

Project Overview

History of 600 High Street

Dedham Square is a traditional New England town center that developed around a train station, which once offered service to Boston and Providence. Among the buildings in Dedham Square was Memorial Hall, built-in 1868, located at 600 High Street. The land on which Memorial Hall stood was donated to the Town by residents who understood the benefit of using that land to support the community for civic needs. Memorial Hall was dedicated as a lasting monument to the bravery of the forty-seven “sons of Dedham” who perished in the Rebellion, or Civil War as it is known today. It was made of Dedham granite, quarried just down the road in what is now Westwood. The monumental structure included town offices, a large community auditorium, shops on the first floor, and memorial marble tablets now displayed in the Ames Building.

In 1962, Memorial Hall was demolished to make way for the next phase of civic use at 600 High Street: to house the Town’s Police Station. The building is a two-story, colonial design with a shingled, pitched roof. The building appears to be in decent condition from the exterior, however, shortcomings of the station have been cataloged for decades, beginning with a report commissioned by the Select Board in 1987. Additional studies cataloged a range of issues: security problems, operational challenges, and environmental contamination.

Ten years ago, with the assistance of a \$1.3 million state grant, the Town invested more than \$6 million to revitalize the downtown, improve public safety, and encourage real estate investment. Those improvements spurred the creation of several new buildings with residential apartments over ground-floor storefronts, raised surrounding commercial property values, and attracted an influx of businesses. Dedham Square is perceived as a vibrant asset that attracts families to settle in the Town.

In 2019, Town Meeting voted to fund a combined Public Safety Building at 26 Bryant Street, freeing up the property for the next phase of civic use. The Police Department is scheduled to move to its new location in October 2022, leaving a 14,700 sq. ft. site open for redevelopment.

Dedham Square Planning Committee

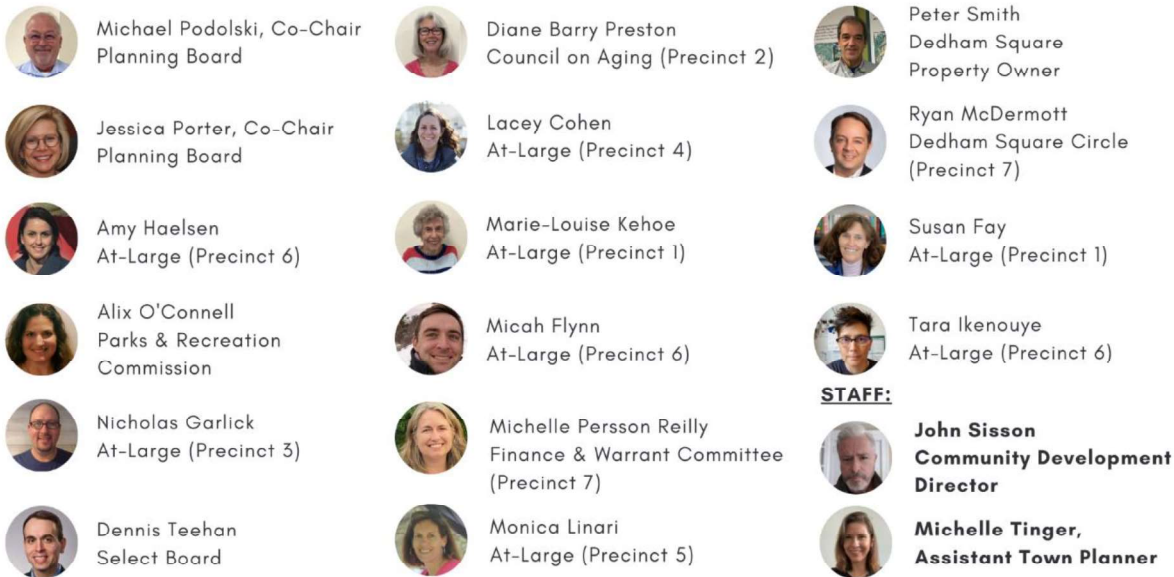
In 2017 Town Meeting allocated \$50,000 to create an economic strategic plan and design guidelines for the Town’s largest central business district, Dedham Square. The Planning Board created the Dedham Square Planning Committee (DSPC) to oversee the studies, and the first phase was completed in 2018 with the publication of the [Dedham Square Design Guidelines](#), with technical assistance provided by Gamble & Associates at a cost of \$30,000 of that original allocation.

When the Dedham Square Planning Committee turned to the work of creating an Economic Strategic Plan, Town Meeting had just approved the construction of a combined Public Safety Building on Bryant Street. Recognizing that the departure of the Police Department from its current home at 600 High Street



could substantially alter the business district, the Select Board asked the DSPC to expand its scope and study the potential reuse of the Police Station parcel as well as the Keystone Parking Lot at High Street & Eastern Avenue.

