

Findings

Based on the work described in the Analysis and Investigation section, the DSPC came to the following conclusions.

Highest and Best Use for 600 High Street: Town Green

600 High Street: Analysis of Options

	Sell Parcel for Private Development	Keep Parcel for Surface Parking	Keep Parcel & Buildings	Keep Parcel, Build Town Square
ECONOMIC BENEFITS	LOW	LOW/MEDIUM	LOW	HIGH
COMMUNITY BENEFITS	LOW	LOW	LOW/MEDIUM	HIGH
ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS	LOW	LOW	LOW	HIGH

In analyzing potential use/reuse options for 600 High Street the DSPC considered several factors:

- Financial Benefit to the Town;
- Economic Impact on Small Businesses;
- Community Benefit;
- Environmental & Open Space Impact;
- Balancing Traffic Circulation, Congestion, and Public Safety; and
- Parking Management & Supply.

Based on this analysis, the DSPC ultimately made a unanimous recommendation that the Town pursue developing the site into a Dedham Town Green. A summary of the reasoning and analysis is below.

Recommendation: Keep Parcel, Create a Dedham Town Green. The suggestion to create a park in Dedham’s downtown area was made early and often by members of the community, but it wasn’t until a complete financial analysis was done that the DSPC determined this option would have the most benefits for the town. Numerous studies have shown the social, environmental, economic, and health benefits parks bring to a town and its people. Downtown parks and open spaces improve people’s physical and psychological health, strengthen our communities, and make Towns more attractive places to live and work.

Economic Benefits. Having a vibrant public space alongside shops, restaurants, and businesses contributes to a local economy in many ways. One of the themes repeated frequently during public meetings was the appreciation for the outdoor dining program during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was linked to support for a Town Green – residents expressed that outdoor dining had increased the frequency with which they visited local restaurants and predicted that this would grow even more if they also had the opportunity to get take-out and eat at the Town Green.

Indirect Economic Benefits: Downtown parks support small businesses

- Downtown parks increase the amount of time spent by existing visitors to the area, making them more likely to linger and visit multiple businesses.
- Parks attract new visitors to a shopping district.
- Commercial areas with parks are more attractive for businesses, and landlords report fewer retail vacancies.
- Thriving local businesses translates to more support for local youth sports leagues, community groups, and non-profits, which see the bulk of support from local businesses.
- Events such as markets, concerts, and other gatherings held at the Green would attract additional visitors, and also provide opportunities for local businesses in other neighborhoods to participate.

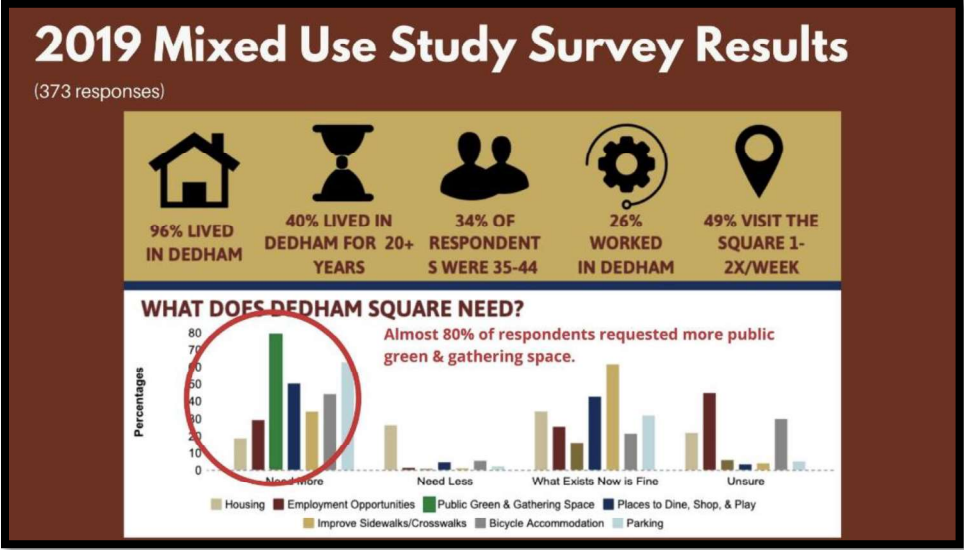
Direct Financial Benefits: When local businesses do well, Town revenue increases

- Parks in commercial areas raise nearby commercial property values, resulting in increased commercial property tax income for the Town.
- Parks help drive traffic to surrounding businesses. Any increase in restaurant traffic goes directly to the Robin Reyes fund for Capital Improvements. In 2019, pre-pandemic, meals taxes contributed over \$1 million to the Robin Reyes Fund. While that contribution drew from restaurants across town, there are 22 restaurants and cafes in Dedham Square providing a significant financial contribution to the Town.
- The Wall Street Journal estimated in 2018 that 68 % of every dollar spent in a local business stays in that local community.

