically with seniors, they have recognized that what is good for seniors is good for people of all ages, and Newton's designation as an Age-Friendly Community is in part about Newton's commitment to support residents throughout their lifetimes.

## Guiding Principles:

- Ensure availability of accessible units
- Create diverse building and unit sizes
- Allow communal living models



## Ensure availability of accessible units

Accessible units are needed in buildings of all sizes in order to accommodate those with disabilities. Newly constructed buildings have to meet strict federal and state accessibility requirements which often means they are better equipped to serve residents with disabilities and those aging-in-place. Even still, there are many details to ensuring that a unit is accessible and age-friendly. The Newton Council on Aging has created a checklist with criteria to guide the development and renovation of age-friendly housing which often overlap with meeting the diverse needs of residents with disabilities and residents of all levels of physical ability. This checklist is already being utilized citywide and is essential to future conversations about housing development on Washington Street.

## Create diverse building and unit sizes

The diversity of buildings was one of the few things that was nearly consistently seen as a positive in the Washington Street planning process. And diversity broadly was highlighted time and again as one of the area's best qualities.

In order to bolster diversity in Newton, the housing stock needs to be diverse enough for the community's diverse population. The neighborhoods along Washington Street have a wide range of living environments. There are single-family homes, 2-family homes that are two condos, 2-family homes where a one family owns both units and rents one of them out. There are small multifamily buildings with 3-8 units and larger multifamily buildings, some that are only apartments, and some that have commercial uses on the ground floor. Some of the multifamily

buildings are structured as condos and others are structured as rentals. One of the topics of concern with new construction has been about ensuring that those buildings continue to enhance the diverse offering in the area. New zoning for Washington Street can ensure that the building types allowed in each portion of the corridor are contextually appropriate and support the goal for diversity in housing (see page XX for more discussion).

Diverse buildings and housing units is also tied into the question of being all-age friendly. A Department of Senior Services' demographics study found that in 2012, 39% of households included at least one member who was 60 years old or older (Living and Aging in Newton, 2014). The 60+ group represents multiple age cohorts, who may be in very different life stages

with very different housing needs. Even then, personal preferences and family arrangements further diversify the range of housing preferences seen in Newton and anticipated for Washington Street. The only clear need is for a broad range of housing types and unit sizes. A housing needs and market assessment is one tool that the City could utilize in the future to more closely track the housing market and demand.

On the other side of the age-spectrum are children and young adults. Newton has an excellent public-school system that attracts families with children to the community. Between the K-12 schools and the local universities, almost half of all people who move to Newton (49%) are 25 years old or younger (Living and Aging in Newton, 2014). Capturing the

full age spectrum in a housing needs and market assessment is valuable not only to understand current needs but also future needs for those who remain in Newton in their adult years.

In Massachusetts, both age and familial status are protected classes, meaning that denying a person housing based on their age and family status (including whether or not the family includes children under 18) is discriminatory. At a citywide level, Newton is obligated to affirmatively further fair housing and actively facilitate an inclusive, equitable community with free and open access to housing opportunities, including evaluating if local actions, policies, processes, and practices have a discriminatory effect that adversely affects people of a protected class, like seniors or families with children.



## Allow communal living models

There are a broad range of multi-unit housing formats that offer a focused mission and do not seamlessly fit into the definitions of a zoning ordinance. Age-restricted senior housing is possibly the most common version of intentional living, where residents participate in a building or complex that intentionally builds a community of older adults. There are also all-age models like co-housing that bring multiple families into a community with shared amenity spaces and communal living and purpose-built multi-generational housing to bring together extended families. Artist housing, like the Claflin School on Lowell Ave, is another form of intentional living. Live-work housing units that incorporate maker space within residential space, often are created in intentional communities to foster communities of entrepreneurs and artists/artisans. Washington Street is a location to consider allowing these more complex forms of multi-family housing.

# Seek Affordable Housing Opportunities

## Guiding Principles:

- Invest directly in affordable housing
- Develop City-led housing for people of all means

The neighborhoods along Washington Street have historically been communities with income diversity. As of 2019, low-moderate income households made up between 33% to 41% of some of the census block groups along Washington Street (HUD 2019 LMISD, based on 2011-2015 ACS). Ensuring that those families can continue to reside in their communities is a growing concern as housing prices in Newton continue to rise. In the coming years, the City of Newton should look for ways to support diverse and affordable housing throughout the Washington Street area to maintain the diversity of these neighborhoods.

Map of Census Block Groups  
with high percentages of low-  
moderate income households

## *Seek Affordable Housing Opportunities*

### Invest directly in affordable housing

The City of Newton has a variety of funding sources that can be directed to the production and preservation of affordable housing units. The City of Newton receives approximately \$3.5 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to support economic diversity and expanded opportunity for low-to-moderate income households in the city, much of which is aimed at producing and preserving affordable housing. The City of Newton and WestMetro HOME Consortium's FY16-FY20 Consolidated Plan identifies affordable housing as the City's greatest need when it comes

to supporting economic diversity and obligates approximately 60% of each year's allocation toward this critical line item. Additionally, the City raises a little over \$3 million each year through a local surcharge for the Community Preservation Program, a portion of which is intended to support affordable housing activities. At the end of 2019, the City will also begin receiving fractional payments from private development projects subject to the Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance. These diverse funds could collectively be utilized to directly invest in affordable housing in the Washington Street area.



## Develop City-led housing for people of all means

The decommissioned West Newton Armory is a potential opportunity site for affordable housing. One potential use in the range of possibilities is to develop the building into 100% permanently affordable housing with the City taking control of the property for only \$1 from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The City of Lynn is currently converting its decommissioned armory into affordable housing for veterans. Newton is exploring a range of options for taking over the armory from the State Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM), currently tasked with brokering the transfer and repurposing of decommissioned armories across the Commonwealth, and is tracking the project in Lynn to understand if that could be a model for Newton. Additional opportunities should be considered as they become available as well.





# Link Housing and Transportation

Housing and transportation are intimately connected. The top three things in selecting a home are location, location, location. A home's location relative to transportation options guides what jobs are accessible and how a person is likely to commute to that job. Washington Street is served by the commuter rail at West Newton and Newtonville and the express bus lines 504, 553, 554, and 556. Already residents along Washington Street are some of those most likely to take transit to work. In some Census tracts along Washington Street more than 25% of residents commute to work by transit (Census ACS 2010-2014, Newton Transportation Strategy). As new development occurs on Washington Street, the City of Newton is interested in seeing developments that build on the existing transit infrastructure, encouraging new residents to use transit, and improving the link between the neighborhoods and the transit services on Washington Street.