The Select Board and Planning Board agreed that any decision about the future of 600 High Street would affect the entire Town and that Committee makeup should include representation from across Dedham. In 2019, the Planning Board dissolved the original Committee and reconfigured it, accordingly, posting notices widely to encourage broad representation. Ultimately the Planning Board appointed 20+ members representing every precinct in Town as well as representatives of the Planning Board, Select Board, Finance & Warrant Committee, Council on Aging, and Parks & Recreation Commission. A few Committee members have since moved out of Dedham or resigned due to other commitments. The Planning Board has monitored membership to ensure that every precinct continues to have a representative. The Committee was supported by planning and economic development staff, with significant contributions by the Town Engineer.



The Committee performed an in-depth analysis of the 600 High Street and the Keystone lot parcels to deliver recommendations to the Select Board, Planning Board, and Town Meeting as to potential future uses. The focus of this report is the parcel located at 600 High Street. In early 2021, the DSPC decided to prioritize consideration of that parcel given the short timetable before the building would be vacant in 2022. The DSPC has also done extensive analysis of potential uses for the Keystone Lot, most including some combination of public parking and private development. The Committee will continue that analysis in 2022.

The study was budgeted at \$50,000 and was funded by the remaining \$20,000 of the 2017 appropriation from Town Meeting and additional funds from the Economic Development budget. The Town engaged a consulting team consisting of Gamble Associates, an urban design and planning firm, and Abramson & Associates, which provided financial analysis and strategic planning services. Working with the Committee and gathering input from the community, Gamble Associates evaluated potential redevelopment scenarios for each site, and Abramson & Associates performed a financial analysis of each scenario.

In March of 2021, after extensive research, financial analysis, and a community meeting with 170+ people in attendance, the DSPC voted to pursue converting the parcel into a Dedham Town Green. Since then, the DSPC has led an extensive process of community engagement to understand how a Town Green could be designed to best meet the needs of the community. The goals of this conceptual design phase were to figure out what features were important to Dedham residents, merchants, and stakeholders; conduct a site analysis to understand what could be built; create a conceptual design; develop a detailed cost estimate for the project with visuals; and estimate what the desired features would cost.

Over the course of several meetings with the public and the Committee, urban designer Don Giard developed a strong understanding of community members' visions for a dynamic public green space. Through in-person and online interactive workshops, the public could "vote" on park elements such as seating styles, water features, and lawn size, as well as weigh in on how they imagined themselves using the space.

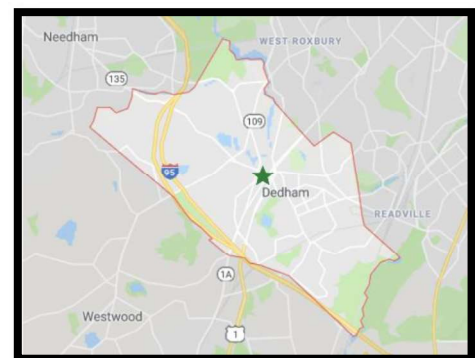
Several common goals emerged across audiences from different neighborhoods and age groups. The overwhelming theme was flexibility: the community desires a space that is welcoming for all ages, designed with the flexibility to accommodate many different uses and is flexible enough to be used year-round, despite New England weather patterns. Mr. Giard developed a design concept for this nearly half-acre parcel that embraces those priorities, improves public safety, and adds significant green space and tree coverage to an area dominated by asphalt and concrete. Detailed explanations of the park design and features can be found in the [Conceptual Design Phase](#) section. More details about the community input can be found in the [Community Engagement](#) section and in [Appendix A: Findings: Conceptual Design](#).

Site Conditions

Zoning & Economic Conditions

600 High Street is located in the heart of Dedham's Central Business Zoning District at the intersection of Washington Street and High Street. In addition to offering the greatest concentration of local businesses, Dedham Square is located at the geographic center of the Town.

This site is within a short walk of many civic assets: Town Hall, the Senior Center, the public library's main branch, the Dedham Historical Society & Museum, the historic Norfolk County Superior Court building, the Registry of Deeds, the County Commissioner's Office, and the U.S. Post Office. Additional attractions include the Dedham Community House, the Community Theatre, and four churches. In terms of economic activity, Dedham's downtown is home to more than 150 businesses, including the headquarters of Norfolk & Dedham



Group, professional and medical offices, retail stores, personal service establishments, and some 22 restaurants and cafes. These establishments employ more than 1,000 workers, from morning until night, on weekdays, and through the weekend. The site is also situated at the edge of Franklin Square, a walkable neighborhood with dozens of single-family residences and apartments in historic structures. In addition, seven nearby mixed-use buildings provide 178 apartments for residents who spend money and pay residential property taxes. All of these residential dwellings and civic, cultural, commercial, and religious establishments are within a 5-minute walk of the site and draw thousands of people to the town center each week for business, shopping, banking, dining, recreation, movies, professional services, and business at Town and County buildings.