Community Benefits. *Parks provide welcoming places for passive recreation alone or while spending time with family and friends.*

- A beautiful Town Green would create a central gathering place for people of all ages, from all neighborhoods in Dedham.
- Parks serve to bring people together, creating new connections and strengthening community cohesion. A 2017 study showed well designed and maintained parks even increase civic trust.
- A central Town Green could provide active civic programming, including concerts, markets, and other events. Surrounding communities with downtown public spaces found even more use during the Covid-19 pandemic when people were looking for ways to connect socially outdoors.
- Downtown parks increase walkability and offer opportunities for passive recreation, both of which improve public health and quality of life.
- Construction offers a potential for collaboration with Blue Hills Regional Technical School. The DSPC has been in touch with an Instructor of Construction Technology about the potential for students to help build wooden structures, such as a pergola, on site. Other collaborations are likely also possible.
- Given the history and location of the site, the Town Green would be well suited for historical displays to help increase awareness and pride in Dedham's History.
- Dedham's Town Green could provide amenities such as Wi-Fi, charging stations and drinking fountains to add convenience for families and other visitors.
- A Town Green could provide space for outdoor programs held by the Dedham Public Library and Dedham Historical Society and Museum.

- Of all the possible development scenarios, a Town Green would provide the best impact on traffic circulation at the intersection of High and Washington streets. Given the existing congestion, any development that includes cars entering and exiting that site would directly impact traffic congestion. Traffic observations as part of the DSPC site analysis revealed that the existing angled parking adds delays and in/out police traffic adds to the volume of cars traveling through the intersection, particularly during shift changes.
- Survey results from recent planning studies such as the 2020 Mixed Use Study and the 2017 Parks and Recreation and Open Space Master Plan have pointed to the community desire for an increase in green space overall and in the Dedham Square area. Almost 80% of the 373 respondents in the 2020 Mixed-Use study requested more public green and gathering space in Dedham Square. A 2021 survey by the Cultural Council found 63% of respondents cited parks and recreation as important for the preservation and improvement of arts and culture in Dedham. 51% of respondents to that survey requested expanded options for performance spaces.



Environmental Benefits. *A Town Green would add much needed green space and trees to a highly paved area and reduce the impervious surface of this half-acre site by 74%.*

- Downtown parks help absorb stormwater, reducing stress on sewers and wastewater systems.
- The conceptual design includes 22 trees, native plantings, and a rain garden. The stormwater at the Town Green will be captured and treated on-site.
- Community members have suggested creating displays explaining the importance of native plantings and protecting pollinators to create an educational component at the park.
- By replacing the current impervious surface (buildings, driveways, parking spaces) with significant lawn, plantings, and trees, a Town Green will improve air quality, sequester carbon, lower temperatures, add shade, and help combat the heat island effect.
- Solar panels on top of the “community porch” would likely generate enough electricity to power park lights a substantial amount of the time.
- The project includes several elements to provide shade, including a pergola, community porch, shade trees and umbrellas. Misting stations could be added at the structures or drinking fountains to help provide cooling on hot days.

- Bike parking would be available on site with the potential for e-bike charging, with power generated by the solar panels on site.
- Given all these environmental benefits, the Town Green project will qualify for an additional \$250,000 of funding through the Federal Land and Water Conservation Grant program.

Reuse Options That Were Researched and Are Not Being Recommended:

Selling Parcel for Private Development

Abramson & Associates' analysis showed the most likely development scenario would be a mixed-use project with three stories of residential units over first-floor retail. The site could accommodate a 24,000 square foot building with 14-18 units and 20 parking spaces for tenants behind the building.

