



ULI TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

WAVERLEY SQUARE BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS

MARCH 3, 4, 7, AND 8, 2022



Boston/
New England

URBAN LAND INSTITUTE (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. The mission of ULI is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. Founded in 1936, the Institute has grown to over 45,000 members worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. ULI membership includes developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, and economic development professionals as well as other related disciplines.

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has nearly 1,400 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local and regional leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANELS (TAPs)

The ULI Boston/New England Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes TAPs at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges, who benefit from the pro bono recommendations provided by the TAP members.

A TAP consists of a group of diverse professionals with expertise in the issues posed. The Panel spends one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

A recent independent study by Rivera Consulting surveyed municipalities that received assistance from the TAP programs and reported a positive impact by the TAP process on communities. Eighty-two percent of participating municipalities said their behavior and approach to municipal planning and economic development strategies were affected; 67% said there were increased municipal investments related to the stated goals and recommendations of their TAP report; and 62% said at least one key developable asset addressed in their TAP report had been redeveloped, consistent with ULI Boston/New England recommendations.

Learn more at: <https://boston.uli.org>.



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Executive Summary

The Waverley Square Technical Assistance Panel (TAP), under the direction of the Boston/ New England District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), was conducted on March 3, 4, 7, and 8, 2022. The TAP was held mostly virtually due to safety concerns regarding the lingering effects of the pandemic. Following the March 3rd late afternoon in-person guided tour of the Waverley Square study area, the remainder of the working sessions and the subsequent public presentation took place

over Zoom. The purpose of the TAP was to provide guidance to the Town of Belmont on the redevelopment options for Waverley Square and to address the affordable housing issues for the Town.

On March 3rd, ULI panelists met with town officials, business owners, members of community organizations and residents of Belmont at the Waverley Station parking lot for a tour of the Waverley Square study



The TAP study area . Source TAP briefing materials.

area. Panelists reconvened via Zoom on March 4th to compare notes and devise a work plan. On the afternoon of March 7th, panelists interviewed two sets of stakeholders via Zoom, assessed the information, and began to develop recommendations for the redevelopment possibilities of Waverley Square. The TAP presented their findings virtually to Town officials and the general public on the evening of March 8th with assistance from the Belmont Media Center.

ULI and the TAP Process

Provides an overview of ULI's District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) and includes a list of the panel members and stakeholders who took part in the information gathering sessions. The chapter also highlights key elements of the tour of the study area for the TAP and describes the process undertaken by the panelists and stakeholders to arrive at their recommendations.

Purpose of the TAP and Background

This section gives a brief overview of the issues that the TAP was asked to assess and includes the questions that the Town posed to the panel. It also provides a brief history of the Town, a more detailed overview of the Waverley Square Study area, a list of studies relating to the redevelopment, and key population and demographic information.

Assets and Opportunities

Identifies the strengths of Waverley Square, including its prime location, access to connecting roadways and public transportation, the high traffic count essential to restaurant/retail development, and an engaged community.

Challenges

Examines the obstacles the Town may face in meeting the goal of transforming Waverley Square into a vibrant town center, including a lack of retail/restaurants; conflicting views of residents in terms of redevelopment, inadequate zoning to promote economic development, a commuter rail station that is not ADA accessible, and inadequate branding and wayfinding.

Recommendations

Proposes a number of actions the Town of Belmont can take to realize their goal of creating a town center in Waverley Square, including implementing a road diet to make roads more bike and pedestrian friendly, improving the streetscape and wayfinding, updating zoning to allow for more density, and creating organizational and administrative entities to help the Town realize its redevelopment goals

Funding Sources/Resources

Provides a list of potential funding sources through federal and state agencies.

ULI and the TAP Process

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Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

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stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges, who benefit from the pro bono recommendations provided by the TAP members.

A TAP consists of a diverse group of real estate professionals with demonstrated expertise in the issues being presented by the TAP sponsor. The Panel spends one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a manner consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

Panel Members

ULI Boston/New England convened a volunteer panel of experts whose members represent the range of disciplines necessary to analyze the challenges and opportunities to provide guidance to the Town of Belmont on redevelopment options for Waverley Square, and to address the affordable housing issues for the Town. Practice areas included architects, developers, planners, and real estate attorneys. The following is a list of panelists:

Co-Chairs

Sandi Silk, senior VP, development partner, Jefferson Apartment Group

Vickie Alani, principal, CBT Architects

Panelists

Andrew Colbert, vice president, WinnDevelopment

Patrick Gallagher, real estate attorney, Goulston & Storrs



TAP Panelists touring the study area with Town planning staff. Source: ULI Boston.

Yongjoo Kim, principal, CambridgeSeven
Deborah Myers, principal, Deborah Myers
Landscape Architecture

Caroline Wells, senior project manager,
Weston & Sampson

Panelists have donated their time.

ULI Staff

Tim Moore, manager

TAP Writer

Mike Hoban, principal, Hoban
Communications

Stakeholders

The TAP also benefited from the participation of the diverse group of stakeholders – property owners and developers, Town officials, business owners, representatives from community groups and other non-profits, and Belmont residents.

