

Watertown Square Plan Project Update



Thursday, February 29, 2024



City of Watertown, MA | planning@watertown-ma.gov

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 - b. Elements of the Plan
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 - a. Potential Redevelopment
 - b. Zoning Recommendations

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Goals for Watertown Square

Why are we making a new plan for Watertown Square?

- To create lively public spaces
- To create street design that promotes safe walking and biking
- To ensure that small businesses can thrive
- To promote shared public-private open spaces that are activated and expanded, with more access to the Charles River
- To create expanded housing options
- To explore more opportunities for public art
- To reuse, enhance, or preserve the Square's most significant historic structures
- To make the Square a destination for residents and visitors alike, with attractions for community members to visit and spend time

What we heard during the Comprehensive Plan

- Watertown Square is the defining feature for the community
- Watertown Square needs planning to address streetscapes, multimodal access and circulation, and small business success, to build community by enhancing character and quality of life
- Busy roadways in Watertown Square are barriers for non-auto trips *and* can be assets for businesses by increasing visibility

Elements of the Plan

What we'll be working on

Existing Conditions Analysis

- Synthesis of past plans, including the Comprehensive Plan, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and Resilient Watertown
- Identify travel patterns and desire lines
- Analysis of current small businesses
- Soft sites analysis

Public Engagement

- Stakeholder Engagement: Watertown Business Coalition, Kitchen Table Conversations with the Community Conversations group
- Polis Online Survey
- Design Charrette

Urban Design & Redevelopment Scenarios

- Potential development opportunities
- Public realm recommendations: street reconfiguration/lane diet
- Urban realm design: open space proposal acknowledging subsurface conditions and their impact at grade

Transportation & Parking Plan

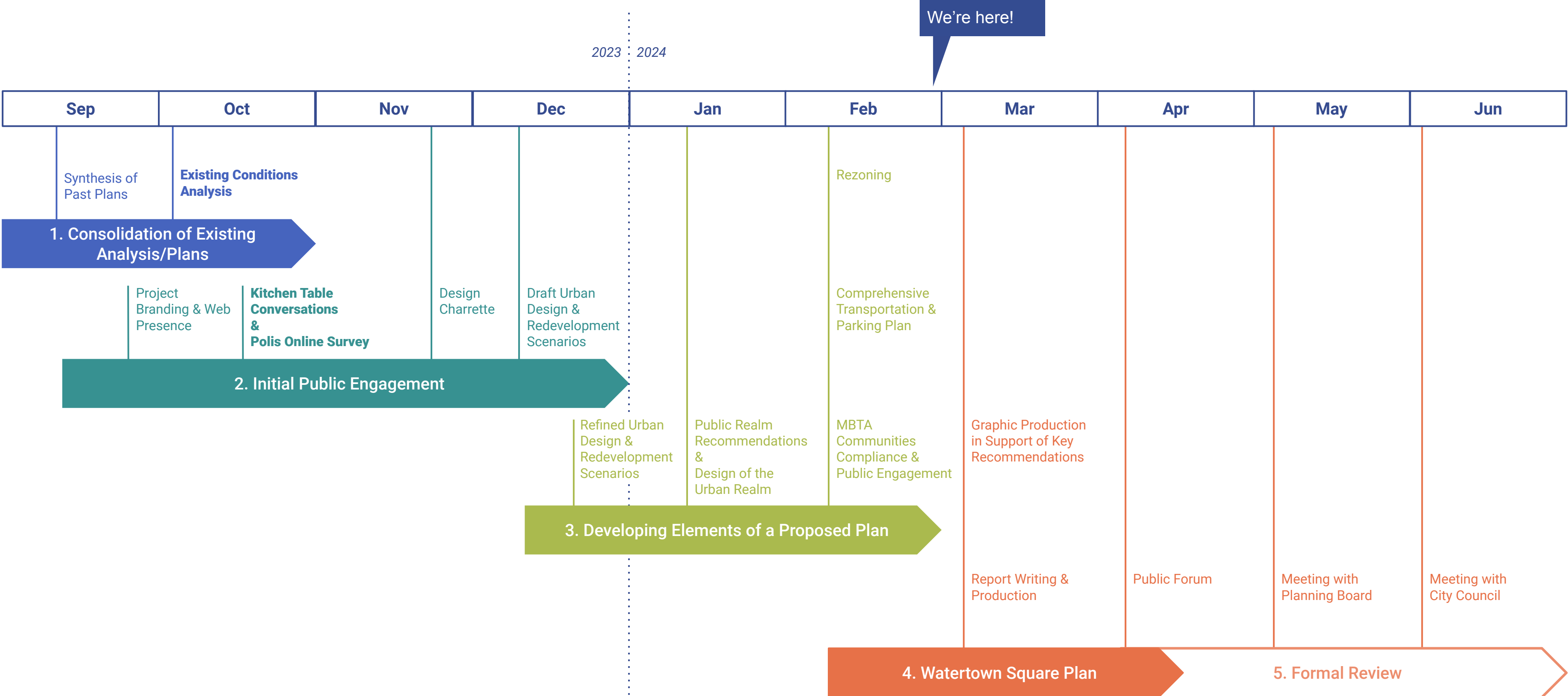
- Detailed conceptual plan for redesigned street right-of-ways
- Implementation timeline
- High-level peer review

Rezoning

- Development of a tiered zoning approach
- MBTA Communities compliance analysis
- Public engagement: Webinar and WCATV

Watertown Square Plan Timeline

Roadmap to a complete plan



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#1452474

Public Engagement So Far

Kitchen Table Conversations

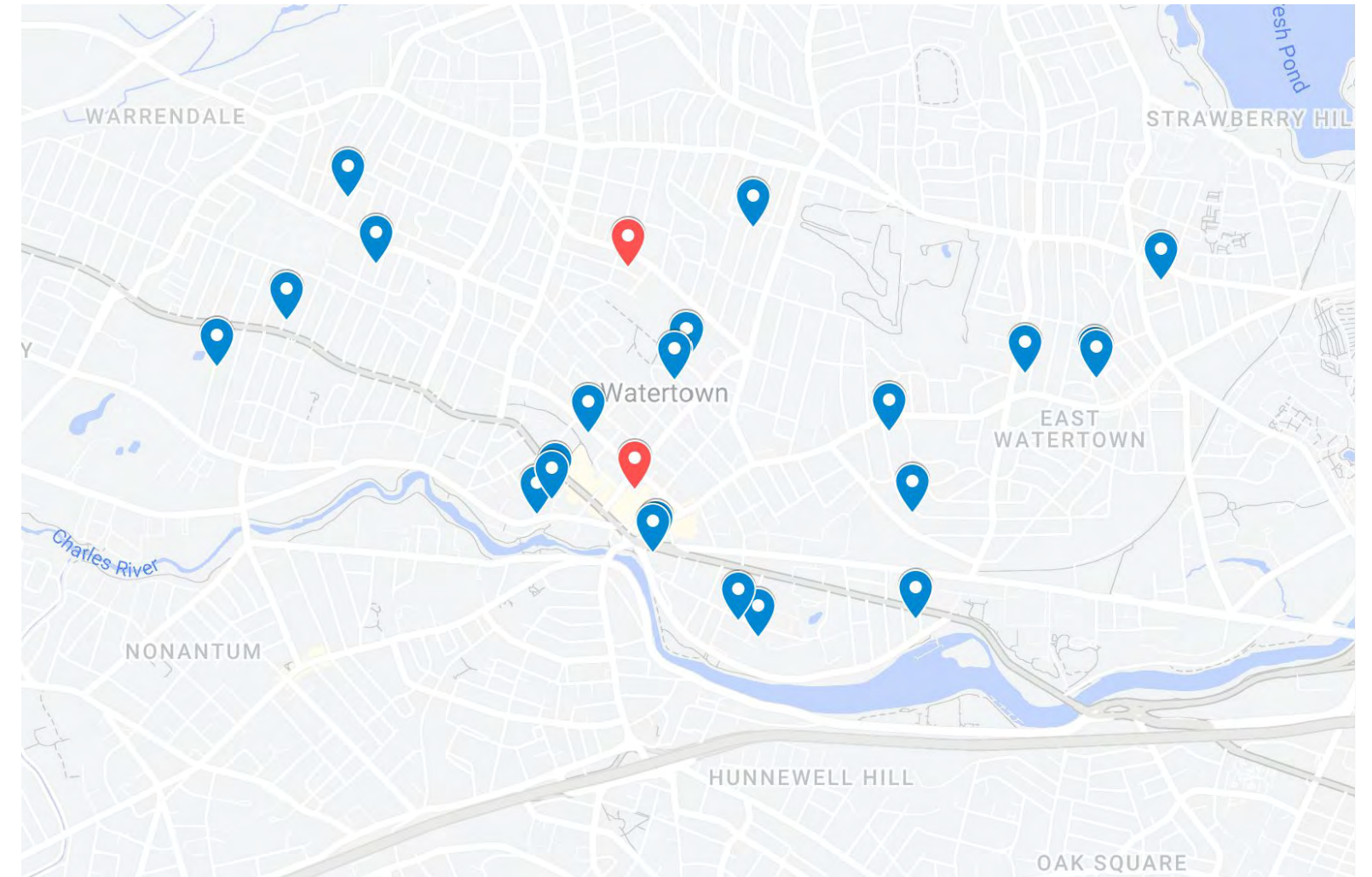
Polis Survey

Charrette

Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC)

Hosted from October 30 to November 17, 2023

- Small group conversations focused on how residents currently engage with the Square and what they would like to see the Square become
- Attended by over 150 residents in 20 locations across the City
- Facilitated by Watertown Community Conversations
- Specific meetings with Perkins School for the Blind and Watertown Business Coalition



Initial Kitchen Table Conversations Locations

Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC)

Feedback Received

What's working in the Square currently?