- The building is in significant disrepair and contains asbestos. In addition, the existing building layout and characteristics, such as a raised first floor, make it undesirable for use as retail space, office, or residential. The building would almost certainly be demolished by any private developer.
- Abramson & Associates' financial analysis indicated a supportable land price in the low \$600,000s, or approximately \$35,000/per expected residential unit. This takes into account requirements of inclusionary zoning and an expectation that demolition and remediation of the site would likely add \$175,000 to \$250,000 to standard demolition costs.
- Abramson's report allowed that the sales price could be higher if a developer made optimistic assumptions about potential rental income and or building costs, in which case the sales price might be around \$750,000.
- Town Manager Leon Goodwin arranged for a full real estate appraisal of the property in the Spring of 2021, which was performed by Allan Foster of The Foster Company Real Estate Appraising. That appraisal valued 600 High Street at \$770,000. However, Foster reported that the appraisal did not take environmental remediation costs into account. After the appraisal was completed, the building was confirmed to have asbestos and other contamination, which would increase the costs of redevelopment and almost certainly impact the property value.
- Based on this analysis the DSPC estimates selling the property could raise between \$650,000 - \$750,000 for the Town.
- Real estate taxes for a mixed-use project with rental units as described would bring an estimated \$60,000 to \$70,000 to the Town annually.
- At DSPC monthly committee meetings and public events, residents expressed concern about the proliferation of mixed-use buildings in Dedham's town center. Concerns were raised about creating a "canyon effect," increasing traffic and parking constraints, and eroding the historic nature of Dedham's town center.

After weighing the relatively small financial benefits against the intangible costs of losing control of key downtown property, particularly in light of the lessons from the Ames Schoolhouse sale and eventual repurchase and renovation, the DSPC decided not to endorse selling the property.

Surface Parking Lot. The Dedham Square Planning Committee's study time has coincided with the construction of the Public Safety Building on Bryant Street. This is important context for this report because the construction project has created a temporary parking shortage in Dedham's Town Center.

Several Town Hall spaces are being used for staging and a section of the Keystone Lot has been cordoned off for Town employees. In addition, a number of public spaces throughout the area are being used by builders and contractors. This temporary shortage has influenced the conversation around parking relative to a Town Green and as a result, this report includes more information on parking than the Committee would have originally anticipated.

The option of demolishing the building to create a town-owned, surface parking lot was dismissed fairly early in the committee's work. This was unexpected; several DSPC members had begun the process thinking that might be the best development option. However, it quickly became apparent that the negative impacts of a surface parking lot would outweigh any positive impacts, given the location of the parcel and current parking capacity. Through research and consultation with planning experts, the following limitations became clear:

A Parking Lot Would Exacerbate Existing Traffic & Safety Concerns:

- A surface parking lot at the main intersection of the district would aggravate existing traffic congestion and safety issues.
 - The proximity of the parcel to the High St/Washington St intersection would create specific challenges.
 - A parking lot at that location would add to the volume of vehicles at that intersection.
 - Traffic entering and exiting a parking lot so close to the intersection would negatively impact the level of service of the intersection itself.
 - Traffic counts of existing conditions demonstrated that even the small number of spaces currently being used for police vehicles contribute to traffic congestion at the High St. /Washington St. Intersection.
 - Location of the parcel at a location with high pedestrian use would add an additional risk for pedestrian safety and erode, rather than improve, walkability.

Parking Capacity and Management is Already Being Addressed:

- Parking capacity in the Dedham Square business district has been studied as recently as 2018, finding that there is existing capacity to meet parking needs.
- The Select Board has taken several active steps to improve Parking Management:
 - Installing “smart” meters
 - Establishing clear time limits for on-street parking
 - Regulating overnight parking in the Keystone Lot
 - Staffing a parking enforcement officer
- The new Public Safety Building will include underground parking for police officers' personal vehicles, which will free up about 7 on-street spaces in Dedham Square currently being used by Police officers on a daily basis.
- The new Public Safety Building will add an additional 29 spaces to the public parking inventory once it is completed, and an additional 10 spaces marked specifically for visitors to the Police and Fire Departments. Between the PSB public spaces and the public spaces at Town Hall, once construction is completed there should be an average of 65 public spaces on

the Town campus for daytime public parking, including for those attending Senior Center programs. In the evenings there are likely to be around 100 public spaces available for those attending meetings or visiting the downtown area. These numbers do not include the additional 5 on-street parking spaces which have just been created on Washington Street in front of Town Hall.

- The Town is in discussions with Norfolk County to formalize parking arrangements that would allow use of the County lot for Town employees, contractors, merchants and/or the public.