The following is a list of stakeholders:

Judith Ananian Sarno, resident, Town of Belmont

Sona Antonyan, principal, Russian School of Mathematics

Julie Babson, principal, Daniel Butler Elementary School

William Brownsberger, 2nd Suffolk and Middlesex District senator, Massachusetts State Senate

Rob Caridad, business development consultant, The Chiofaro Company

Michael Chesson, commissioner, Belmont Historic District Commission

David Coleman, chair, Town of Belmont Transportation Advisory Committee

Adam Dash, chair, Town of Belmont Select Board

David DeStefano, chief, Town of Belmont Fire Department

Kevin Dorn, chair, Belmont Vision 21 Implementation Committee

Christine Doyle, vice-chair, Town of Belmont Warrant Committee

Wendy Etkind, member, Town of Belmont Economic Development Committee

Brandon Fitts, acting director, Town of Belmont Recreational Department

Judith Feinlieb, resident, Town of Belmont
 Bruce Flett, president, James W. Flett Company
 Sheila Flewelling, resident, Town of Belmont
 Bonnie Friedman, vice chair, Community Path
 Patrice Garvin, Town of Belmont Administrator
 Kimberly Haley-Jackson, member, Town of Belmont Diversity Task Force
 Jeff Hansell, executive director, Belmont Media Center
 Rachel Heller, co-chair, Town of Belmont Housing Trust
 Lauren Jezienicki, founder & CEO, One Circle Co.
 Betsy Lipson, co-chair, Belmont Housing Trust
 Allison MacMartin, district manager, Belmont Housing Authority
 Jay Marcotte, director, Town of Belmont Department of Public Works
 James MacIsaac, chief, Town of Belmont Police Department
 Lisa Pargoli, resident, Town of Belmont
 Ray Peleckas, owner, Burnin' By Ray
 Steve Pinkerton, chair, Town of Belmont Planning Board
 David Rogers, representative, Massachusetts House of Representatives
 Emma Thurston, member, Town of Belmont Economic Development Committee
 Otto Torres, manager, Belmont Car Wash
 Taylor Yates, member, Belmont Vision 21 Implementation Committee

Study Area Tour

Panelists met at the Waverley Station parking lot with senior planner Robert Hummel and staff planner Gabriel Distler of the Town of Belmont, as well as Town committee members from the Historic District Commission, the Planning Board, the Economic Development Committee, the Belmont Housing Trust, residents, and business owners. After introductions, the tour proceeded up Lexington St. to Thayer Rd. and made their first stop at Sherman Gardens, an 81-unit age and/or disability restricted



apartment complex operated by the Belmont Housing Authority. Sherman Gardens just received funding to preserve and renovate all 81 units that are obsolete due to a lack of accessibility features, undersized units, and unmet capital needs. The tour then stopped at the corner of Lexington and Beech to observe an empty parking lot for St. Luke's Parish, which is owned by the Archdiocese of Boston. The group then made its way up White St. to the Daniel Butler elementary school, a highly rated K-4 elementary school serving over 300 students that also houses an after-school program that is owned and operated independently of the Daniel Butler School. The tour proceeded past the former fire station that had been renovated in 2005 into 6 units of housing, before turning onto Trapelo Rd, where panelists observed one of Waverley Square's primary regional retail attractions, the Belmont Wheelworks bicycle shop, as well as the U.S. Post office and some service-oriented retail. Across the street from Wheelworks is the new mixed-use development (22 studio apartments, 10,000 square feet of retail) which was completed in 2021. Panelists returned to Waverley Station at the conclusion of the tour.

Purpose of the TAP and Background

The Town of Belmont sought the help of the ULI TAP to provide guidance on redevelopment options for Waverley Square and to address the affordable housing issues the Town is facing. The panelists were asked to address the following questions:

Walkability and Bikeability

How do we make this a walkable and bikeable neighborhood that has foot traffic for businesses, motivates people to take the commuter rail or the 73 bus, and inspires people to walk to nearby amenities such as the Beaver Brook Reservation?

Redevelopment

What are the redevelopment opportunities for Waverley Square? Can the Square be redesigned to be a vibrant center? What are best practices for helping local businesses to remain while creating opportunities for new businesses? How can Waverley Square play a role in meeting affordable housing needs? How much housing is needed to support current and future businesses, including restaurants, as is, a desire of many neighborhood residents? How can Waverley Square contribute to Town goals around accessibility to the commuter rail station, housing, and amenities; sustainability; and increasing the Town's commercial tax base? What do we do about parking? Can we use space above the commuter rail tracks?

Zoning Changes

Would this neighborhood be a good candidate for either 40R or could this location support the necessary multifamily requirement under MGL 40A, Section 3?

Town of Belmont History and Background of Study Area

The Town of Belmont is a primarily residential suburban community located just west of Boston. Belmont has a total area of approximately 4.65 square miles, and is bordered by the cities of Waltham (to the west) and Cambridge (east) and the towns of Arlington (north), Lexington (northwest) and Watertown (south).

The colonial history of Belmont dates back to 1630 when it was settled as an agricultural community on the lands of the Pequosette. The Town of Belmont was founded on March 18, 1859, with land taken from the bordering towns of Waltham, West Cambridge, and Watertown. In 1843, rail service was established by an affiliate of the Boston and Maine Railroad, providing three rail stops, Wellington Station (present day Belmont Center), Plympton's Crossing (now known as Waverley Square), and Hill's Crossing Station (on Brighton Rd.). The Fitchburg Rail Line enabled those living in Belmont Hill to commute to North Station in Boston by about 1850, and with the development in 1902 of the electric trolley line to Harvard Square along the Belmont-Trapelo Corridor, opportunity was created for middle- and working-class families to settle in Belmont in single, two, and three-family homes extending out and beyond Waverley Square.