- Watertown Free Public Library fosters community
- Access to Charles River Greenway
- Cultural diversity

What would you change about Watertown Square?

- Slowing and reducing traffic to increase biker and pedestrian safety
- Enhanced and increased connectivity to greenspace
- More, vibrant businesses and venues catered to gathering and community: i.e. grocery store, food stand or restaurant, music or dance venue, etc.
- Architectural character of buildings

Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC)

Common Themes

Throughout all conversations, the following themes were emphasized:

- The new Watertown Square should **invite and foster community**
- **Walkability and connectivity** between assets already in the square should be improved
- **Accessibility and green space** considerations should be at the forefront of any design
- Look to **unique building facades** like the Watertown Savings Bank to guide the aesthetics and design



Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC)

Selected Quotes

Plan accessibility FIRST when thinking about Watertown Square – whatever is not functioning well for us [low vision and blind community members] needs to be top of the list for any upcoming changes.

We already have a lot of what we want, but there isn't a design to foster a community feel, enhance businesses that are here, and connect all the pieces. Often we have to stumble upon things.

My pet peeve is the Delta, which lacks charm. Why don't we copy European examples? Install a fountain, benches, and invite food carts.

The library is the heartbeat of the Square. How can this reverberate and be expanded throughout the Square?

Arsenal Yards is a cautionary tale. Is there a way to do that without chains? We want to retain our New England character and preserve our history.

Watertown Square should be less of a highway and more of a destination. Give it a sense of place, with clues that say 'you have arrived.'

Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC)

Varying Opinions

The following topics had conflicting opinions across different conversations:

- **Parking**

- Desire to keep parking to support local businesses and for personal convenience
- CVS lot identified as potential space for recreational use
- Many pointed to Arsenal Yards as a negative example due to car focused infrastructure

- **Transit**

- Some preferred to improve and increase bus access in and through Watertown Square
- Many wondered if removing bus service from the Square would improve traffic



Polis Survey

Snapshot of Results

1,076

people voted
(based on logins or individual devices)

973

people grouped
(261 in Group A, 712 in Group B)