Economic Impact of a Parking Lot at 600 High Street:

The relationship between parking capacity and economic impact is often counterintuitive. While many people think you cannot have too much parking, research has shown the issue is far more complex, and that parking management and perception are as critical as capacity.

- Having an excess of parking can hurt the success of businesses as much as or more than having insufficient parking.
 - People are less likely to visit multiple businesses.
 - Economic districts seem less vibrant and walkable if there are many empty parking spots.
- The ideal location for parking areas is on the perimeter of a shopping district, not in the center. Parking on the perimeter causes less traffic congestion and circling, and also means shoppers are more likely to walk by multiple businesses creating the opportunity for “impulse purchases.”

Renovating and/or Repurposing the Building(s).

Gamble and Associates toured and evaluated the building and garage at 600 High Street from an architectural and engineering perspective and Abramson & Associates performed real estate and market analysis on the existing buildings. Both determined there were significant challenges to the existing buildings, and that renovation would be costly. Several committee members also toured the buildings and have followed years of the study showing the downsides of the buildings.

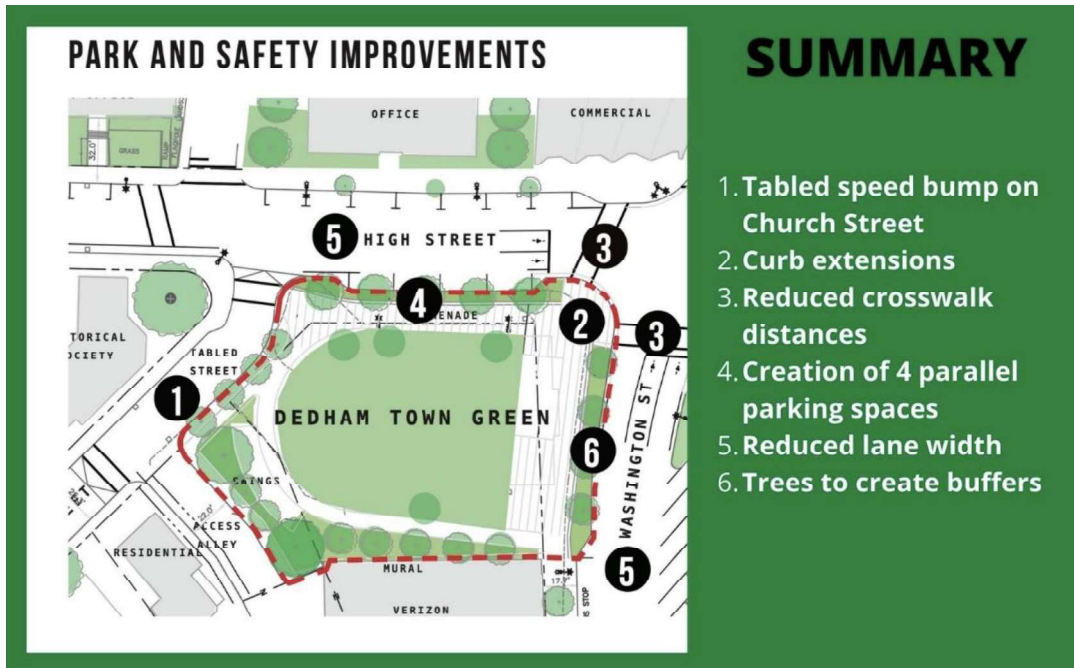
- The building is in significant disrepair and contains asbestos. In addition, the existing building layout and characteristics, such as a raised first floor, make it undesirable for use as retail space, office, or residential. The building would almost certainly be demolished by any private developer.
- Gamble and Abramson explored multiple scenarios, pictured below:
 - keeping main building and garage and adding a pocket park
 - keeping only the main building and adding a pocket park
 - keeping only the garage and adding park space



- Economic analysis showed the challenges of these scenarios outweighed any potential benefits. Challenges included:
 - The buildings are old, outdated, and in significant disrepair.
 - The existing footprint would not meet current demands and standards for office, retail or residential needs.
 - Renovations to make the building functional for retail or office would trigger environmental remediation.
 - Renovating building to extent necessary would be cost prohibitive. Given the Town’s recent experience renovating Town Hall, this was of big concern to the DSPC members.
 - If the main building were to be renovated – the likely scenario would be a restaurant, possibly with offices on 2nd floor.