Belmont today is primarily a white-collar town, best known for its affluent Belmont Hill section, although most residents live in the more densely settled neighborhoods. Belmont was one of the last "dry" towns in the

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, allowing for limited restaurant alcohol licenses (beer-and-wine-only) in 1998, and granting “all-alcohol” licenses for stores and restaurants in 2007. There are three major commercial centers in the town: Belmont Center in the center, Cushing Square to the south, and Waverley Square to the west. However, the Town has a very limited commercial base overall, with over 95% of its tax revenue coming from residential taxes. In contrast, the surrounding communities of Lexington, Watertown, and Waltham have significant commercial and industrial development, with commercial taxes making up 20-60% of the municipalities’ tax receipts. It should also be noted that commercial development typically generates higher local receipts, such as meal taxes, building permits, and fees.

Affordable Housing

According to the Belmont Housing Trust, the Town of Belmont currently has 6.5% affordable housing stock, well under the 10% mandate of Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B. There has been little development of affordable housing in Belmont in recent years. In October 2021, the Zoning Board of Appeals approved 12 townhouse units (three affordable) at 91 Beatrice Circle. Prior to that, the most recent 40B permit issued by the ZBA was for Royal Belmont in 2007 for a total of 298 units, 60 of them affordable. The Bradford, a 112-unit apartment complex in Cushing Square built in 2020, added 12 units to the affordable stock, which leaves the Town over 300 units shy of safe harbor status under MGL ch. 40b at present.

Population/Demographics

The population of the Town of Belmont was estimated at 27,295 by the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau, up from 24,729 in 2010, a nearly 10% increase. The population is 76.8% White, 17.1% Asian, 4.2% Hispanic/Latino, and 1.1% Black. The median household income is \$140,500 with a poverty rate of 5.4%. The typical home value of homes in Belmont as of March 2022 is \$1,340,838, and Belmont home values have increased by 12.6% over the past year, according to Zillow. Sixty-two percent of

housing units are occupied and 38 percent are rentals. The average rent for a 1-bedroom unit in March 2022 is \$2,350, a 31% increase compared to the previous year, according to Zumper.

The Study Area

Waverley Square is located at the western gateway to Belmont, at the intersection of Trapelo Rd. and Pleasant St. (Route 60), both of which are significant local/regional connectors serving Waltham and Watertown, as well as the western end of Belmont for those traveling to Cambridge and Boston. At the point of the intersection of Trapelo Rd. and Lexington St., there is a triangular block occupied by the Waverley MBTA Commuter Rail Station (which has one of the lowest daily ridership counts among MBTA Commuter Rail Lines), a small, landscaped area that provides access to the station, and a municipal parking lot that can accommodate approximately 40 vehicles. Access to the MBTA platforms is through stone staircases from the parking lot and park. It is inaccessible for those with mobility issues.

Waverley Square is well-served by public transportation. In addition to the rail station, the neighborhood is serviced by MBTA Bus Lines 73 and 554. The MBTA designates the 73 Bus Line as a “key bus route” with over 500 riders on average during peak morning and afternoon commute times according to a 2019 MBTA study. Despite the transit connections, Waverley Square lacks commuter parking, making this a station where passengers are transferring from different modes of transit or walking to or from surrounding neighborhoods in Belmont, Watertown, and Waltham. The Square is surrounded by residential neighborhoods, including single-, two-, and three-family homes, with a mix of multigenerational households and residents who are newer to Belmont. There are mixed feelings on the part of residents regarding the potential redevelopment of the Square, with some opposed to change while others are interested in having more restaurants and shops as well as safer walkways, particularly around the elementary school.



In terms of commercial development within the study area, Waverley Square is anchored by a large Star Market grocery store that has street access from both Trapelo Rd. and Pleasant St. Belmont Car Wash & Detailing is adjacent to the Star Market on Trapelo Rd. There is a popular bicycle shop, Belmont Wheelworks, which is a regional retail draw, but there is very little in the way of restaurants in Waverley Square, with the exception of Pho and Thai at the corner of Trapelo Rd. and White St., and a Dunkin' coffee shop in a historic building on Church St. There is some service-oriented retail, as well as a Bank of America, a U.S. Post Office and a pair of gas stations on Trapelo Rd. There has been some development recently in the Square, with Desco Associates completing a three-story mixed-use project in 2021 at 495-505 Trapelo Road (adjacent to the Belmont Car Wash), with 22 studio apartments on the top two floors and 10,000 square feet of retail space on the first floors. The Zoning Board recently approved a second development for Desco on White St. that will consist of 18 apartments on the top two floors and 7,000 square feet of retail space on the first floor with an underground parking garage. There have

also been some infrastructure improvements in Waverley Square, with Trapelo Road and Pleasant Street having been recently reconstructed from edge of sidewalk to edge of sidewalk.

Previous Studies

Waverley Square has been the subject of numerous studies since 2003, which are referenced below:

1. Town of Belmont – Economic Development Study - 2003
2. Air Rights Final Report Cecil Group 2004
3. Business Econ Dev Report March 2005
4. Waverley Square Professional Building - 2008
5. Town of Belmont – Waverley Square Planning Study - 2009
6. Town of Belmont – Waverley Square Commercial Market and Development Study - 2010
7. Pare Study – Belmont Community Path - 2017
8. McLean Housing Site Plan Presentation – 2021



Waverley Square Survey Results

Panelists were provided with the results of a 2022 survey that explored how Belmont residents felt towards key issues that would potentially affect the redevelopment of Waverley Square. The survey provided valuable insights for panelists prior to the site walk and stakeholder interviews, including:

Over half of the respondents live within one-half mile of Waverley Square.