112,174

votes were cast

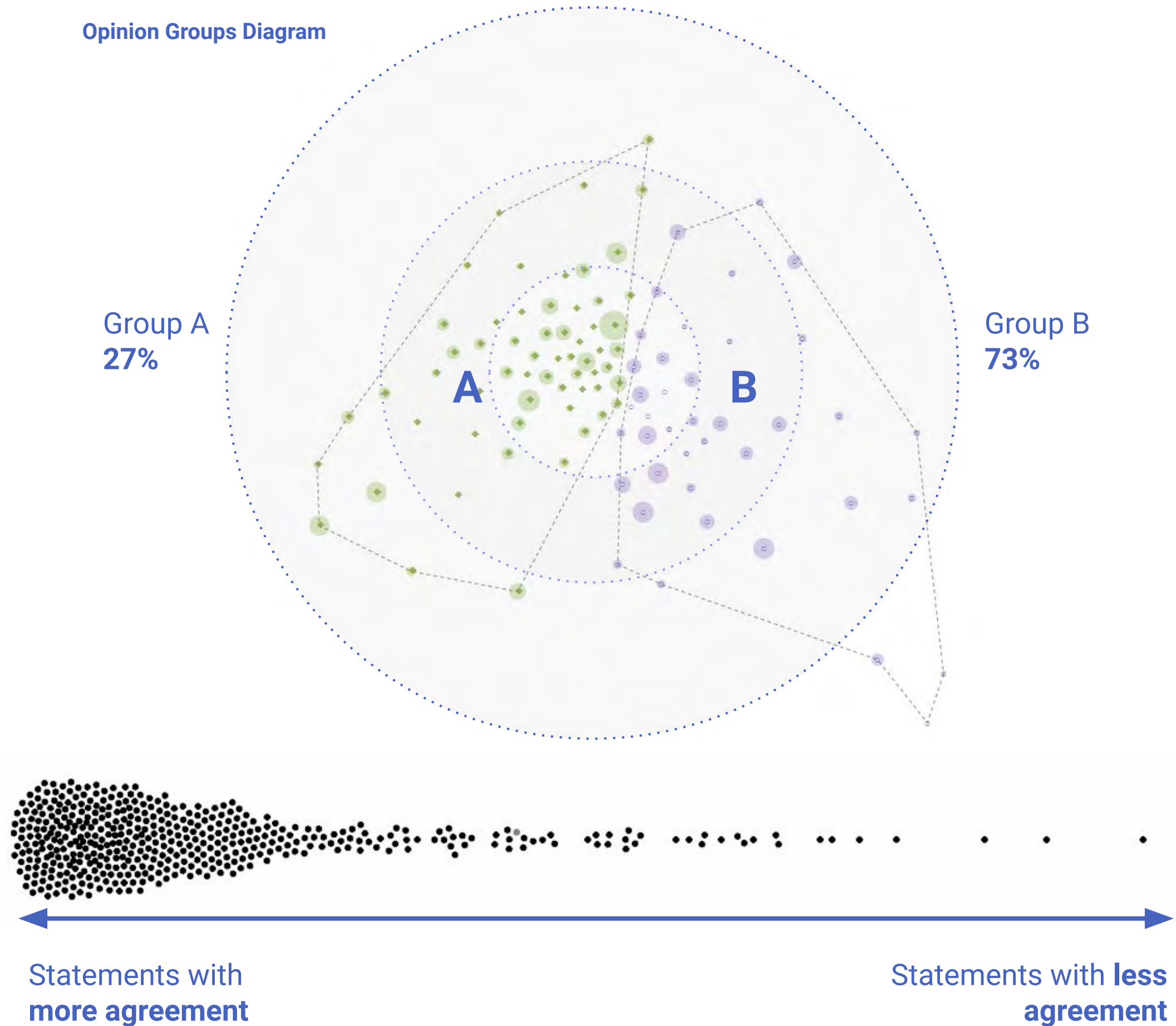
1,073

statements were submitted

104.25

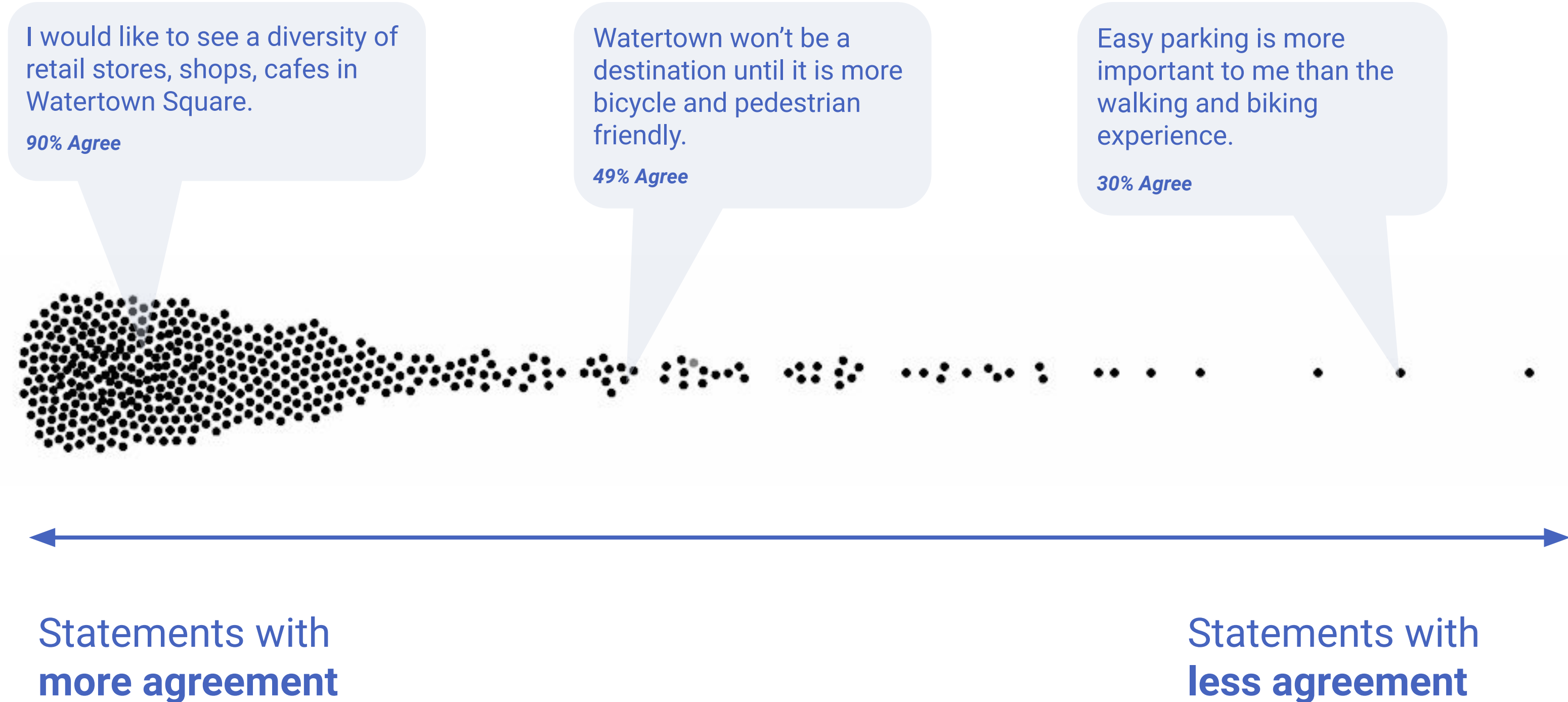
votes per voter on average

Opinion Groups Diagram



Polis Survey

Snapshot of Results



Polis Survey

Snapshot of Results

Group A (261 participants) agrees with:

Easy parking is more important to me than the walking and biking experience.

One reason businesses turn over so often is that parking is both limited and inconvenient. Why would I risk a parking ticket over dinner?

The most important consideration for Watertown Square is to keep traffic moving.

Denser housing development will contribute to the current traffic issues in the Square.

Group B (712 participants) agrees with:

Cars are loud, dirty, dangerous, and expensive. There should be less hardscape for cars/parking, and more room for people and shade trees.

Building dense housing in the Square would provide foot traffic that will support local businesses.

All major corridors should have physically separated bike lanes.

Build the square for people, bikes, and mass transit options, not cars with 1 passenger.

Polis Survey

Major Themes

Environment

- Provide easier access to the Charles River path and make the river more visible
- Create green corridors of trees along streets to regulate climate stress and provide shade and beauty

Economic Development

- Diversify businesses (shops, retail, cafes) to encourage residents and visitors to spend time in Watertown Square
- Add more support/infrastructure for small businesses

Housing

- Increase the density and diversity of residential and mixed-use development
- Add more affordable housing development
- Provide more options for family housing

Transportation

- Consolidate connections among the various bus lines to make a convenient and user-friendly transit hub
- Provide faster, frequent, and more reliable transit through the Square
- Create continuous, protected bike lanes
- Ensure easy parking and walking

Arts & Culture

- Create more spaces for outdoor dining, socializing, and lingering
- Add more diverse events (like the Farmers' Market) to the Square
- Foster a vibrant nightlife in the Square (extended hours for restaurants/retail)

Other

- Disabled and senior citizen pedestrians need to be taken into account for the redesign of the Square
- Revitalize Watertown Square storefronts

Overall Attendance

High Turnout

230

Different people participated in one or more sessions between Tuesday and tonight