## Guiding Principles:

- Focus housing where residents have transportation options
- Pair housing near transit with new commercial and retail space

# Focus housing where commuting traffic can be mitigated

Washington Street sees its peak traffic during commuting hours, as residents from across Newton use Washington Street to travel east or west through the city or to connect with the Mass Pike at West Newton or Newton Corner. There is a strong interest in seeing new housing that is transit-oriented and in putting in place a framework to curtail traffic growth related to new development.

One of the most effective ways to limit the traffic impacts of new housing is to focus new development near transit. Arlington Virginia saw substantial residential and office development along its arterial roads that connect to the community's rail stations in the 2000-2010 decade; these routes are similar to Washington Street today. Wilson Boulevard/Clarendon Blvd are a pair of one-way 2-lane roads between subway stations that also have multiple bus lines. The corridor is lined with multi-story mixed-use development projects that then transition to older single-family neighborhoods. Tied into

their goal to "Move More People Without More Traffic," Arlington is tracking traffic volumes on its arterial streets. Most interestingly, between 1996 and 2012 the corridor saw a 23% reduction in daily traffic in the inbound (toward Washington DC) direction and a 5% reduction in the outbound direction (Arlington VA FY 2015-2024 CIP Presentation). The transit service on that corridor had been in place since the 1970s, but the shift in land use pattern and the walking experience has encouraged not only new people in the area, but also others in the surrounding neighborhoods to travel differently. Newton can encourage the same transition

by focusing new housing close to transit and ensuring that new development meets walkable design standards.

Newton has also been building up its capacity for transportation demand management, and new zoning for Washington Street can incorporate the clear requirements for reducing single occupancy vehicle trips coming from new residents (see page XX). Not only should new housing be focused physically around transit stations, but there should be programs in place to ensure that new residents near transit service have every incentive to not drive.

Map of Wilson Blvd/Clarendon  
Blvd, Arlington VA

## Pair housing near transit with new commercial and retail space

Traffic is not just about commuting; mitigating traffic is also about creating opportunities for people to run errands and enjoy their life without getting in the car. Housing within a comfortable walk of shops, services, and dining options also reduces driving. Furthermore, having these daily service needs allow transit commuters from the surrounding neighborhoods to “trip-link” and pick up dry-cleaning, prescriptions, or dinner on their walk home, saving them a car-trip as well. The mix of uses in West Newton and Newtonville already allow for a lot of trip linking, and this mix can be further enhanced as new development occurs, particularly at the West Newton station which is much less integrated into the village center than the Newtonville station.

## **D. GLOBAL CLIMATE AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENT**

---

**Provide Options for Low-Carbon Living**

**Improve Climate Resilience**

**Expand Access to Open Spaces and Recreation**

**Mitigate the Mass Pike's Effects**



# Provide Options for Low-Carbon Living

Fighting the climate change crisis requires that individuals make choices that will lower their carbon footprint. There is a clear role for Newton in ensuring there are places in the city that enable those choices. Newton's draft Climate Action Plan states, "The longer we delay taking ambitious action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and change how we interact with our environment, the greater the environmental, public health, and economic problems we will face, both now and in the future." The two greatest areas of emissions, and therefore the most needed areas of change, are in buildings and transportation systems. Fundamentally, both need to move towards greater efficiency and reduced reliance on fossil fuels.

While quality of life, economic development, housing diversity, and transportation system efficiency are all excellent reasons by themselves to implement the Washington Street vision, the opportunity to proactively address the climate crisis may be the most important reason for action. Washington Street has all the potential to make low-carbon living easy. Already, residents of this area are frequent users of transit and take advantage of the walkable village centers for many of their daily needs. The recommendations in this Vision can help people significantly reduce their individual greenhouse gas emissions.

## Guiding Principles:

- Allow for diverse and smaller unit residences
- Build in features to make low-carbon living easy
- Create incentives and mandates for energy-efficient construction

## Allow for diverse and smaller unit residences

One of the best ways to achieve greater efficiency in housing is through smaller unit sizes. Smaller units require less energy to heat or cool. Smaller units can also mean higher overall residential densities which, coupled with local services in walking distance and transit opportunities, can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Smaller units can additionally address the city's needs for a greater housing diversity.

While smaller units of various types, from small single-family to small apartments make sense anywhere within the Washington Street area, the higher density clusters should occur close to the village centers and the rail and bus transit services.

## *Provide Options for Low-Carbon Living*

### Build in features to make low-carbon living easy

It is already relatively easy to lead a low-carbon lifestyle along Washington Street. Residents of this area use transit at relatively high rates than are take advantage of walkable village centers for many of their daily needs. That said, an enhanced walking, biking, and transit environment will allow more people to take advantage of these modes of transportation. Vibrant and appropriately dense village areas will make for destinations that are even more worth walking to and more competitive than driving to other shopping or entertainment areas. Individual development projects are encouraged to make

low-carbon living easier by further incorporating substantial insulation, sustainable heating and cooling systems to provide comfortable indoor temperatures with less energy as well as electric vehicle charging stations to encourage residents and employees to purchase electric vehicles. Wherever possible operational aspects should include low-carbon lifestyle features like robust waste management systems that include recycling and composting and stormwater/graywater recapture to reduce water consumption.

## Create incentives and mandates for energy-efficient construction

The new buildings that will be built along Washington Street within the timeframe of this Vision Plan will likely have lifespans of well over 100 years. The urgency of addressing climate change and the longevity of these buildings stresses the importance of ensuring the highest quality and most advanced energy-efficient technology is used. The Washington Street zoning should include a combination of standards, special permit criteria, and incentives to ensure the highest degree of energy efficient design is achieved.

This plan supports Passive House design as a model for reaching this objective. Passive House's requirement for strong sound insulation and indoor air filtering are both valuable added benefits for Washington Street given the proximity to the Mass Pike.

For large projects, investments to increase efficiencies through low embodied carbon construction and the development of district energy services and on-site energy production should be considered.



# Improve Climate Resilience

In 2018, Newton completed a citywide Climate Vulnerability Assessment. The assessment identified potential threats from climate change (flooding, sea level rise, and rising temperatures) to vulnerable sites and populations. Sea level rise is not a threat on Washington Street but both flooding and rising temperatures are climate vulnerabilities that can be reduced through local actions.

## Guiding Principles:

- Improve Cheesecake Brook to reduce downstream flooding
- Reduce heat island effect through building and site design standards

## Improve Cheesecake Brook to reduce downstream flooding

During the first half of the 20th century Newton's engineers made the decision to underground Cheesecake Brook in long sections of culvert. Doing so was likely perceived as the best course of action for protecting valuable commercial and industrial land from flooding in what was a growing and prosperous City. While the underground culvert was likely

sized appropriately at the time for the anticipated volume of water, the impacts of climate change are already being felt in Newton and we can anticipate even larger storms and greater amounts of rainfall, further straining the capacity of this system. Fortunately, there are many design solutions that can ameliorate flooding and improve stream ecology and

water quality. The vision plan calls for working with adjacent property owners to uncover or "daylighting" a portion of Cheesecake Brook where feasible between Washington Street and Watertown Street and lining the brook with park space that can serve to buffer the waterway and absorb stormwater during flood events.