It is also important to note that while most of the community members either walked (over half) or drove (nearly 80 percent) to Waverley Square, only a small percentage arrived by public transit or by bike (less than 10% combined).

The Current and Future State of Waverley Square

The survey revealed that what respondents like most (over 50%) about Waverley Square was the transportation options (public transit and walkability), while 30% cited the retail options. Housing options, restaurants, and the current state of the landscape received far lower favorability ratings.

In terms of what respondents would like to see change in Waverley Square, respondents overwhelmingly (80+%) want to see more restaurants, followed by additional retail options, and an improved landscape (60%) as well as more open parks and space (nearly half), that would encourage residents to spend more time in Waverley Square. When asked what town centers in the region they would like to see the Square emulate, Belmont Center, Cushing Square, Arlington Center, and West Concord each received between approximately 30 to 40 percent of the respondent's favorable ratings, with Porter Square in Cambridge also garnering votes (approximately 20%).

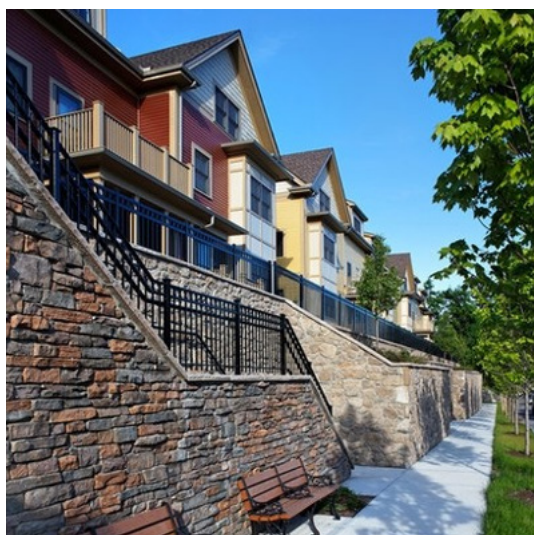
Respondents were split fairly evenly as to whether or not they would support more housing development in Waverley Square (55% 'Yes' to 45% 'No'), but there was strong support (nearly 95%) for additional retail options. Over half the respondents said they visit Waverley Square at least once a week, a number that respondents stated would surely increase if the popular changes were to be implemented.

Assets and Opportunities

Waverley Square, with its access to public transportation, proximity to schools and services, and the density of auto and pedestrian traffic, has many of the necessary elements to create a vibrant village center. In addition, the Square is family-friendly and has an active engaged community that cares about the future of Waverley Square and Belmont as a whole. The Square also

benefits from a strong tax base from its retail and commercial properties, as there are few commercial vacancies in the Square.

Given the proximity of the site to bus and train public transportation, as well as its convenient access to Route 128 and Route 2 via Trapelo Road and Pleasant St. respectively, the Square has great visibility.



Challenges

For nearly two decades, Waverley Square has been the subject of a number of studies by the Town and outside entities that are geared towards increasing visibility and maximizing the opportunities that the center has to offer. Drawing on the information provided by those studies, stakeholder interviews and panelist observations, panelists identified challenges within the study area that could hamper efforts for an optimal outcome for the Square.

High Traffic Volume – Due to the auto-centric nature of the businesses located within the Square, as well as the abundance of parking, there is a significant volume of traffic entering and leaving the area for extended periods every day. While this bodes well for creating a vibrant center, the current configuration does not adequately serve the area in terms of traffic flow.



Wide Pedestrian Crossings – Stakeholders indicated that they feel unsafe traversing the lengthy expanse across some streets within the study area, particularly sections of Trapelo Rd. The current layout is not consistent with a pedestrian-focused village center. It is worth noting that during the recent trial of a motor vehicle accident resulting in a pedestrian death, it was reported that there were about 100 accidents at the intersection of Lexington and Sycamore streets over a 10-year period, 2008 to 2018, according to Belmont Police records.

Lack of Retail/Restaurants – Despite limited commercial vacancies within the study area, there is a clear lack of restaurants, and with the exception of the popular Wheelworks bicycle shops, there is little destination retail (other than Star Market) that would draw foot and vehicular traffic.

Inadequate Branding & Wayfinding – As visitors approach Waverley Square, there is no signage indicating that they are entering a retail/business district of the town. There is also an absence of a wayfinding system to assist with parking, adequate notice of the train station or signage to call attention to places of interest, such as Wheelworks.

Conflicting Views on Density – It became apparent during the stakeholder meetings that opinions vary widely regarding increasing density in the study area. While most recognized the possibilities that leveraging the transit infrastructure and redeveloping Waverley Square (including adding workforce/affordable housing) would offer in terms of creating a vibrant village center, some were opposed to increasing density, specifically within the study area.

Parking – Although there is adequate parking within the study area, much of it is underutilized due to a lack of wayfinding and signage.

Train Station Not ADA Accessible – The Waverley Station MBTA Commuter Rail Stop is not accessible to all, and a 2016 report by the MA Architectural Access Board submitted to MassDOT estimated that an investment of \$15.65 million to \$30.28 million would be required to make Waverley Station compliant with applicable State and Federal accessibility regulations.