This dense confluence of residential, civic, commercial, and religious uses creates a vibrant center of activity and collaboration between different establishments. The spending of residents, employees, and visitors supports private enterprises, thereby helping to pay commercial property taxes and generate meals-tax funds that are earmarked for the Town capital building projects like new schools. The local restaurant scene and other healthy business operations provide employment opportunities and attract new visitors to the town center.

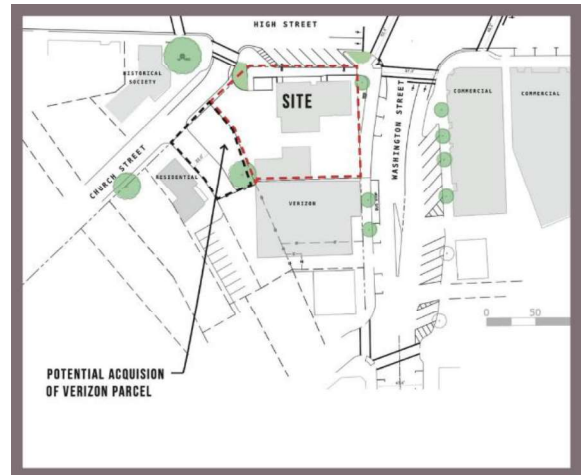


Size & Scale

The Dedham Town Green would be made up of the existing Police Station parcel, part of the Verizon property, and additional space created as an indirect benefit of public safety improvements. The total size would be 24,180 square feet, comparable to Needham Common.

The Police Station currently sits on a parcel of 14,700 square feet. It is bound by Church Street to the West, High Street to the North, Washington Street to the East, and a parcel owned by Verizon to the South.

As a part of due diligence for this analysis, the DSPC wanted to understand Verizon's long-term plans for their building on Washington Street at the Southern Edge of the Town Green. While Verizon expects to inhabit the building for the coming decade(s), Town Manager Leon Goodwin has been in negotiations with Verizon about the Town acquiring a portion of the alley at little or no cost. The Town would maintain an easement on part of the property with a driveway to accommodate Verizon vehicles as well as access for immediate residential and commercial neighbors. This acquisition would add 4,350 square feet to the total area for a Town Green. Verizon has also agreed that the Town can use the exterior of the building for a mural, which was a frequent request at community meetings.



Site analysis revealed a significant need and opportunity for public safety improvements around the site. This would help address a common complaint heard at public meetings about the risks to pedestrians at the intersection and the collisions that have occurred there. By extending the curbs at corners, decreasing the widths of vehicle lanes and crosswalks, and adding a tabled speed bump at the Church Street intersection, the intersection could be safer for foot traffic without reducing the capacity of the intersection. No vehicle lanes would be eliminated. These public safety improvements would add 5,260 square feet to the area available for a Town Green.

With the public safety improvements being proposed and the addition of land currently owned by Verizon, the total square footage available for the town Green would be 24,180 square feet, making the site slightly larger than half an acre.