467

 Total Signups

141

 People attended Tuesday night

207

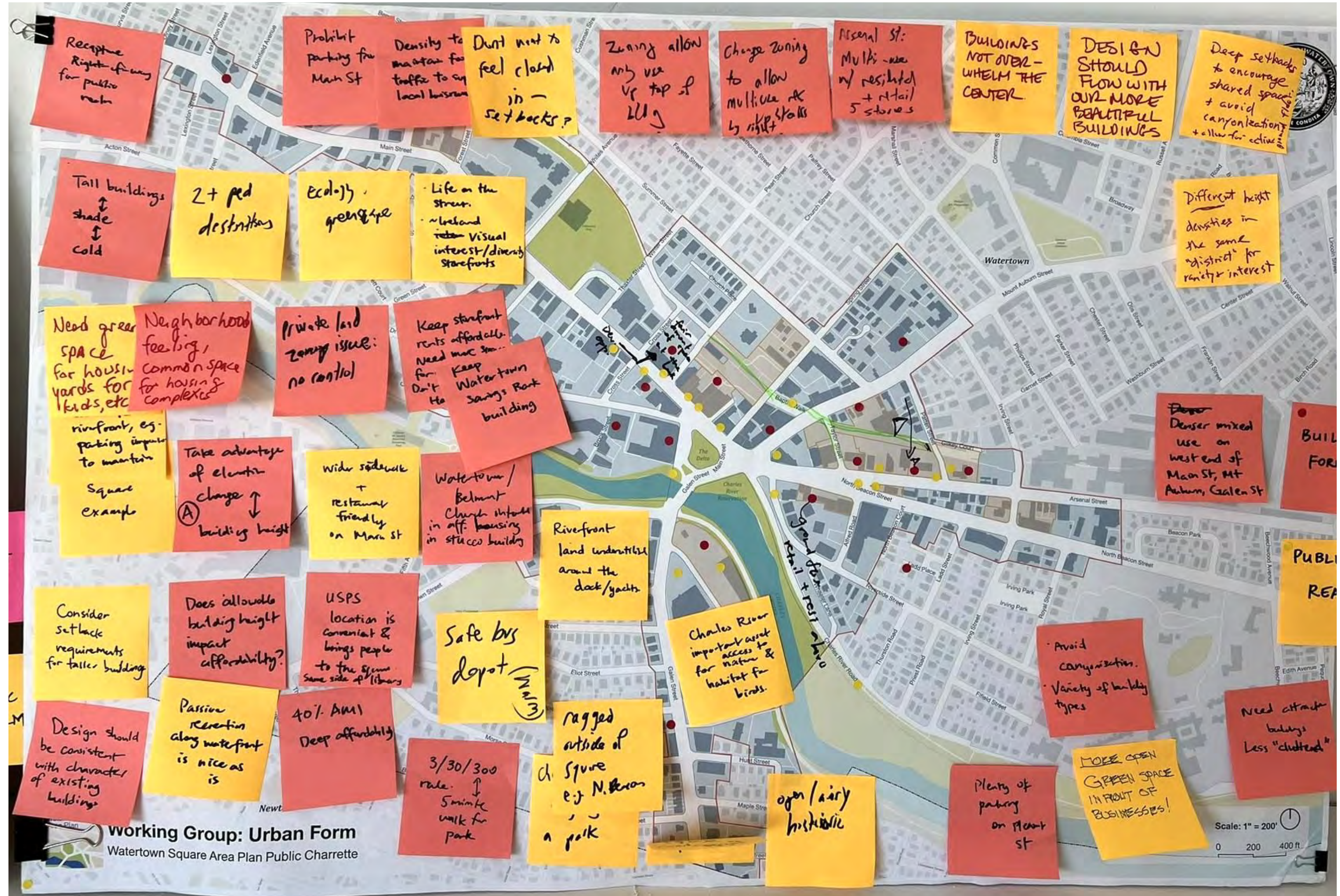
 People attended Wednesday's sessions

86

 People attended Thursday's sessions

Urban Form

Working Group



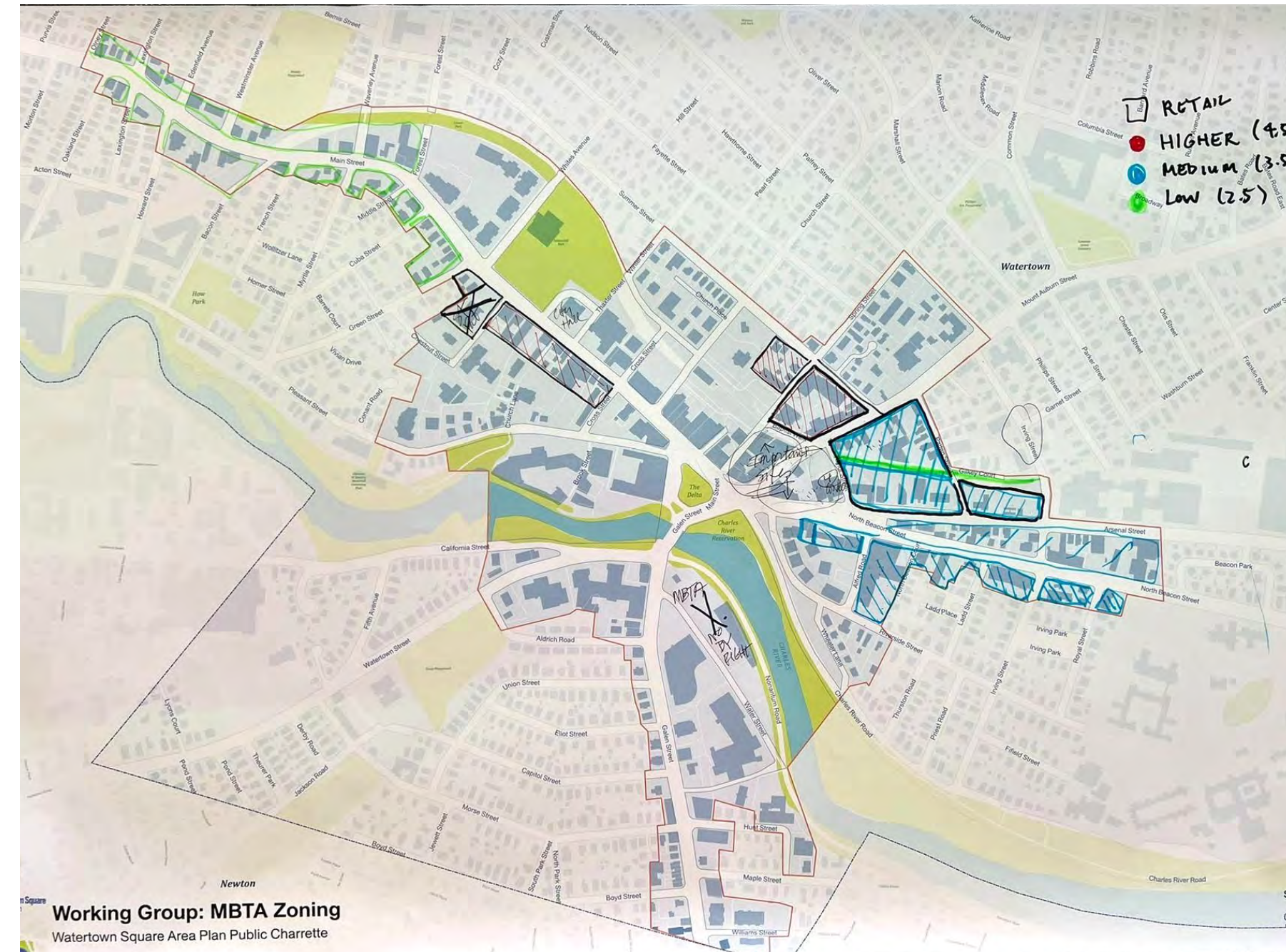
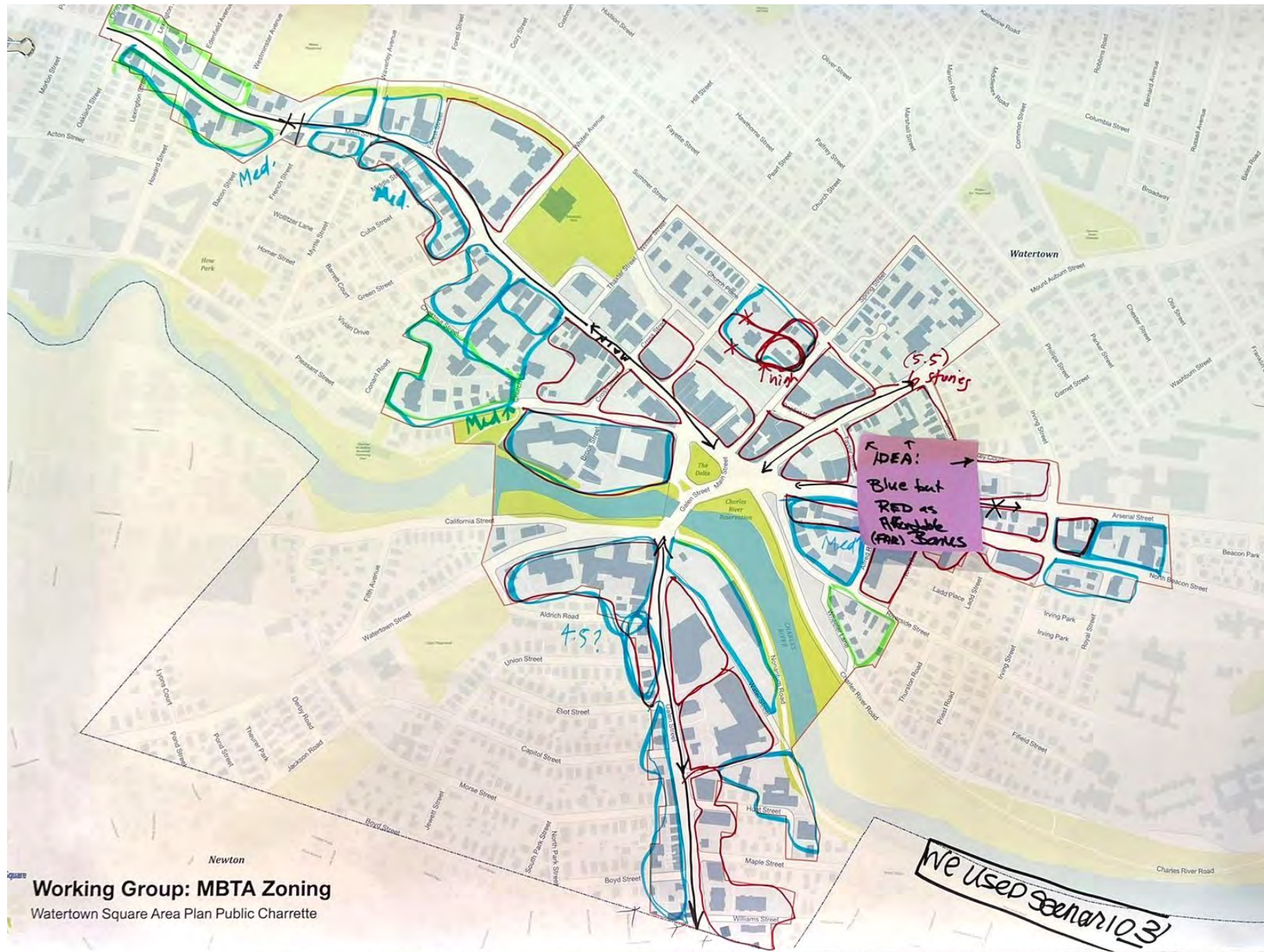
Destination Square

Working Group



MBTA Communities

Working Group



Strategic Sites

Working Group



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1 Pivotal Location ^{+ showcase}	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2 Better usage for owner	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Gate-way	✓
3 Missing footh? (no street wall)	✓	●	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4 Under leveraged space	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5 Large parking lot - underutilized	✓	✓	✓	Back lot	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6 Showcase location	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7 Bus Rte - Near dock for water-shuttle	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8 Fronts on both sides of parcel	✓	✓	✓	Ped/Bike only in loc	At corner	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9 Bus Next to civic (bus)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	At corner	Corner	Corner	✓	✓
10 Chop-up-able Multi-tenant Mixed Use	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Near-ish	Near-ish	✓	✓	✓
11 Run down - disrepair	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12 Vacant	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13 Poor facade	✓	✓	✓	Don't have	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14 Poor current use	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Working Group Sessions

Emerging Themes

Urban Form

- Create more opportunities for outdoor dining and people-watching. Provide benches and tables that overlook the river; enhance views to the river
- Differentiate the architecture of ground floor retail from upper story residential levels in mixed-use buildings

Destination Square

- Create event space for community programs, including the Library and non-profit programs
- Provide outdoor activated spaces and wider sidewalks with planting zones; create opportunities to integrate murals with adjacent businesses
- Create integrated branding to promote WTS via signage and interactive displays

Strategic Sites

- Create mixed-use development on the sites with auto-related businesses along Arsenal Street
- Provide housing and community-oriented amenities on the MBTA site alongside a consolidated transit hub
- Create pedestrian passages between larger buildings

MBTA Communities Zoning

- Incentivize affordable housing with a height bonus
- Provide upper story setbacks
- Extend proposed zoning to include areas south of the river along Galen St
- Provide greater setbacks and zone for lower building heights for areas adjacent to small scale residential