Lack of Programming – There is little in the way of public or private event programming (festivals, holiday celebrations, food trucks, etc.) in Waverley Square that would bring additional visitors.

Low Train Ridership – A 2015 MassDOT report indicated that the Waverley Station MBTA Commuter Rail Stop is used by only 117 riders daily, possibly driven by the aforementioned limited accessibility and visibility of the station. A 2018 Spring/Fall Commuter Rail Passenger Counts (CTPS) indicated that 82 passengers boarded and 32 disembarked from Waverley rail stop daily.

Zoning Issues – The current zoning is not conducive to attracting new restaurants, as parking and licensing (including difficulty obtaining liquor licenses) issues are seen as prohibitive to prospective restaurateurs.



Recommendations

Panelists recognize that the Waverley Square study area/neighborhood encompasses a much larger area, but the focus of this report is primarily on the triangle that surrounds the MBTA Station, as that is the nexus and commercial node of the Square. Panelists addressed the following questions, which were modified slightly from their original form:

Question One:

How do we make this a walkable and bikeable neighborhood that has foot traffic for businesses, motivates people to take the commuter rail or the 73 bus, and inspires people to walk to nearby amenities, such as Beaver Brook Park?

In order to recreate Waverley Square as a destination, a place where people want to go “to, not through” as panelists heard from stakeholders, there needs to be a recalibration, a re-thinking as to how this space is used. Such a recalibration will involve some trade-offs. A previous study by the Cecil Group in 2004 suggested the construction of a large building over the rail station, and while a worthy plan, the complex nature and expense of the project may make it better suited to the long-term redevelopment goals of the Town. Panelists instead focused on redevelopment plans that could have a more immediate impact, and suggest the following:

Parking and Transportation

The first plan of action is to make the Square more appealing to pedestrians and cyclists, and to create a space where people want to gather. This design will involve compromise, as there is no way to accommodate large roads and public space together within this small area. In this new space, cars and the need to get through the area quickly must

assume a lower priority than the pedestrian/ bicyclist experience. One of the ways to accomplish this is to reduce the speed of the automobiles through the area, which will create a safer experience for those walking to and congregating in the gathering space. Secondly, creating a space that attracts residents and visitors through signage, seating, landscaping, art, bicycling amenities, and other means (discussed below) is imperative.

Implement a Road Diet

Road Diets are an inexpensive way to reduce vehicle collisions and make roads more bike and pedestrian friendly through the reconfiguration of existing roadways. Before selecting the reconfiguration that best suits Waverley Square, the Town should commission a traffic study to determine accurate traffic counts. One plan to consider would be to do the following (see Figure 1)

- Explore the possibility of creating one-way travel northbound on Lexington and eastbound on Church Street through the Square.

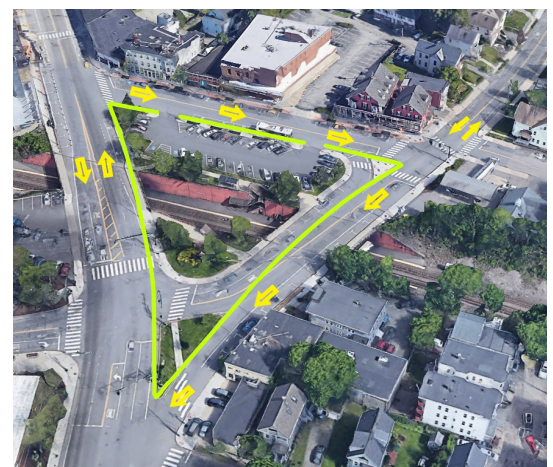


Figure 1

- Remove traffic islands at the south side of Lexington and Church Street and at Lexington and Trapelo Road to improve the pedestrian realm by adding green space on either side of the roadway.
- Work with area business owners to create shared use agreements for existing private parking lots and create wayfinding signage to direct motorists to those parking lots. Proper signage helps to reduce traffic congestion within the area as drivers no longer need to circle the area looking for parking spaces.
- Improve branding and wayfinding by adding signage that announces that visitors are entering the retail/business district of the town as well as banners/signage that highlight some of the retail/restaurant offerings. Also, create a wayfinding system to assist with finding municipal parking and retail/restaurant locations, as well as signage that alerts visitors to other attractions within the town, such as Beaver Brook Reservation.
- Install bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and create safer pedestrian crossings by making the crosswalks more visible to oncoming traffic through reflective crosswalk signs, flashing lights, and protected intersections, and consider installing distinctive reflective strips to help drivers and pedestrians quickly identify the crosswalk. This will create a more welcoming space for pedestrians and cyclists. The panel also suggests working with Community Path to devise an integrated approach to planning.

While panelists recognize that implementing a road diet will be a cultural shift, the above actions will expand the footprint of the park, and by limiting two-way traffic and mid-street stopping points, it will improve the pedestrian experience and create a safer environment – a vital building block for creating a vibrant town center.

Question Two:

What are the redevelopment opportunities for Waverley Square?

The panel envisions Waverley Square as a traditional town square, beginning with the

creation of a vibrant public open space. a destination amenity where local families and guests gather to enjoy the vibrancy of the neighborhood. The panel explored best practices to position Waverley Square as a neighborhood amenity that will serve as an engine for attracting new, and retaining existing, businesses in the neighborhood by increasing pedestrian and bicycle traffic to the area.