## ***Improve Climate Resilience***

### Reduce heat island effect through building and site design standards

One of the challenges Newton will face regularly as a result of climate change is the increase in hot and extremely hot days. A map in Newton's draft Climate Vulnerability Plan clearly shows a greater degree of "heat island effect" along the Washington Street corridor, where paved surfaces and other factors exacerbate the effects of high heat. Creative building and site design can be used to ameliorate the heat island effect. For example, buildings can have deep awnings or other similar features that shade the front of the building and the sidewalk. Rooftops that are white, green (planted), or blue (trapping rainwater) reduce the urban heat island effect. Minimizing pavements from driveways and parking lots also reduces summer heat. Trees are an essential element for addressing excessive heat and should be required when new sidewalks and parking lots are being developed to shade large hardscaped areas.

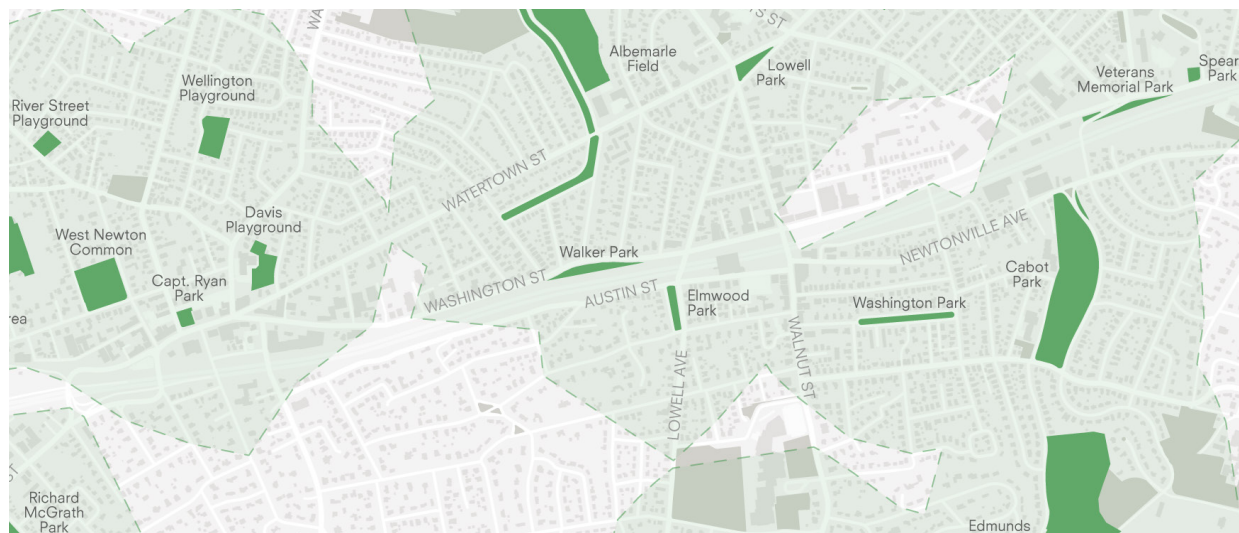


# Expand Access to Open Green Spaces and Recreation

## Guiding Principles:

- Create a network of pocket parks, tot lots, and community plazas
- Activate existing and the new public spaces
- Expand tree canopy and add layers of vegetation

Most residents in the Washington Street area are within a 10-minute walk to a park, but there are some notable gaps. Court Street is almost entirely more than 10-minutes' walk from the nearest parks (Cabot Park and Lowell Park). There are also gaps in park access on West Newton Hill and just north of Watertown Street. This Vision includes goals to create a network of new small parks and plazas, to reinvigorate existing park space, and even to create new village greens over the Mass Pike for both West Newton Square and Newtonville Square (see page XX for more on this idea). In time, the hope is that all residents in the Washington Street area will be within a 10-minute walk of a communal outdoor space.





## *Expand Access to Open Green Spaces and Recreation*

### Create a network of pocket parks, tot lots, and community plazas

Parks are an essential part of a community with a wide range of recognized benefits for the local environment, public health, and general sense of community. While Newton overall is well-served by park space, the neighborhoods along Washington Street could benefit from a range of smaller, infill parks and plazas. Such civic-space amenities should be incorporated into new development

projects. At the same time, existing parks and open spaces should be reinvigorated. Captain Ryan Park in West Newton could be redeveloped as a more vibrant community space. The Walker Street green space, located in the bend of Washington Street by the Mass Pike, currently unprogrammed lawn, could be re-imagined as a new park.





## Activate existing and the new open spaces

Parks and public spaces are more than just their built features; a bandshell after all means little without a band. As parks and plazas are being developed it is important to consider how they will be managed and programmed. This is particularly a question for newly created private plazas and courtyards. During the permitting of large developments with new civic spaces, it will be important to discuss how new privately-built civic spaces will be programmed – particularly those spaces are being arranged to accommodate community events. An on-site management company that manages event scheduling and logistics can be of great support to community groups that sponsor and put on community events.



## *Expand Access to Open Green Spaces and Recreation*

### Expand tree canopy and add layers of vegetation

The Washington Street corridor has relatively few trees compared to other parts of the Garden City. Trees serve as a humanizing and hugely beneficial landscape element. Beyond simply looking beautiful, street trees provide a sense of enclosure that helps slow vehicle speeds in neighborhood settings; filter pollution by capturing particulate matter and buffering traffic noise; reduce the urban heat island effect and provide shade for people in the summer; capture rain

and help infiltrate stormwater thereby reducing burden on the stormdrain system and contributing to healthier waterways; and contribute to improved mental health. Trees and ground-level landscaping also may enhance property values.

The West Newton Square and Walnut Street Enhancements Projects will each add dozens of new trees to the village centers in the next few years. The redesign of Washington Street should provide for

the incorporation of trees as an important element of the design, recasting the street as a tree-lined boulevard. As will be modeled in the upcoming village center projects, newly planted trees should use the latest planting techniques to provide for the longevity of the trees. In keeping with the City's Street Design Guide, stormwater management best practices for street trees and shrubs should be incorporated wherever feasible.





# Mitigate the Mass Pike's Effects

## Guiding Principles:

- Install plants at the 'Pike edge to improve noise, air quality, and aesthetics
- Install sound barriers that have multiple positive outcomes
- Investigate opportunities to deck over sections of the Mass Pike

The construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike through Newton in the 1960s has had some negative local effects on Washington Street. Communities to the north and south were further separated from each other and bridges between neighborhoods were removed. The air pollution and noise of Mass Pike traffic is constant throughout the day. Until the day that all vehicles are electric, and noise and air pollution are reduced on the Mass Pike, the City can work to mitigate the local effects of the Mass Pike on Washington Street and the surrounding neighborhoods.