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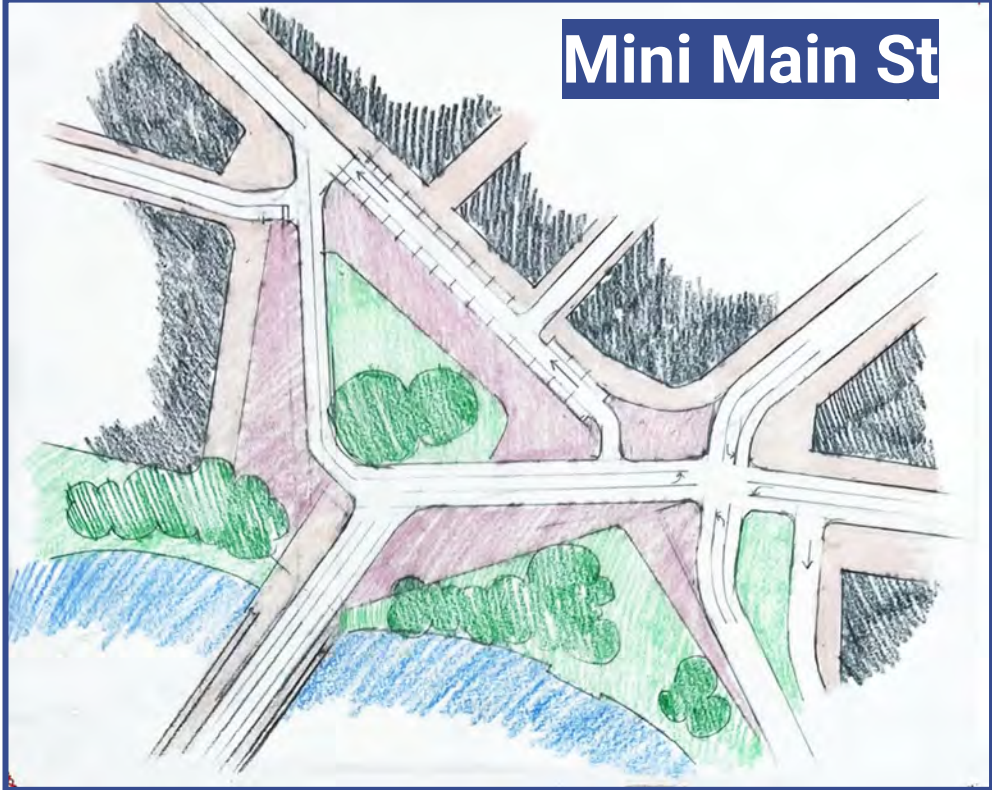
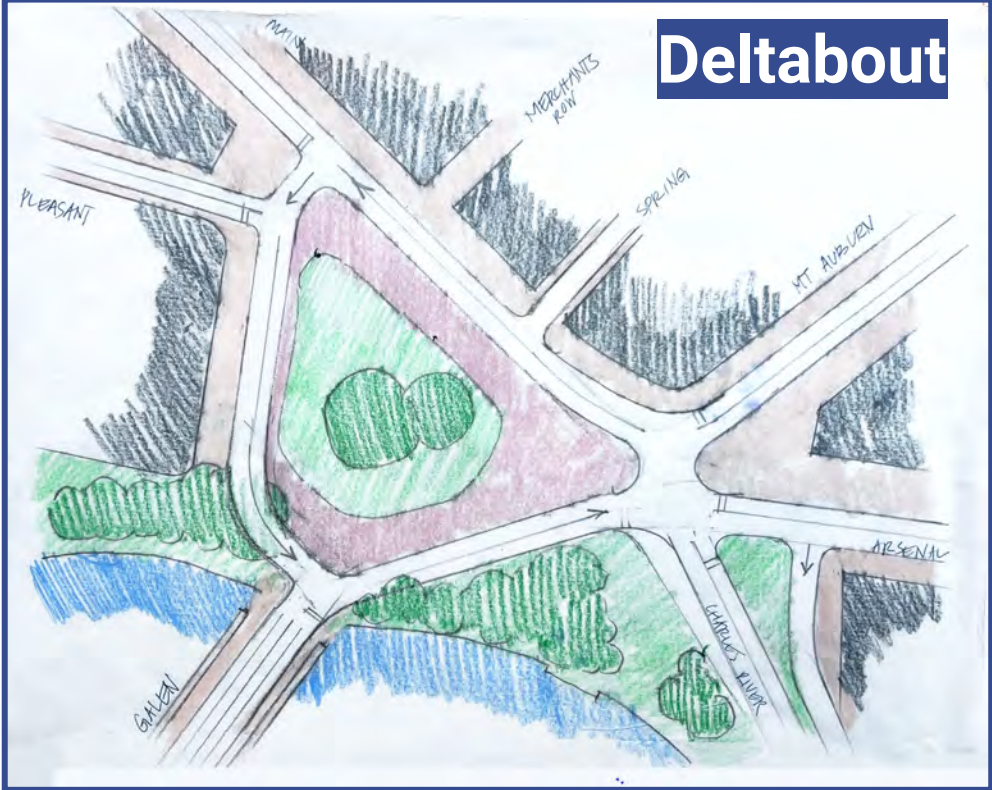
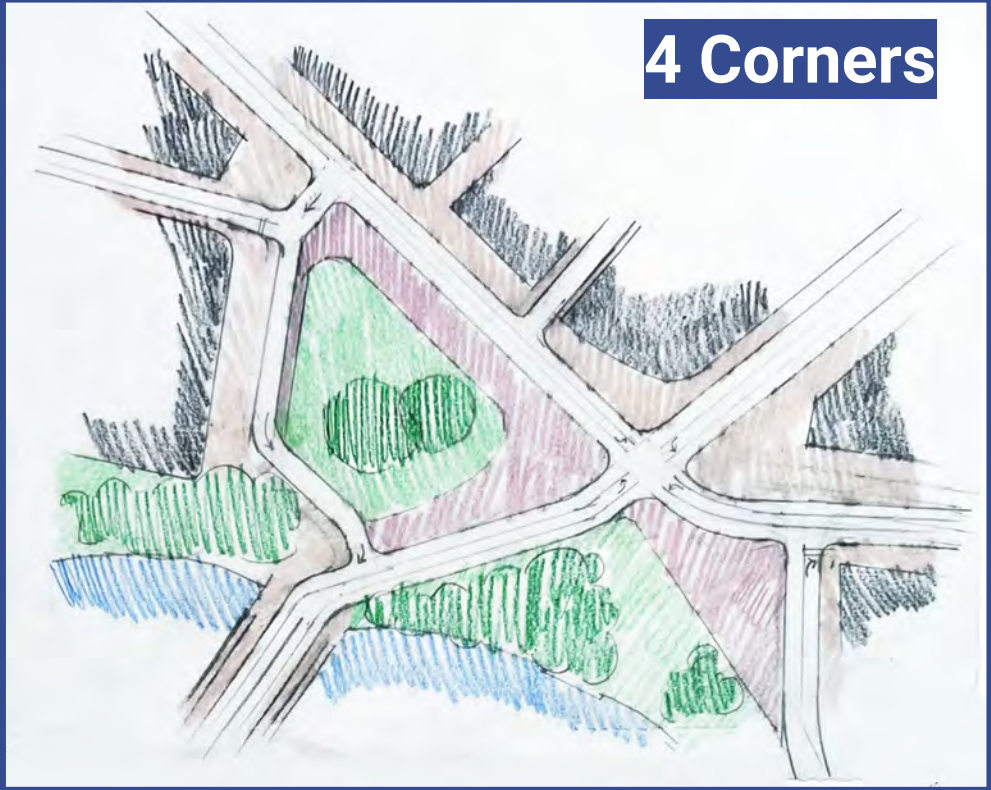
Have you participated in any of the previous Watertown Square Plan engagements? Tell us which ones you've been a part of below.