Ultimately, the DSPC found keeping the buildings would be more of a liability than an asset for the town. Keeping or renovating the buildings for Civic use would be cost-prohibitive, given known environmental contamination as well as the additional tax on staff time to manage leases, vacancies, etc. Additionally, given Dedham’s recent investment in renovating the Ames Schoolhouse into a new Town Hall, there is not an identified need for office space for Town Departments.

Public Safety Improvements



In preparing the concept design, Mr. Giard looked for ways to increase the safety of the existing intersection at Washington and High Streets, working with the Town Engineer to ensure improvements would not reduce the current Level of Service (LOS) of the intersection. The above plan highlights specific streetscape changes proposed, which would improve pedestrian safety and increase the amount of usable park space by about 15%.

1) “Tabling” a portion of Church Street. This feature would elevate a ~15-foot length of Church Street bringing it to curb level, creating an extended speed bump near the intersection with High Street. This would achieve several goals.

- Signals drivers that they are entering a public area with pedestrians to raise awareness near the park and intersection
- Discourages drivers from using Church Street as a cut-through and contributing to congestion at the High & Washington Street intersection. Traffic counts of the area at rush hours showed a steady flow of cut-through traffic turning onto Church from Court Street and adding volume to the main intersection.
- Provides the opportunity to extend the Town Green area for occasional events. All or a portion of Church Street could be shut down to through traffic and the tabled portion of the street could be used for programming.

2 & 3) Curb extensions would help shorten crosswalks, a safety feature that is helpful for children and older residents alike.

4) The concept plan eliminates the angled police station parking and creates four new parallel parking spaces at the side. Parallel spaces provide less traffic confusion than angled spaces, particularly so near

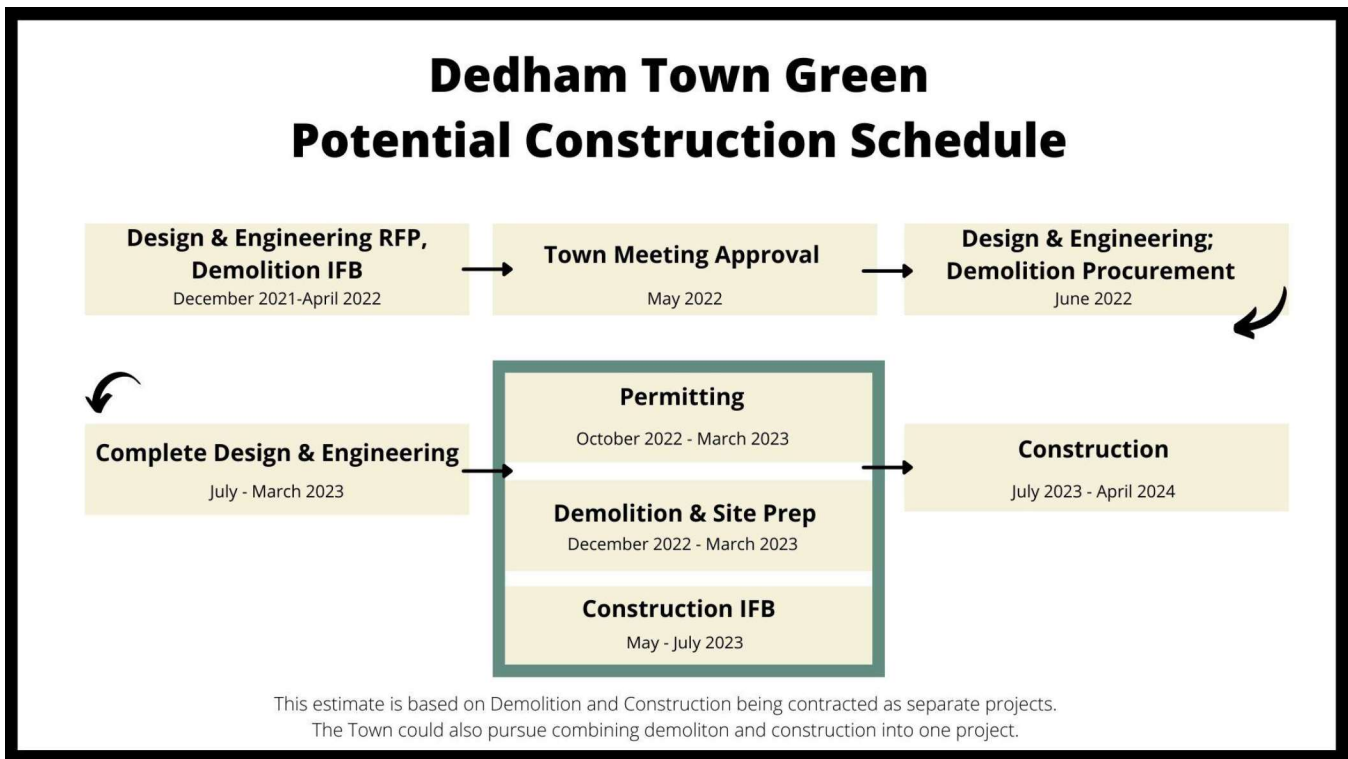
an intersection. They are also safer for cyclists, who are more likely to be hit by cars backing out of angled spaces.