## Install plants at the 'Pike edge to improve noise, air quality, and aesthetics

During design week, one resident who has lived near Washington Street for a long time told a story about how after only a day or two of opening her windows in the summer, she could wipe black soot off surfaces in her apartment. One mitigation strategy that cities including Seattle, London, Vancouver, and Paris use to tame air pollution is the installation of plants on buildings, bridges, and

structural sound barriers. Plants mitigate noise and remove particulates from the air. Paris now licenses citizen-gardeners to assist in planting programs; the citizen gardeners maintain the look and health of the green spaces and are encouraged to experiment, including planting on walls and roofs, they must plant for pollinators and may never use pesticides. A diversity of densely planted, multi-story

perennials along the Mass Pike could have a substantial visual, environmental, and public health impact, especially where Washington Street and the Turnpike are situated at the same grade. Plantings could be installed in conjunction with structural sound barriers. A license program like that in Paris could engage Washington Street area residents as well.

## Install sound barriers that have multiple positive outcomes

The Mass Turnpike/commuter rail edge of Washington Street could provide much greater community value. There are many that would like to see noise mitigation, but a sound wall alone is a limited improvement.

The Principle Group developed a proposal to further meet Newton's energy goals by installing solar panels on sound walls on the City-owned land between the commuter rail tracks and Washington Street. The east-west orientation of the Mass Pike provides an opportunity for solar panels to have a clear southern exposure, facing toward the tracks and the Mass Pike. S

A further innovation on the idea is to build small scale buildings along the Mass Pike edge in the places where there is sufficient public land. The idea would be for these buildings to provide noise mitigation, generate solar power with panels on the roof, and fill a need for low cost business/arts space.

## Investigate opportunities to deck over sections of the Mass Pike

An idea proposed in this Vision is to realize the potential value of air-rights development in West Newton and Newtonville and deck over the Mass Pike for economic development, the creation of new public open spaces, and to help heal the divide created by the Mass Pike. The village green that could be created for each village center is a valuable component of the traditional New England village that would serve as central gathering spaces in both villages, helping to draw people in from the north and the south and contribute to village vitality. With new buildings and other mechanisms for buffering the Mass Pike from these village greens, they could be attractive new parks that serve to limit the felt presence of the Mass Pike in the villages.

# **E. EXCELLENCE IN PLACEMAKING AND DESIGN**

---

**Area-wide Planning Principles**

**Site Planning Principles**

**Building Design Principles**



# Area-wide Planning Principles

The Washington Street Vision Plan covers an area with multiple neighborhoods and two distinct village centers. The interplay of all of priorities for vitality, transportation, housing, and the environment ultimately come together and are expressed through the development of buildings, the creation of open and recreational spaces, the opening of new stores, and the implementation of roads and other infrastructure. Thinking about this portion of Washington Street as a whole, there are a number of physical planning principles that will be used to guide the development of zoning for Washington Street.

## Guiding Principles:

- Ensure Newtonville and West Newton remain distinct and vital
- Protect iconic buildings
- Foster moments of arrival
- Create gentle transitions to adjacent neighborhoods
- Develop standards and guidelines for human-scale design

## Ensure Newtonville and West Newton remain distinct and vital

West Newton and Newtonville are two distinct villages that should not appear to blend together into one continuous development along the length of Washington Street. Much of Newton's identity derives from having separate and individually unique villages. With Newton's strong housing market and the community's objectives to address the climate crisis and growing housing needs, the market might very well accept a plan for six-story buildings along the entire length of Washington Street as has been seen in other nearby municipalities; for Newton though, the appropriate place to focus new, denser development just outside the village centers, consistent with the City's historical development patterns.

### Protect iconic buildings

The center of West Newton is a federally designated historic district, its character derived from several important civic buildings and a handful of historic commercial buildings. Newtonville is similarly home to iconic civic structures in and the residential neighborhood north of the village commercial buildings is a local historic district. Newton should continue to protect iconic buildings and to treat them as guideposts in the views along Washington Street while also growing and changing to support the other objectives of this Vision Plan.

Typically the center of a village is where height is allowed to be the highest, but that approach could mean detracting from the historic structures in the core of the village centers. This would even have been the historic pattern of the village centers before the Great Depression, when a number of multi-story commercial buildings in the village centers were replaced. In this Vision, density and height are recommended to be located in areas of underutilized land just outside of the village cores and yet well within the walkable and transit served areas of the villages. In West Newton, this area

includes the MBTA parking lots and the “Cheesecake Brook lots” east of Chestnut Street as far as the Trader Joe’s on Armory Street. In Newtonville, this area is primarily at the intersection of Crafts Street and Washington Street. Essentially, the vision calls for improving these areas that are currently less reflective of the ideal of Newton placemaking excellence. The vision proposes that these portions of the corridor could realize the important policy objectives while also incorporating the quality design that define the West Newton and Newtonville village cores.

## Foster moments of arrival

Because height is being guided to the edges of the village rather than the center, it can be used to mark moments of arrival as one moves through the village. Newly created taller buildings would mark arrival at the edges of each village, and then heights in the village core areas would be kept relatively low in order to allow the historic civic buildings to continue to have prominence. The taller features of the Masonic Hall on Walnut Street in Newtonville and the Unitarian Church in West Newton should continue to catch one's attention as one passes through the village centers.

This approach would mark each transition into and out of the village centers with a moment of well-designed height – arrival at West Newton Square near the MBTA station, passing the civic core with the church and police complex, leaving West Newton where there are no longer buildings on both sides of the street, entering Newtonville Square as one passes Lowell Ave, passing the civic core with the Masonic Hall, leaving Newtonville Square as one passes Crafts Street.



## Create gentle transitions to adjacent neighborhoods

The gentle transition from the village centers to surrounding residential neighborhoods is an important part of retaining the historic pattern of villages and neighborhoods. This Vision recommends, and the zoning could ultimately require, to drop building heights adjacent to residences in order to be complementary to the scale of surrounding neighborhoods. Setbacks are another way to create a gentle transition, a taller building that is pulled away from the property line in favor of green space or even a driveway lined with trees gives the

neighboring property some breathing room. The transition can also be made gentler by locating smaller footprint buildings adjacent to residential neighborhoods; for instance, a small four-story office building that has the same footprint as a house could actually be a better transitional structure than a one-story office building with a long facade and large footprint. All of these approaches to creating gentle transitions should be incorporated when developing zoning for Washington Street.

## Develop standards and guidelines for human-scale design

Every building and public space along Washington Street should be designed with a focus on the view from the person standing on the street. This includes thinking about the relationship of the human body, particularly the body's field of vision, to building height and width, as well as the details of the architecture – the layout of windows on the ground floor, the frequency of doorways, the architectural details that relate a building to the people who will ultimately use it. Human-scale design principles should be incorporated into zoning for Washington Street as well as design guidelines for Washington Street.