The panel offers the following recommendations:

Placemaking

The goal is to redevelop the existing parking lots of Waverley Square into a unique town square with a ‘town green’ as its centerpiece. Stakeholders indicated that there was no “there, there” in the Square, so the panel recommends creating a sense of place by implementing the following measures:

Create An Identity – This can be accomplished by hanging banners from light posts that identify the area as Waverley Square (particularly gateway signage along Trapelo Rd. and Pleasant St.) as well as banners that celebrate history, etc. There should also be signage highlighting local attractions, neighborhood amenities and key retailers such as Wheelworks.

Improve Streetscape with Art – The Town should consider adding murals and art installations at the MBTA station or along the Community Path, and also consider enhancing crosswalks with art as part of traffic calming measures. The Town can work with local artists or school groups to accomplish this.

Activation Opportunities – There is a social aspect to placemaking which is typically tied to event programming, including regularly scheduled gatherings such as Farmer’s Markets, as well as those centered around seasons or holidays. The parking lots could be cordoned off to stage events such as food truck nights (which also allow potential restaurateurs to develop a following that could result in a brick-and-mortar restaurant in the neighborhood), an outdoor music series, etc.

Create Greenspace – It is important to note the benefits of creating greenspace in a

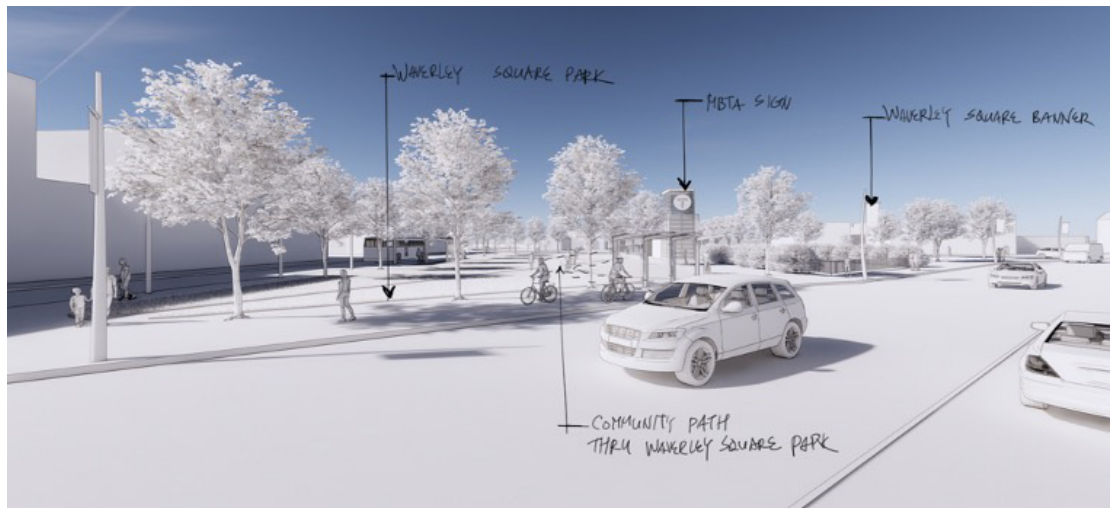
traditional village center. ULI detailed the value of incorporating greenspace into a town center in a comprehensive report published in 2021, "[10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks](#)" which outlines the steps necessary to accomplish these goals. These include identifying a champion within the community to promote parks as essential services; collaborating with partners; and purposefully fostering a sense of belonging for all.

Site and Landscape Improvements

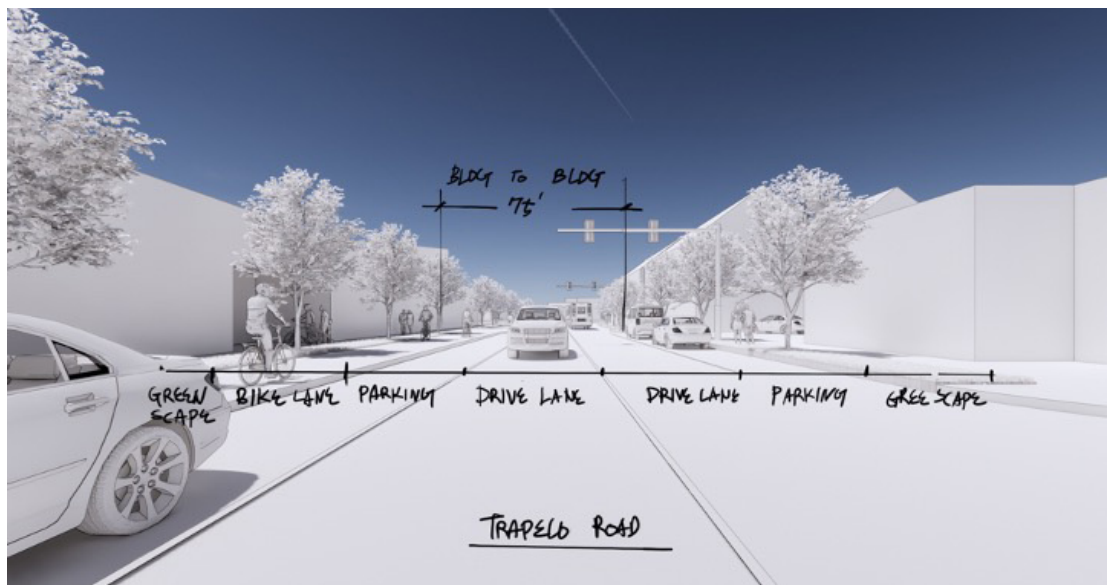
One of the benefits of adopting a road diet is that it creates additional space for land and streetscaping, as well as improvements to the public realm that encourage visitors to spend

more time in the Square. Creating a more walkable Waverly Square will increase foot traffic and help to attract and retain retailers and restaurants that stakeholders would like to see in Waverley.