5) By reducing the width of travel lanes on High and Washington Streets from 12 feet (standard for highways) to 11 feet Dedham can bring this area of High Street closer to the standards for downtown areas. During rush hours and congestion, the narrower lanes would not impact traffic speeds nor decrease the level of service for vehicles. Simply put: an 11 foot lane won't impact the time it takes a vehicle to get across town during rush hour. However, it will increase safety for people who need to cross the streets during those times. In addition, narrower lanes could help slow traffic when traffic is light, a condition that encourages speeding through the intersection, providing the greatest risk for collision with pedestrians and other vehicles. Reducing the lane widths will shorten crosswalk distances making it safer for pedestrians, particularly those who are older, using wheelchairs or strollers, or otherwise need more time for crossing.

6) The project would add a significant number of trees to help create a buffer between vehicles and people.

One of the major goals of the Town Green design was to increase public safety without compromising traffic capacity and emergency vehicle access. The proposed road layout changes and turning movements have been studied and reviewed by the Town Engineer, Fire Chief and Police Chief. These studies confirmed that emergency vehicles, including fire trucks, will have adequate space to perform turning movements with the proposed lane width reductions and curb extensions. Additionally, there are endless studies that prove that narrow lanes can slow down cars without reducing road capacity, a few of which are linked in the [References](#) section.

Schedule:



Potential design, engineering, construction timeline

The Town Green conceptual design has been shared at the Town Planner’s monthly Design Review Team (DRT) at each meeting to get input from the Conservation Department, Building Department, Fire Department, Police Department, Engineering Department, Department of Public Works, Planning & Zoning Department, and Assessors Department. These reviews have been incredibly helpful for identifying permitting requirements, setting timelines, reviewing the conceptual design, and checking traffic and other public safety assumptions.

Mass Historical Commission

Any new construction projects or renovations to existing buildings that require funding, licenses, or permits from any state or federal government agencies must be reviewed by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) for impacts to historic and archaeological properties. Given the possible inclusion of federal funds from the Land and Water Conservation program the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 Process. If the Town applies for the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant, there would be a historical review process with the Mass Historical Commission. The Economic Development Director has already begun that process in order to ensure there would not be delays if the Town decides to go forward in developing the Town Green.

Cost Estimates & Funding Sources

Cost Summary	
Demolition	\$706,050
Design & Engineering	\$288,500
Construction	\$2,404,169
Contingency (15%)	\$403,900
Indirect Costs (insurance, GC, etc.)	\$486,788
Estimated Total Cost	\$4,289,408

Identified Funding Sources	
State and Federal Funding	\$1,700,000
Local Grants and Corporate Donations	\$100,000
Private Donations	\$200,000
Total External Funding	\$2,000,000

Estimated Net Investment by Town	\$2,289,408
Estimated Yearly Tax cost to Average Dedham Property Owner	\$9.17

The DSPC recommends seeking funds from the federal Land and Water Conservation Program, which is administered by the Commonwealth. Given the large number of environmental benefits this project offers and the fact that Dedham registers as a heat island community, the DSPC expects the project would qualify for funding at the maximum amount of \$1 million. This would be a reimbursement grant, approved prior to the Spring 2022 Town Meeting and reimbursed after construction. The funding amounts are calculated as a 50% reimbursement, meaning Dedham would qualify for \$1,000,000 in grant monies if Town Meeting approved a town contribution of at least \$2,000,000.

Additional sources of public funding could include Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, state contributions, and other grants. The project's combination of economic and environmental impacts makes it an attractive project for State and Federal funding.