People generally feel more comfortable in cozy spaces than in wide open spaces.

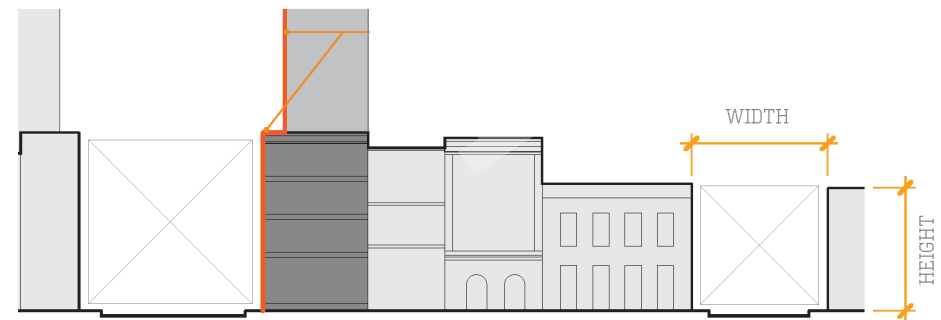
- The human body is instinctually programmed to seek out edges and sheltered areas. In natural settings, the forest is generally more comfortable than the field. Similarly, in a built setting, a street that is enclosed by building edges is more comfortable than one with wide open parking lots on either side.

People can only see so far, and what they can see changes at different distances.

- People can see a lot of detail at eye-level and closer to the ground, and generally less detail up above. When walking along the street, people are more interested in the ground floor of a building than its upper stories. The eye easily seeks out other people,

window displays, and other details but may not register information or activity as readily on the upper stories.

- Regarding building height, from as high as the 5th or 6th story people can still engage in activity on the street. They can hear the tone of a conversation and clearly observe the interactions occurring down below. Above this height, humans lose direct connection with the happenings on the street. This is generally the height above which buildings should be stepped back from the street edges as well to allow more light on the ground.