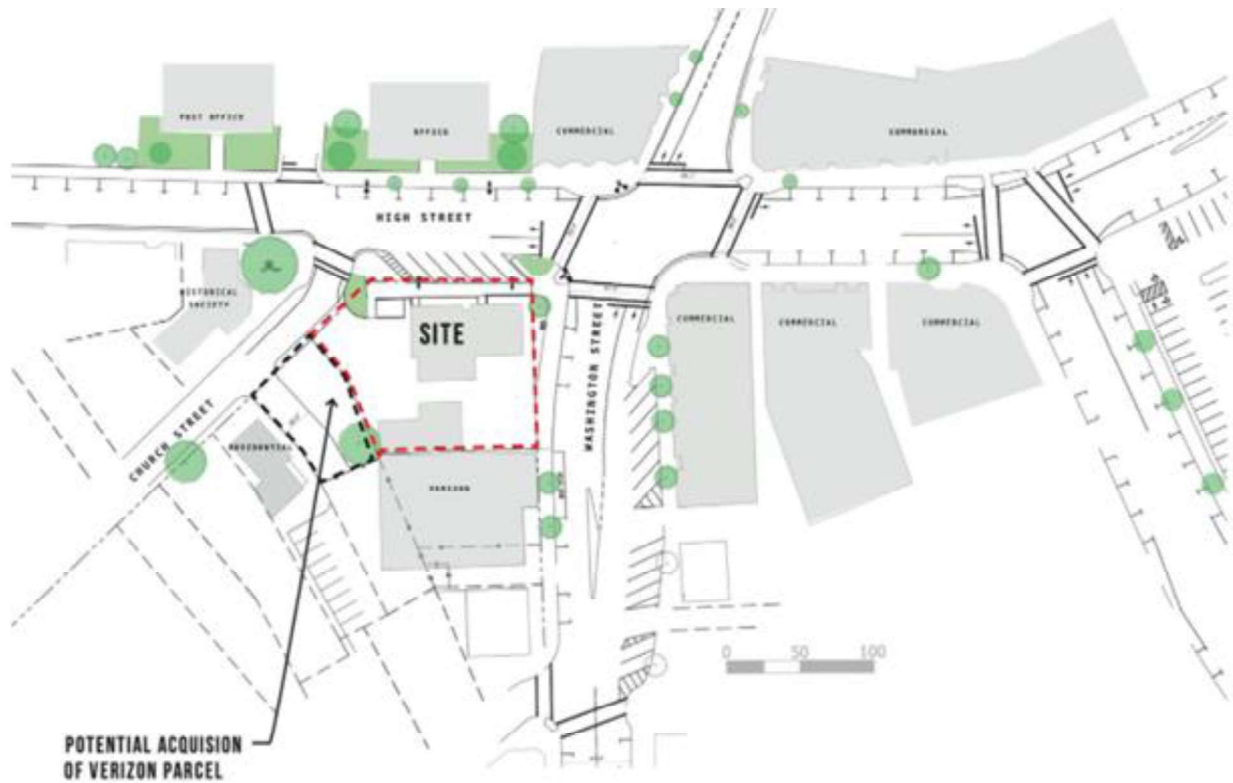
The size of the proposed Dedham Town Green is comparable to parks in other towns and within Dedham. The figure below shows examples from Boston's Post Office Square, Dedham's First Church Green and Oakdale Square, Needham Common, and Roslindale Square with the size of the proposed Town Green overlaid in red.



Physical & Environmental Conditions

Dedham’s center is highly developed, with very little green space or shade trees. Most of the area is covered in impermeable surface, including asphalt, concrete, and buildings. These surfaces do not allow water to pass through them and absorb and hold onto heat. This creates significant environmental challenges, particularly around stormwater management, air quality, and “heat island” impacts. Buildings, roads, and other infrastructure absorb and re-emit the sun’s heat more than natural landscapes do. Locations where pavement, buildings, and parking lots are highly concentrated and greenery is limited become “islands” of higher temperatures relative to outlying areas. These pockets of heat are referred to as “heat islands.” Temperatures in heat islands are generally 1-7 degrees higher than surrounding areas, according to the EPA, which increases air conditioning costs for surrounding businesses and town buildings and stresses the grid on hot days.

Dedham places in the top quartile of Massachusetts communities for average temperatures over the past 30 years, as seen in the [UMass I-CARES Urban Heat Island Dataviewer](#). Replacing asphalt and buildings with trees and plants is key to reducing heat island effects. Given Dedham’s heat island status in general and the amount of asphalt surrounding 600 High Street in particular, creating a Dedham Town Green in this space would be not only a civic and economic project, but it would also bring significant, positive public health and environmental impacts. The project would also qualify for additional grant funds given state and federal climate and sustainability goals.



Existing Conditions: The image above depicts the limited amount of plantings and trees in the blocks surrounding 600 High Street.



Impermeable surfaces in Dedham Square (omits some vegetation)

Traffic Conditions

Traffic congestion in Dedham Square was the most consistent concern raised at community meetings and focus groups. This is not surprising: given the way Providence Highway bisects the Town, Dedham Square is a main cut-through and High Street is used more often to get THROUGH the downtown area than TO the area. The congestion, particularly at rush hours, combined with wide crosswalks, creates a stressful and dangerous experience for pedestrians.

Congestion caused by Dedham Square being an important crossroads, cut through traffic from other towns, businesses in Dedham Square attracting customers, mixed use buildings attracting more residents to Town, and a vibrant night life all contribute to traffic issues in Dedham Square. Any use at the Town Green site will add one more challenge to the already complex traffic situation in the Square.

The most important traffic issue will be to consider and evaluate solutions that enhance the economic vitality of current and future uses in Dedham Square, that enhance Dedham Square's attractiveness as a safe and thriving pedestrian area while providing for the efficient movement of motor vehicles to and through the Square. Given that traffic congestion issues are linked to so many other factors in the Square, the committee thought it best to add the Town Green to the uses in the Square that need attention.



At the same time, the Dedham Town Green project does offer an opportunity to help increase public safety by adding more protections for pedestrians. It also presents opportunities to make traffic flow more efficient without affecting the level of service. The Town could use the project to spur other projects including wayfinding, adding a dynamic traffic light optimization system, and engaging in a traffic study of the area to understand how to redirect cut through traffic from other towns.