The DSPC has begun research on private fundraising through local businesses, foundations, and individuals. Given the successful fundraising effort to install lights at the Dedham High School track and football field, the DSPC is confident at least \$200,000 could be raised to help with construction costs from private donations. Early research suggests an additional \$100,000 could be possible in corporate donations.

A detailed breakdown of construction costs can be found in [Appendix C](#).

Maintenance Costs

The Department of Public Works (DPW) currently provides daily trash pickup, maintains plantings, and provides snow removal in the Dedham Square business district. DPW anticipates being able to incorporate regular maintenance of a Town Green into their existing operational resources and budget. This is similar to how Needham maintains their Town Common – it does not require a separate budget line.

Possible Next Steps

The DSPC has spent almost two years studying project alternatives, working with design and economic consultants, and holding numerous civic engagement efforts. The DSPC is pleased to make the recommendation to the Select Board that they create a Dedham Town Green at 600 High Street. The goal of this report is to provide the Select Board, and ultimately Town Meeting members and the full Dedham community, with a comprehensive plan and vision for creating a Town Green. The DSPC takes pride in this work and believes it has accomplished what the Select Board asked it to do. As a part of that research, the DSPC has also identified potential next steps the Select Board could take in pursuing this goal.

The DSPC respects that any decisions about redeveloping 600 High Street will be made and led by the Select Board. Should the Select Board agree that a Dedham Town Green would be the best way for the Town to use this parcel, the DSPC offers some potential next steps for their consideration. These are proposed to ensure the timing of a redevelopment project would enable Dedham to qualify for and meet the deadlines of State grants. The timeline is also proposed to avoid having this civic asset in the town center sit vacantly.

- Direct a project manager to create a schedule for the project, including a permitting plan, and make sure all team members adhere to it.
- Prepare a Warrant Article for the Spring 2022 Town Meeting. This would include funding the project and might also include the purchase of the Verizon property and any other legal considerations to allow the Select Board to pursue building a Town Green.
- Develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Design & Engineering to develop construction plans. An RFP could be prepared and distributed prior to Town Meeting to expedite the Town's ability to select a design and engineering team if Town Meeting votes in favor of the project.
- Develop Designer selection criteria and processes.
 - It may be in the interest of the Board to form a small working group to assist staff with the selection and engineering process. If the board decides to do this, the DSPC recommends that the group be considered a true working group and include people with professional expertise such as an architect and/or landscape architect.
- Apply for a Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant. Workshop sessions for this grant are being held on Tuesday, November 30, 2021, at 11:00 am and Thursday, December 2, 2021, at 2:00 pm. To assure a response in time for Spring Town Meeting, the Grant application should be submitted by January 15, 2022.
- Invitation for Bid (IFB) for demolition and site preparation.
- Explore partnerships to help with construction such as with the Blue Hills Technical High School.
- Explore private fundraising options, including corporate, foundation, and individual donors.

- Establish a mechanism for private donations

In addition to the recommendations for the Town Green, the DSPC's community engagement and site analysis have revealed several other ideas which the Select Board may be interested in pursuing. The DSPC encourages the Board to consider and plan for future improvements in the Downtown area, including

- Narrowing vehicle lanes on Eastern Avenue and at additional portions of High Street may provide the opportunity to add trees and additional greening and have the potential to create outdoor dining space in some areas while retaining, rather than replacing, parallel parking spots.
- Work with the Commonwealth to get funding for a small planning and design project to examine the use of alleys and parking lots in the block bound by High, Washington, Eastern, and Bryant, to maximize parking, improve circulation, and explore placemaking opportunities.
- Jumpstart the Town's wayfinding project, including signage to make downtown parking easy to find and signage to help divert cut-through traffic to major arteries such as Providence Highway and I95.
- Invest in minor public realm improvements to direct and provide people with a lighted, safe connection between the Registry lot and the High St sidewalk.
- Identify ways to connect people with existing public parking spaces including those located at the upper and lower levels of Gonzalez field.
 - Research opportunities for businesses to offer valet parking using those public spaces.
 - Improve pedestrian connection to lower field parking lot through festive lighting under the Rt 1 overpass.

The Dedham Square Planning Committee has thoroughly enjoyed working on this project and is pleased to document its research in this report. If the Select Board would like assistance with aspects of the project going forward, such as help with private fundraising and/or reporting to Town Meeting, the DSPC members would be happy to support the effort in whatever way the Select Board deems useful.

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