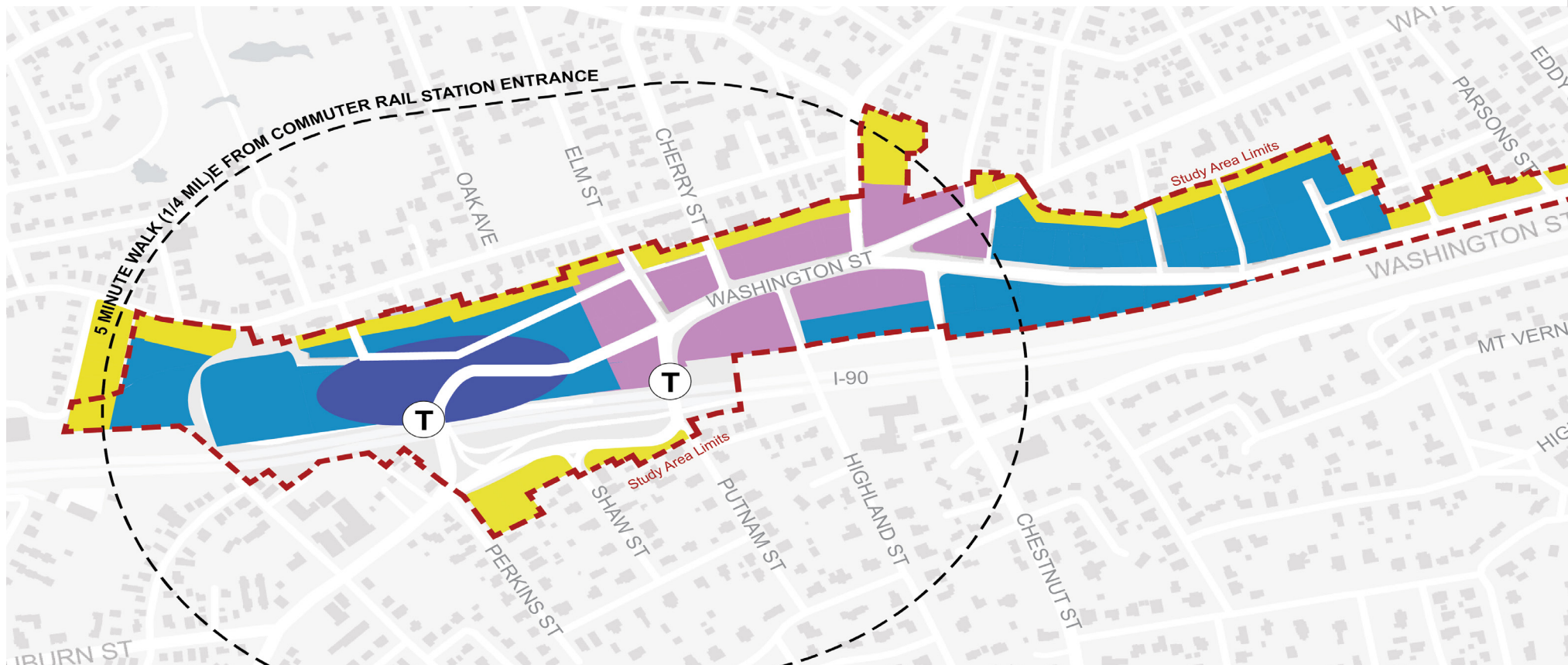


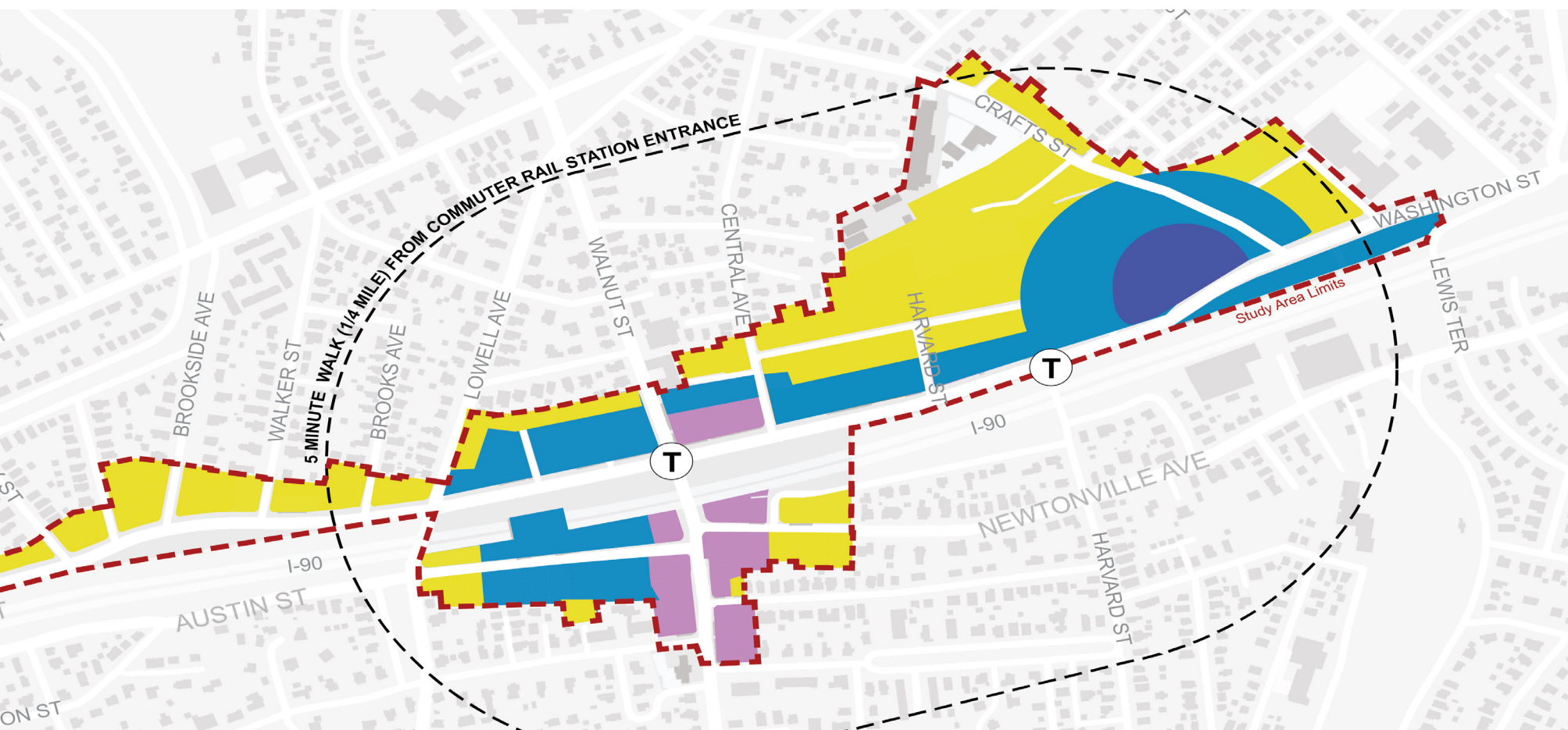
Caption: This diagram describes two of the design principles for setting building height in relationship to a street. First, note the gray square with an X through it above each street. The sides of the square are equal. The diagram demonstrates that the height of the buildings at the street edge are equal to the width of the open space. This ratio has generally been found to make for a comfortable sense of enclosure for humans. Second, note that on the left, the buildings are taller, but are set back at the upper levels. This preserves the proportions at which the street is comfortably enclosed and allows more sunlight into the street.

### Mapping the Height Principles

This diagram illustrates the height principles along Washington Street. The height ranges shown correspond to the area-wide planning principles:

- Maintaining the lower height
- Allowing historic iconic buildings to maintain their prominence in the village cores
- Creating moments of arrival and transition at the edges of the villages
- Ensure buildings respond to human scale throughout the area including upper story setbacks on taller buildings





- Low Heights - Neighborhood Character (1 to 3 stories)
- Low Heights - Village Character (1 to 4 stories)
- Medium Heights - Village Character (3 to 6 stories)
- Taller Heights - Village Character (4 to 6+ stories, with anything above 6 stories stepped back from the building edge)

Footnotes:

- This is not a regulatory map.
- Further nuance must be developed in Washington Street Zoning including specifying the limits of each zoning district and the rules for each district and building type.
- The scale of some buildings, including taller height buildings, will require additional review and community input as can be achieved through the Special Permit Process.



# Site Planning Principles

Individual properties affect the fabric of the neighborhood and excellence in placemaking. Site design principles should be carried forward through zoning and design guidelines to ensure that any new development adds to design excellence on Washington Street.

## Guiding Principles:

- Create variety in building size and shape
- Limit visible parking
- Broaden the toolkit to incentivize historic preservation
- Break down the scale of larger projects with new streets, paths, and open spaces

## Create variety in building size and shape

A distinguishing characteristic of both West Newton and Newtonville is that the buildings in these villages developed incrementally over time and are therefore distinctive from each other, varying in height, width, materials, and other aspects of their design. These building patterns are another essential feature that defines the unique sense of place of Newton. The vision recommends that zoning for Washington Street require that new development reinforce these building patterns. In particular, where a larger new development is proposed that might include multiple buildings or stretch over an entire block, that such a development reinforce the idea of multiple buildings with varying heights, materials, and other design distinctiveness.

### Limit visible parking

While there is much to discuss on the amount of parking that should be allowed or required on Washington Street relative to the City's transportation priorities, there is general consensus that parking should not dictate the size of buildings nor dominate the landscape. Any parking that is provided should be tucked behind buildings, screened from the sidewalk, or ideally below ground.

Generally, below-grade parking garages are preferred for Washington Street over above-ground garages because they do not add to the visible mass of buildings. Understanding though that below-grade parking is not always achievable due to physical and financial constraints, the second priority

is for parking to be at the back of a property, away from the street. Parking lots are very boring to walk alongside and can be a barrier to pedestrian activity. In addition to locating parking lots behind a building, another strategy is to limit the size of parking lots along the side of a building. Small convenience parking areas are more effective from a range of perspectives: higher customer convenience, reduced design impact, lower heat island effects, and lower opportunity costs.

The details of parking requirements, including parking lot design standards, should be considered as part of future zoning and design guidelines for Washington Street.

## Broaden the toolkit to incentivize historic preservation

Historic preservation in Newton has long been an important community goal and there are many tools in place to preserve important structures. There is a challenge though in preserving the structures that are underperforming economically relative to their land value. Some of the most challenging with respect to preservation are the one-story commercial properties built in the 1930s that are valuable for

their narrow shopfront and detailed facades but are based on a simple box structure at the back. An added tool for keeping the portions of the property that have historic value, would be to establish a height/floor area bonus that would be granted on condition of maintaining the historically significant portions of the existing structure. This approach would give the Newton Historic Commission

and the City Council an additional option when discussing preservation in the context of a special permit project. Such a bonus should be structured to allow the Historic Commission an opportunity to weigh in on what building-specific historic features need to be preserved in order to be granted the bonus.



### Break down the scale of larger projects with new streets, paths, & open spaces

The strong interest in seeing building diversity on Washington Street becomes particularly relevant when considering a large development proposal. Washington Street today is an eclectic mix of architectural styles and building sizes and there is an interest in seeing that pattern continued in new construction. Writing zoning requirements that treat large projects as a series of contextually appropriate buildings rather than single large structures can reinforce the desired outcomes. In addition to requiring new projects to be multiple varied buildings, the zoning for Washington Street can require that large projects

include new streets and paths to create new smaller blocks and can require that new large projects include public open spaces.