Street Reconfiguration Scenarios

Four Corners
Mini Main Street

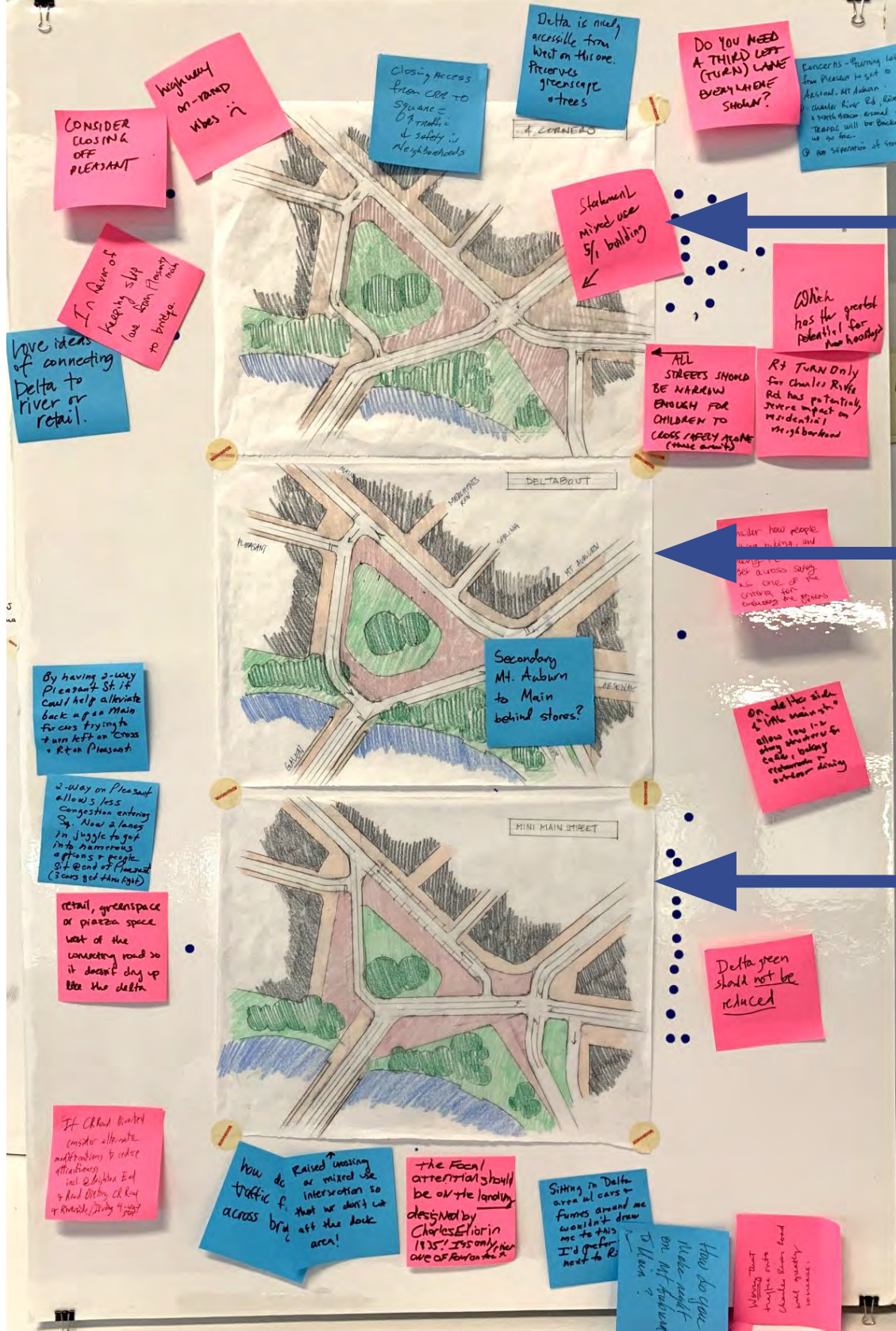
Defining Preferred Scenarios

Sketches shown during Interim Progress Drop-in Session on Wednesday Evening



Defining Preferred Scenarios

Public Feedback from Wednesday Evening



4 Corners: 13 votes

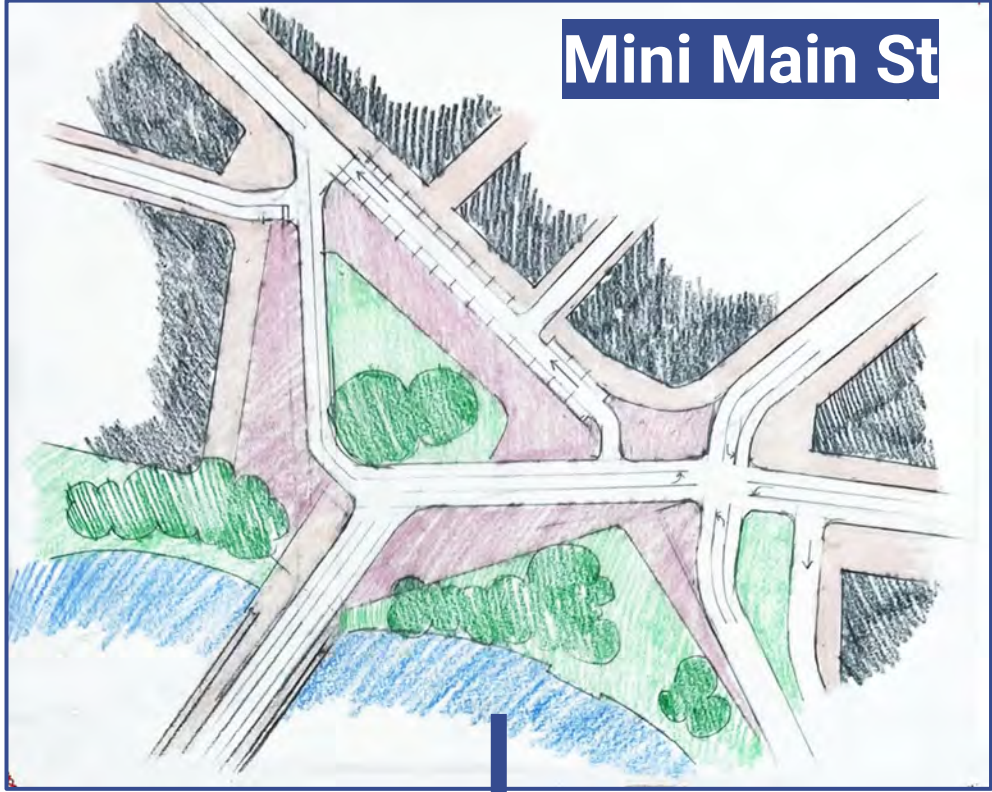
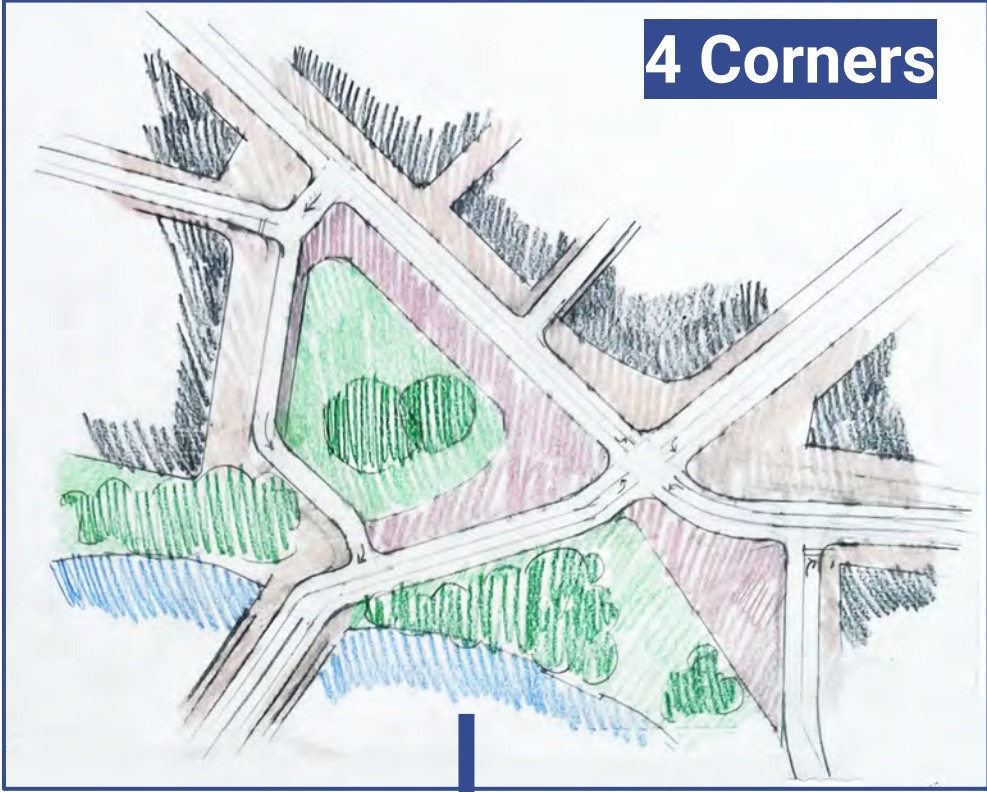
Deltabout: 1 vote