In order to accomplish this, the sidewalks should be widened to allow for benches, street trees and planters and bike storage areas and encourage outdoor dining and seating. The Town should also consider the use of overhead catenary lighting on Church Street to provide ambiance, and possibly add a water feature to help mitigate traffic noise. The Town should also develop consistent design guidelines for fencing, etc. within the pedestrian realm.



Waverly Square Park (view from Trapelo Road). Source TAP Panel.



Trapelo Road View. Source TAP Panel.

Create Organizational & Administrative Entities

To facilitate placemaking – which requires commitment, people, and financing – the panel recommends creating an administrative framework to manage parking, event activations and additional programming. This can be accomplished through mechanisms such as a BID (Business Improvement District), Main Street Association, or Merchants Association.

Site and Landscape Improvements

Panelists also provided some visualizations to help understand what some of the proposed changes would look like from a street level view:

Trapelo Road Improvements

While much of the discussion of the Road Diet plan has focused on the Waverley Park section, the section of Trapelo Rd. that encompasses Wheelworks, Bank of America, U.S. Post Office and the mixed-use Desco developments would also benefit from reconfiguration/roadway improvements.

In its current configuration, the roadways are over 60' feet across from curb to curb, with one driving lane in each direction, space for parking, and a bike lane, which is wider than necessary. By reconfiguring the roadway,

two 11' car lanes and an 8' parking lane could remain, as well as a 10' bike lane on the Wheelworks side of Trapelo Rd., gaining nearly six feet on each side that could be used for streetscape improvements (street trees, additional greenery, street furnishings, etc.) that would extend the pedestrian experience to Trapelo Rd. The bike lane would also be connected to the Community Path through the park. (see slide 28 below, with Wheelworks on L and Bank of America on R side).

This view is from the Star Market/Belmont Car Wash side of the road and illustrates the proposed road diet for Lexington St.

Question 3:

Would this neighborhood be a good candidate for either M.G.L. Chapter 40R (Smart Growth) or could this location support the necessary multifamily requirement under M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 3A (MBTA Communities)?

Overview of MBTA Communities Requirements

Before getting into specific recommendations, it is important to note that there is an enormous amount of potential for a



Trapelo Road View. Source TAP Panel.

neighborhood like Waverley Square. But in order for that potential to be realized, property owners and potential developers need to have a degree of predictability when it comes to height, density and allowable uses for the neighborhood.

The focus of 40R or 40A is centered around the creation of more housing. There is a dearth of housing in the Greater Boston area, which 40R and MBTA Communities are designed to address by increasing the number of housing units, particularly in towns that are served by mass transit.

Belmont is one of 175 MBTA communities, as defined under M.G.L. c. 161A, Section 1. Under current draft guidelines that have been promulgated by DHCD, Belmont would be classified as a “bus service community;” however, DHCD has indicated that communities, such as Belmont, which have a commuter rail station within their borders may be re-classified as part of the issuance of the final guidelines.

Under M.G.L. c. 40A, Section 3A, every MBTA community is required to implement new zoning in which multi-family housing is allowed as-of-right (without a special permit or variance). The new zoning district must be at least 50 acres, located at least in part within 0.5 miles from a transit station and must allow for a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre. This does not mean that every acre must have 15 units, it only means that the zoning allows for the potential of this housing to be built. The density also does not have to be uniform across the entire zone, but instead allows for areas of higher and lower densities. To be compliant, Belmont’s multi-family zoning district must allow for the potential development of up to 2,176 units (i.e., equal to 20% of the town’s current housing stock, per 2020 U.S. Census).

As a bus service community, Belmont is required to adopt a plan that complies with Section 3A on or before December 31, 2023. Communities that do not achieve full compliance by the deadline may risk the loss of state funding from the Housing Choice Initiative, the Local Capital Projects Fund, and/or the MassWorks Infrastructure

Program. Additionally, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), may, in its discretion, take non-compliance into consideration when making other discretionary grant funds, all of which represents a potentially significant loss of funding for communities not in compliance by the deadline.

Overview of Smart Growth Zoning

Smart Growth is essentially a corollary to the MBTA Communities requirements, but instead of penalizing communities for non-compliance, Smart Growth rewards communities that are taking steps that will foster more housing development. It revolves around creating new zoning districts in the vicinity of transit stations and areas of higher commercial development. Unlike MBTA Communities, where the zone needs to be at least 50 acres, the area can be smaller or larger, depending on the goals of the individual municipality. Residential and mixed-use development must be as-of-right in order to be approved, and must meet a predetermined threshold of affordable units (for Smart Growth developments over 12 units, 20% must be designated as affordable, typically for those earning 80% or below of the AMI – Area Median Income). The Smart Growth district must provide a minimum allowable density of 8 units/acre for single-family homes, 12 units/acre for two and three-family homes, and/or 20 units/acre for multi-family developments.