An approach that resonated well during the design process, was the idea of creating public courtyards in new large projects. Courtyards were favored because they would be buffered from the noise and pollutants coming from the Mass Pike and because they would offer more intimate settings for community gatherings.

# Building Design Principles

## Guiding Principles:

- Allow form to follow function
- Encourage traditional New England roof diversity
- Promote efficient, human-scaled and durable construction

Like site planning, the decisions of individual architects can have an effect on the overall feel of Washington Street. The issues at hand have a lot less to do with architectural style (modern vs. traditional for example) and more to do with how a building addresses issues of scale. There are many building design elements that affect the perception of scale: the proportion of height to width along the street, the composition and arrangement of windows and doors, and even the size of the exterior materials (traditional brick or clapboards vs. large panels). As zoning and design guidelines are developed for Washington Street the architectural principles below should be incorporated into those standards.

### Allow form to follow function

Washington Street is a mixed-use area, meaning that there will be properties that are primarily commercial and properties that are exclusively residential. Tailoring the building design regulations to the expected range of uses in the building is important to ensure that the rules work with today's building code requirements and desired uses.

For instance, a restaurant space requires a high ceiling height in order to accommodate the requisite hoods in the

kitchen and air exchange system in the dining room. In order to accommodate restaurants in new construction, the zoning would need to allow sufficient ground floor height to meet those needs (estimated at 15 ft or more).

Likewise, if Newton would like to see new buildings in the village centers have the flexibility to be used for either residential or office, the floor-to-floor height will need to be tall enough for all of the additional infrastructure that offices need between floors (additional

wiring, air exchangers, etc.). Residential buildings are anticipated to need 9-12 ft floor-to-floor while offices are estimated to required 10-14 ft floor-to-floor.

Similarly, while there is an interest seeing new storefronts be narrow like the historic storefronts in West Newton Square and Newtonville, research by the Principle Group suggested that with current accessibility standards, newly constructed or modified storefronts will need to be a little wider than the ones built in the 1930s.

## Encourage traditional New England roof diversity

Washington Street has a wide range of roof types reflecting the variety of development periods and land uses in the area. The Seth Davis Tavern, one of the oldest buildings in West Newton Square has a gable roof as do many of the residential homes between the village centers. There are also a variety of hipped roofs and mansard roofs on the residential structures, including those that have been since converted into small offices. Most of the 20th century commercial buildings have flat roofs, often with parapets. While that's the majority there are two stand out examples of commercial projects with pitched roofs; the office building at 246 Walnut Street has a gable roof and a

turret at the corner, and the office building at 580 Washington Street has a post-modern split gable roof. Throughout the planning process, people reacted more positively to images that showed a mix of roof types, but today's construction methodology, particularly for commercial buildings means that pitched roofs are rarely cost-effective. One way Newton could incentivize roof diversity is to allow the area under a roof to be habitable above and beyond the allowed number of stories. It is expected that most new buildings would still find the flat roof to be the more cost-effective choice, but this tradeoff could result in a few more interesting building shapes over time.



### Promote efficient, human-scaled and durable construction

As is the case with the buildings we see today, any new construction or major renovation on Washington Street should be expected to last decades if not a century. It is in the city's interest to see that new construction and renovations are of the highest quality possible. In this instance high quality, means a few things: energy and resource efficient, relating to human-scale, and durable. While the principles for high quality design and construction have been described elsewhere in the vision, it is important to recognize that the City of Newton can play a role in promoting quality design and construction for projects of all sizes. One of the most direct ways is through advisory design review. Newton already has an Urban Design Commission that reviews projects and provides advice to applicants, city staff, and the City Council. That role could be expanded for a broader range of projects on Washington Street and could be supported with Washington Street specific design guidelines.

- this page intentionally blank -



# **III. IMPLEMENTING THE VISION FOR WASHINGTON STREET**

---

**How is the Comprehensive Plan and its amendments used?**

**Guiding Principles for Implementation**

**Early Actions**

## **How is the Comprehensive Plan and its amendments used?**

This Vision Plan [has been] adopted as an amendment to the City of Newton Comprehensive Plan because it is a basis for future decision-making by the City Council, the City staff, and City boards and commissions. The Comprehensive Plan and this Vision Plan Amendment provide direction and guidance for future projects and efforts.

The City Council will be able to use this Vision to guide decision-making on the draft zoning prepared by the Principle Group as well as any private-sector development proposals that come before the Council while that ordinance is being considered. Private-sector proponents are encouraged to use the Washington

Street Vision Plan when preparing their proposals as well, in order to align with this [adopted] vision. Moving forward, the Vision Plan will also be utilized to develop capital projects and infrastructure investments along Washington Street.

Throughout the implementation of this Vision Plan, those utilizing the vision will also be able to refer to the Hello Washington Street Report produced by the Principle Group. That document will be particularly useful when development projects are brought forward in areas for which the Principle Group developed site studies and recommended development objectives.



# Guiding Principles for Implementation

Thinking broadly about implementing the Washington Street Vision Plan, there are a few recommendations for all involved in implementation to keep in mind when putting this Vision into practice.

## Return to the Vision Statement

The Vision Statement on page XX is ultimately the vision Newton is aiming for on Washington Street, meaning that it is ok if the ideas to reach that vision need to be adjusted over time to ensure those top-line priorities are met. It is recommended that those priorities for vitality in the villages, safe streets, housing diversity, community gathering, and environmental protection should be integrated into the purpose statements of future activities coming out of this Vision Plan. For instance, the zoning for Washington Street could integrate the vision statement into an overall purpose statement for the new districts. This way the vision for Washington Street is always top of mind when projects are being implemented.

## Engage the Community at Key Touchpoints

The development of this Vision Plan benefited immensely from the involvement of community members who live and work along Washington Street. The community conversations at the large meetings and in small group office-hours settings was an essential input in the process.

Many of the ideas described in this Vision will need substantially more discussion in the future and there is a role for the community to play in each of those major implementation projects. At key touchpoints, the community should be asked again to share their ideas and perspectives as the vision is implemented.

## Establish Equity as an Essential Consideration

Maintaining Washington Street's diversity is an underlying objective throughout this Vision plan. Where opportunities arise in new private-development projects and in City investment projects, the equity impacts of decisions should always be considered.

## **Early Actions**

While much of the Vision Plan will play out over the next 20-30 years, there are some key early actions that the Planning Department has recommended for the first 6-18 months after adopting this Vision as an amendment to the City's Comprehensive Plan in order to make immediate progress toward the vision of lively villages, a safe street, diverse housing, places for community connections, and environmental protection.