Mini Main St: 14 votes

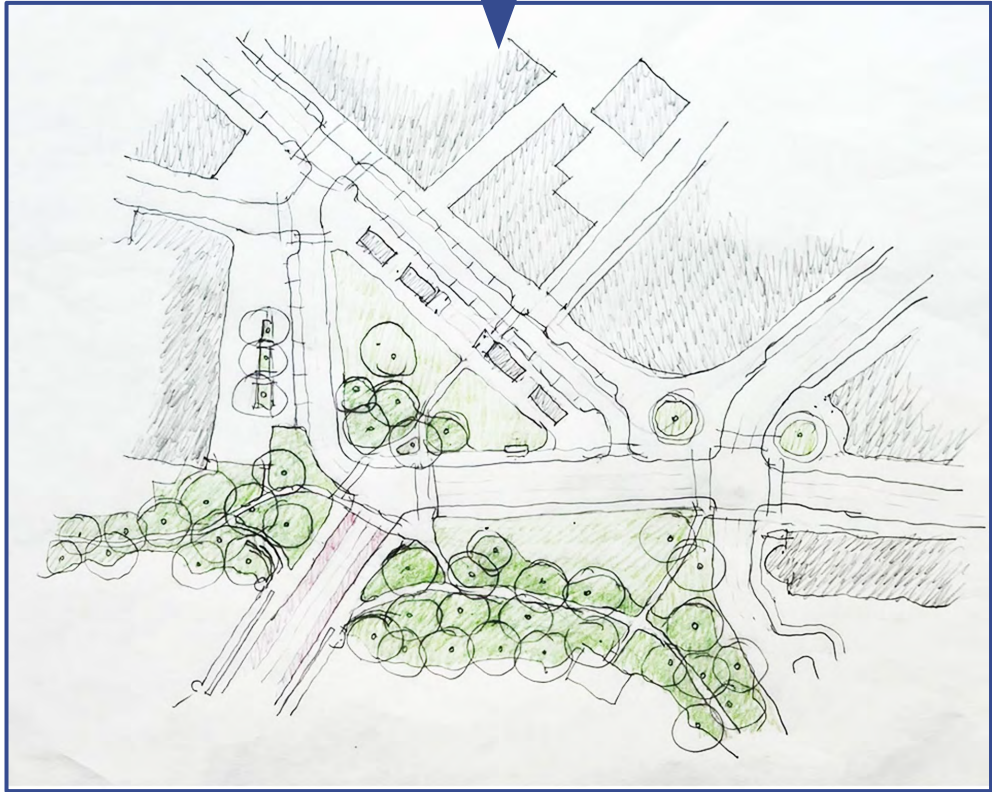
Defining Preferred Scenarios

Sketches shown during Interim Progress Drop-in Session on Wednesday Evening

Interim Scenarios



Refined Scenarios

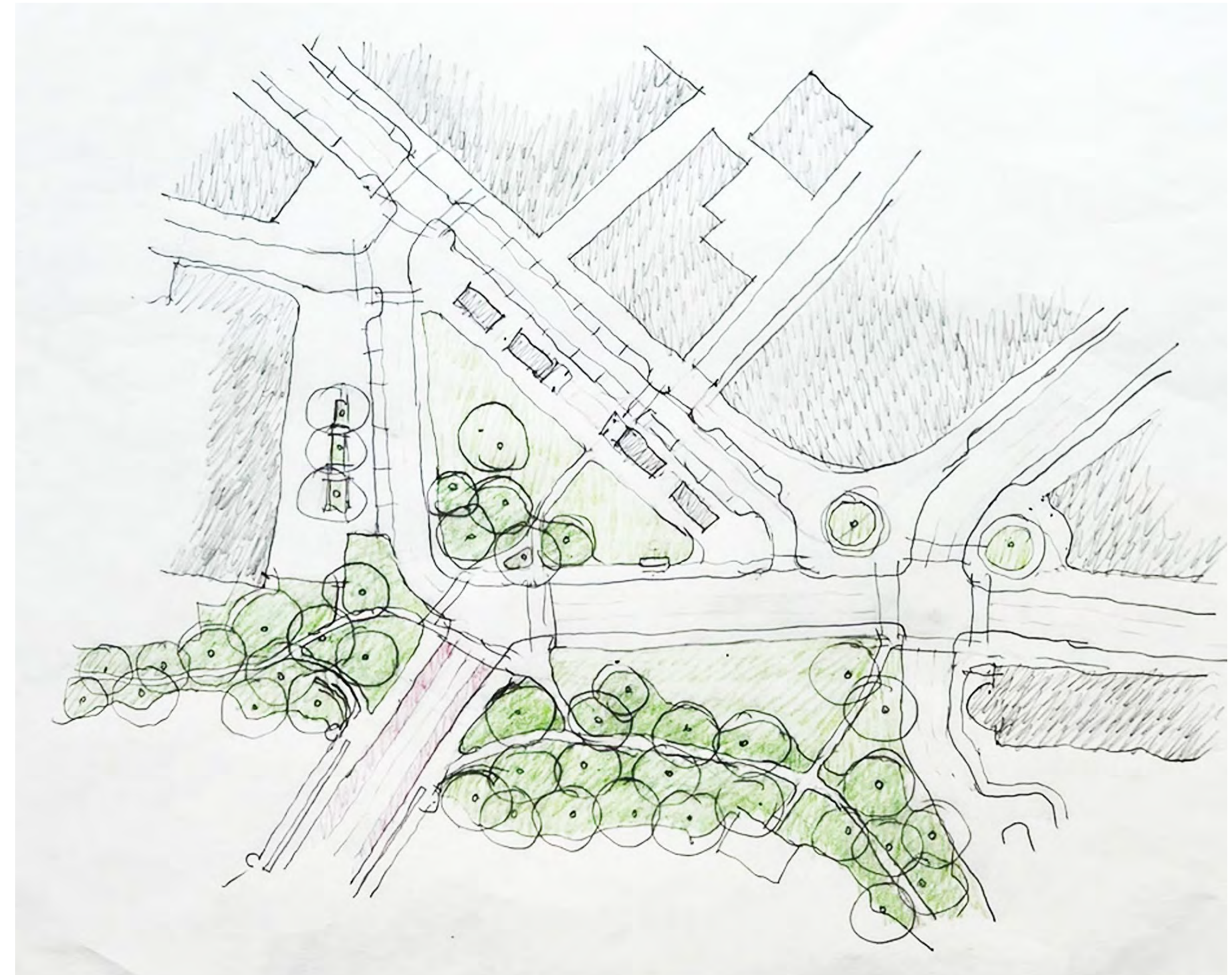


Developing Preferred Schemes

Four Corners



Mini Main Street

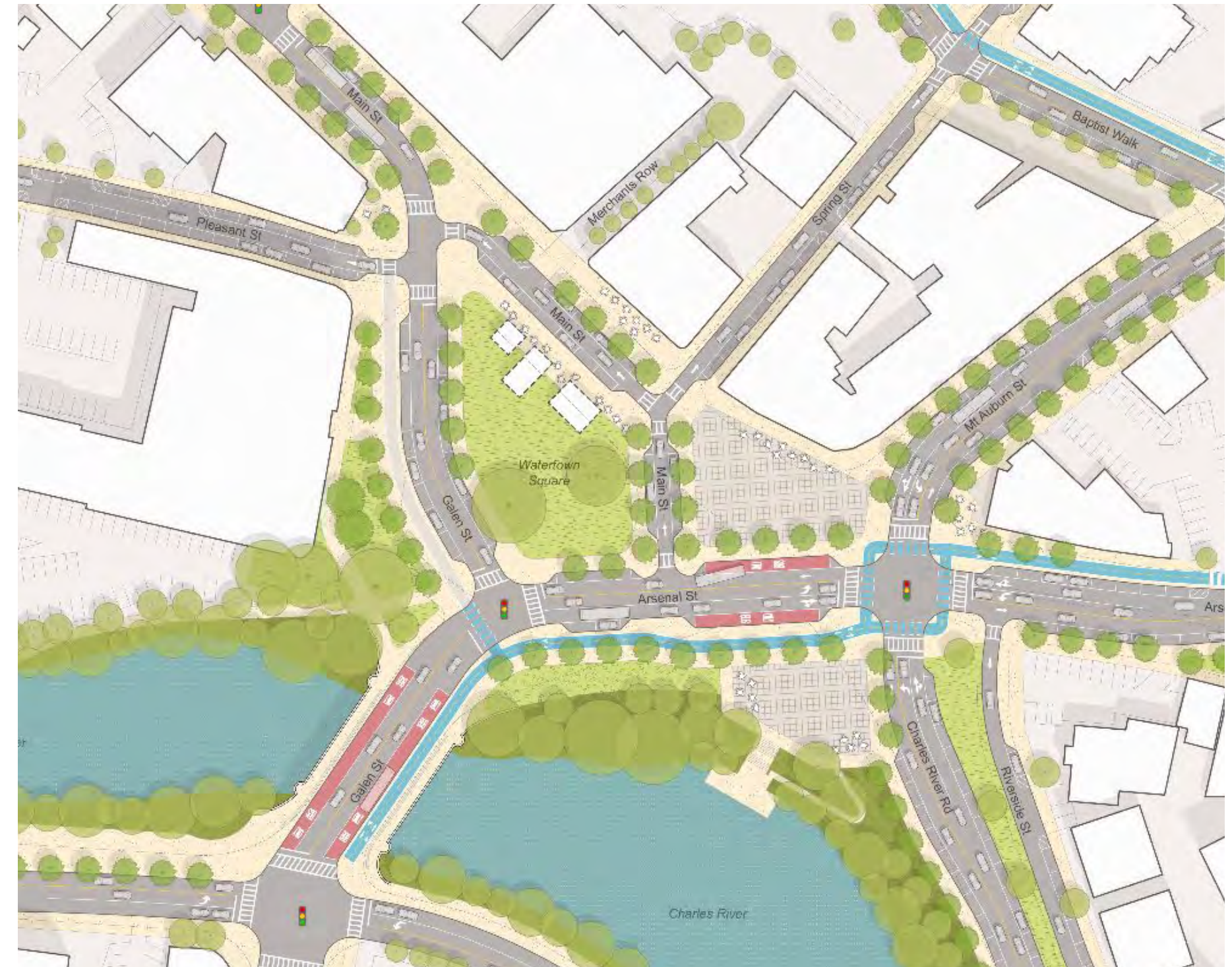


Developing Preferred Schemes

Four Corners



Mini Main Street



Existing Condition

Current Plan



4 Corners

Concept Plan



4 Corners

Area Reclaimed for Public Realm

157,690 SF

Gained Space

10,440 SF

Lost Space

147,250 SF

(3.38 AC)