Incentives

A Smart Growth District that provides for the potential creation of units offers the following incentives for communities:

- Municipality receives zoning incentive payment based on potential new housing creation (\$10,000 for up to 20 units, \$75,000 for 21-100 units, \$200,000 for 101-200 units, \$350,000 for 201-500 units, and \$600,000 for 501+ units).
- There is an additional bonus payment of \$3,000 per new unit of housing built



- Reimbursement for net cost of educating students living in new housing in Smart Growth district.
- Communities may receive a preference for DHCD and other state funding.

Increase Housing Through Zoning Changes

Taking into account the goals of the Town of Belmont and its desire to create a more vibrant Waverley Square, as well as the potential repercussions of not complying with MBTA Communities zoning change requirements, the panel recommends creating a zone that would satisfy the MBTA requirements.

To achieve compliance, Belmont should consider rezoning areas in the vicinity of Waverley Square that will allow multi-family housing as-of-right. It should be noted that other parcels would need to be incorporated to achieve the stipulated 50-acre minimum. The 50 acres do not have to be contiguous, but at least 25 acres would need to be, and the other parcels would need to be located within the half-mile radius, so the corridor

encompassing Pleasant Street and certain town-owned properties to the south of the MBTA right of way could be included. This is just one avenue towards satisfying the MBTA requirement, and the panel also recommends considering the senior housing facility (Sherman Gardens) and other nearby properties within the half-mile radius for potential inclusion in an MBTA Communities zone. The panel also believes that the addition of housing units in the neighborhood could be accomplished in a way that addresses the concerns of the Waverley Square community.

The Town of Belmont could also explore using a 40R Smart Growth overlay district to promote the development of new housing in the Waverley Square area. This could be separate from, or in conjunction with, any rezoning designed to bring Belmont into compliance with MBTA Communities (with the added bonus of municipal incentive payments under Chapter 40R).

Independent of MBTA Communities compliance and the potential use of 40R, Belmont should consider rezoning Waverley Square to promote building heights from the

existing two stories to 3 stories (or higher, depending on community consensus) along all primary street frontages (Trapelo Rd., Pleasant and Church streets) that face Waverley Square. This could unlock potential redevelopment opportunities that could significantly improve the neighborhood for both residents and existing and potential businesses. There is a trade-off however, as any neighborhood improvements need to be feasible from a development perspective. Providing additional density, with first floor retail with housing units above, for example, allows projects to be financeable, where two-story development may not be.

Final Thoughts

Create a Sense of Place – First and foremost, Waverley Square, as is, lacks a sense of place. The best way to create that place is to focus on the triangular portion of the Square surrounding Waverley Station. Failure to redevelop the Square using a road diet and activation through improved landscaping, event programming, etc. to support the creation of that place, would be a missed opportunity. When there is a sense of place, and a reason to visit that destination, there are ripple effects – both quantitative and qualitative. In the case of a redeveloped Waverley Square, we believe that the ripple effect would be more economic development.

In order to bolster that effort, there needs to be zoning revisions that will allow for increased density. The increased density of housing would not be in the Square itself, but around the edges of the Square, from Star Market, proceeding east up Pleasant Street. This will, in effect, frame the square and create that sense of place, but also create a robust demographic group and customer base that will support the restaurants and retail in Waverley Square. In its current form, the Square seems to be unable to attract restaurants of the caliber of, for instance, Il Casale in Belmont Center or Sarma in

Somerville – destination restaurants that would draw outside visitors and transform the entirety of Waverley Square.

With regards to the primary zoning changes relative to the MBTA Communities larger scale zoning revision, the town should seek to improve the accessibility across the entirety of Waverley Square, the ability to connect the Star Market property and portions of Waverley Square along Pleasant St. is critical to the overall vitality of the Square.

Lastly, the improvements worth making in the public realm are highly focused on both transportation and pedestrian improvements – adding to pedestrian safety and walkability – and that walkable nature is very reflective of the historic context that exists in much of Belmont. The “shrinking” of the Square through the road diet makes the roads more walkable.

It is worth noting that the findings of the ULI panel echo the recommendations of previous studies of Waverley Square dating back to the 2003 Town of Belmont - Economic Development Study. The report framed the state of the Square at the time thusly: *“There is a real concern about the safety of pedestrians, the vitality of businesses, and the general economic atmosphere along the corridor.”*

The recommendations are also strikingly similar, as the report urged the town to “promote pedestrian and bicycle improvements while preserving traffic operations; improve parking in the commercial areas; improve the character of commercial streets; review and update applicable regulations; promote economic development; and encourage mixed-use development and increase density in Town Squares.”

There has been a significant amount of planning work done over the years, and now is time to begin implementing those plans.

Funding and Resources

Panelists identified a number of government agencies that can provide funding and guidance as the project moves forward. (Some are noted previously in the report).

MassDevelopment/Commonwealth Places – A collaborative initiative between MassDevelopment and the crowdfunding platform Patronicity, Commonwealth Places provides a funding mechanism for community-driven placemaking projects throughout Massachusetts. Also helps to incentivize private investment. MassDevelopment also provides help with brownfields, site readiness, and technical assistance for a variety of projects, and provides financing assistance (tax-exempt bonds, bridge financing, loans, etc.)

CPA (Community Preservation Act) – Helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities.

Shared Streets and Spaces Grant (MassDOT) – Provides funding to municipalities and public transit authorities to quickly implement improvements to plazas, sidewalks, curbs, streets, bus stops, parking areas, and other public spaces in support of public health, safe mobility, and strengthened commerce.





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