### **Develop a Concept Design for Washington Street Enhancements**

The City of Newton has proposed to develop a concept design for Washington Street and a long-term trial for a portion of the roadway. The intent is that this concept plan along with the finance strategy below will give the City a clearer understanding of how to proceed with the street repair objectives outlined in the vision plan. Completing the concept design may unlock significant state funding through the State's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that could be used for construction.

The West Newton Square & Walnut Street Enhancements projects will both move into construction in 2019-2020. Any future roadway or sidewalk work will be coordinated with these current investments.

### **Adopt Washington Street Zoning**

Already in draft form at the point that the Vision Plan [was adopted], the City Council, with the assistance of the Planning Department will work toward the adoption of specific zoning to implement the ideas about building shape, size, and form and related performance standards for new construction. Some companion zoning amendments are also in the works that would apply to the entire zoning ordinance to clarify the allowed commercial uses, update the inclusionary housing section, and to improve upon the language related to sustainable building technologies.

### **Pursue Acquisition of West Newton Armory for Public Purpose**

The City of Newton has the rare opportunity to acquire the approximately 30,000 square foot West Newton National Guard Armory on Washington Street from the State of Massachusetts. Toward that end, the City is filing Special Legislation with the Massachusetts Legislature to gain the ability to acquire the property for affordable housing or other direct public use at a price to be determined. The City should immediately plan to undertake an investigation of potential reuse options to better understand the financial and other implications associated with the various reuse possibilities.

## **Develop Parking Management Strategies for West Newton and Newtonville**

Effective public parking management is an ongoing task that is never finished, and that means early and continuous action is needed to bring parking policies closer into conformance with the rest of the city's transportation goals.

## **Prepare a Finance Strategy for Washington Street Infrastructure & Public Spaces**

The City of Newton has applied for a grant from MassDevelopment to create a finance strategy for the infrastructure and public spaces shown in the plan. [If the grant is received], this strategic effort will explore the financing tools described in the Vision Plan and guide the City in budgeting for these investments.

## **Incorporate the Vision Plan into Ongoing Citywide Strategies**

The City of Newton is currently developing an Arts and Culture Master Plan and working on implementing the Economic Development Strategy. In the Hello Washington Street! process, it became clear that supporting artists and small businesses in Newtonville and West Newton are of

Draft 07.08.2019

vital importance to the community. The findings and ideas developed here will be integrated into these efforts along with other city initiatives like the City's Street Tree Program.

## **Convene a Commuter Rail Conference**

The City of Newton will work together with Newton government leaders at the state and federal levels to convene a discussion on how to move the commuter rail vision forward to implementation.

## **Pilot Pop-Up Retail Pavilions**

The City of Newton will create a pathway for testing pop-up retail pavilions along Washington Street.

## **Host a Design Imagination Day at Walker Park**

In developing this Vision, it became clear that Walker Park (located along the Mass Pike across from Walker St) could be an excellent neighborhood resource. In this early action time frame, the City of Newton will host an "Imagination Day," at Walker Park to bring local families and children into the idea development phase of the design.



## **IV. SUMMARY OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR WASHINGTON STREET**

---

**Vibrancy in the Village Centers**

**Safe Multimodal Transportation**

**Housing Diversity**

**Global Climate and Local Environment**

**Excellence in Placemaking and Design**



## **A. Vibrancy in the Village Centers**

### **Promote Unique and Vital Village Centers**

- Encourage a mix of activities 18-hours a day
- Give entrepreneurs an assist
- Connect businesses to local customers and workforce
- Ensure community gathering is allowed and encouraged

### **Design for Engaging Walks**

- Use buildings and trees to make a more comfortable environment
- Activate the 'Pike edge
- Create narrow and transparent shopfronts
- Incorporate opportunities for outdoor dining
- Design streets and plazas as places to linger

### **Invest in Public Art & Arts Programming**

- Promote West Newton and Newtonville Artists
- Allow for arts production, presentation, and artist housing
- Design for music and community events in public spaces

### **Strengthen the Business Climate**

- Promote the village centers' competitive advantages
- Create clusters of office and lab activity in each village
- Explore incentives and investments in locally-owned businesses

## **B. Safe Multimodal Transportation**

### **Prioritize People, Safety, and Comfort**

- Make room for people-powered transportation
- Design sidewalks for year-round comfort
- Improve the bus experience

### **Create More Route Options**

- Break up mega blocks
- Connect Washington Street to the Charles River Greenway
- Consider building more bridges over the 'Pike
- Make way for crosswalks

### **Advocate for the Rail Vision**

- Support new accessible stations
- Advocate for service every 15-minutes all day in both directions
- Participate and advocate heavily for early implementation of the Rail Vision

### **Make Traffic Speeds Safe and Improve Flow**

- Pilot reconfiguring Washington Street as a boulevard
- Promote slow streets in adjacent neighborhoods
- Test before the City invests

### **Actively Manage Driving and Parking**

- Actively manage village parking
- Develop and implement a public parking garage strategy
- Shape where and how much parking is in private developments
- Require transportation demand management by developers
- Track and prepare for driverless technology

## **C. Housing Diversity**

### **Attract All Ages, All People**

- Ensure availability of accessible units
- Create diverse buildings and unit sizes
- Allow communal living models

### **Seek Affordable Housing Opportunities**

- Invest directly in affordable housing
- Develop City-led housing for people of all means

### **Link Housing and Transportation**

- Focus housing where residents have transportation options
- Pair housing near transit with new commercial and retail space

## D. Global Climate and Local Environment

### Provide Options for Low-Carbon Living

- Allow for diverse and smaller unit residences
- Build in features to make low-carbon living easy
- Create incentives and mandates for energy-efficient construction

### Improve Climate Resilience

- Improve Cheesecake Brook to reduce downstream flooding
- Reduce heat island effect through building and site design standards

### Expand Access to Open Green Spaces and Recreation

- Create a network of pocket parks, tot lots, and community plazas
- Activate existing and the new public spaces
- Create tree canopy and add layers of vegetation

### Mitigate the Mass Pike's Effects

- Install plants at the 'Pike edge to improve noise, air quality, and aesthetics
- Install sound barriers that have multiple positive outcomes
- Investigate opportunities for larger parks over sections of the Mass Pike

## **E. Excellence in Placemaking and Design**

### **Area-wide Planning**

- Ensure Newtonville and West Newton remain distinct and vital
- Protect iconic buildings
- Create gentle transitions to adjacent neighborhoods
- Foster moments of arrival
- Develop standards and guidelines for human-scale design

### **Site Planning**

- Create variety in building size and shape
- Limit visible parking
- Broaden the toolkit to incentivize historic preservation
- Break down the scale of larger projects with new streets, paths, and open spaces

### **Building Design**

- Allow form to follow function
- Encourage traditional New England roof diversity
- Promote efficient, human-scaled, and durable construction