Net Gained Space



Existing Condition

Current Plan



Mini Main Street

Concept Plan



Mini Main Street

Area Reclaimed for Public Realm

156,370 SF

Gained Space

17,915 SF

Lost Space

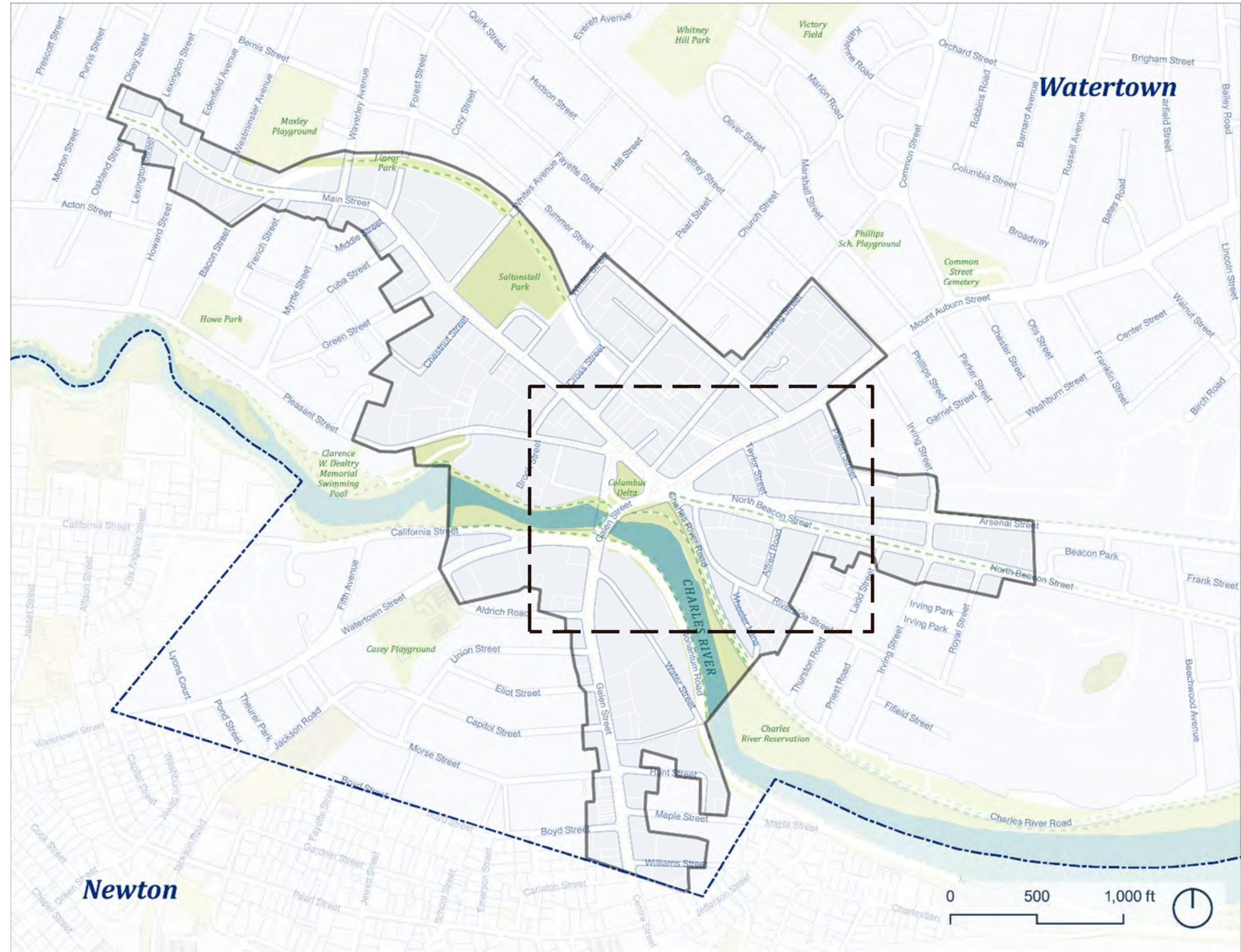
138,455 SF

(3.18 AC)

Net Gained Space

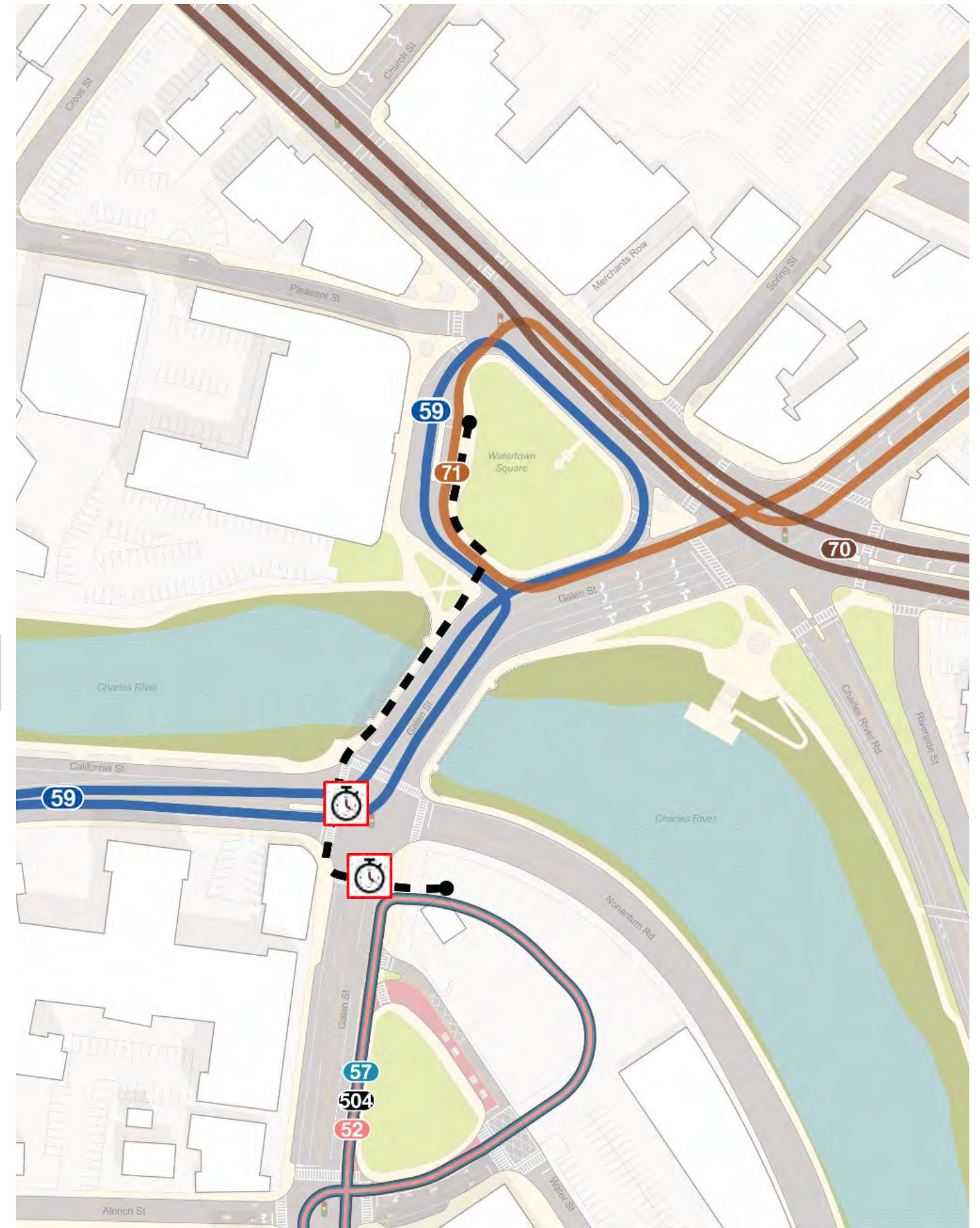


Watertown Square Plan Study Area



Issues and Opportunities

Walking in Watertown Square



40% of space is for driving cars

35% of space is for parking cars

25% of space is for people

Issues and Opportunities

Pass-through Trips in Watertown Square

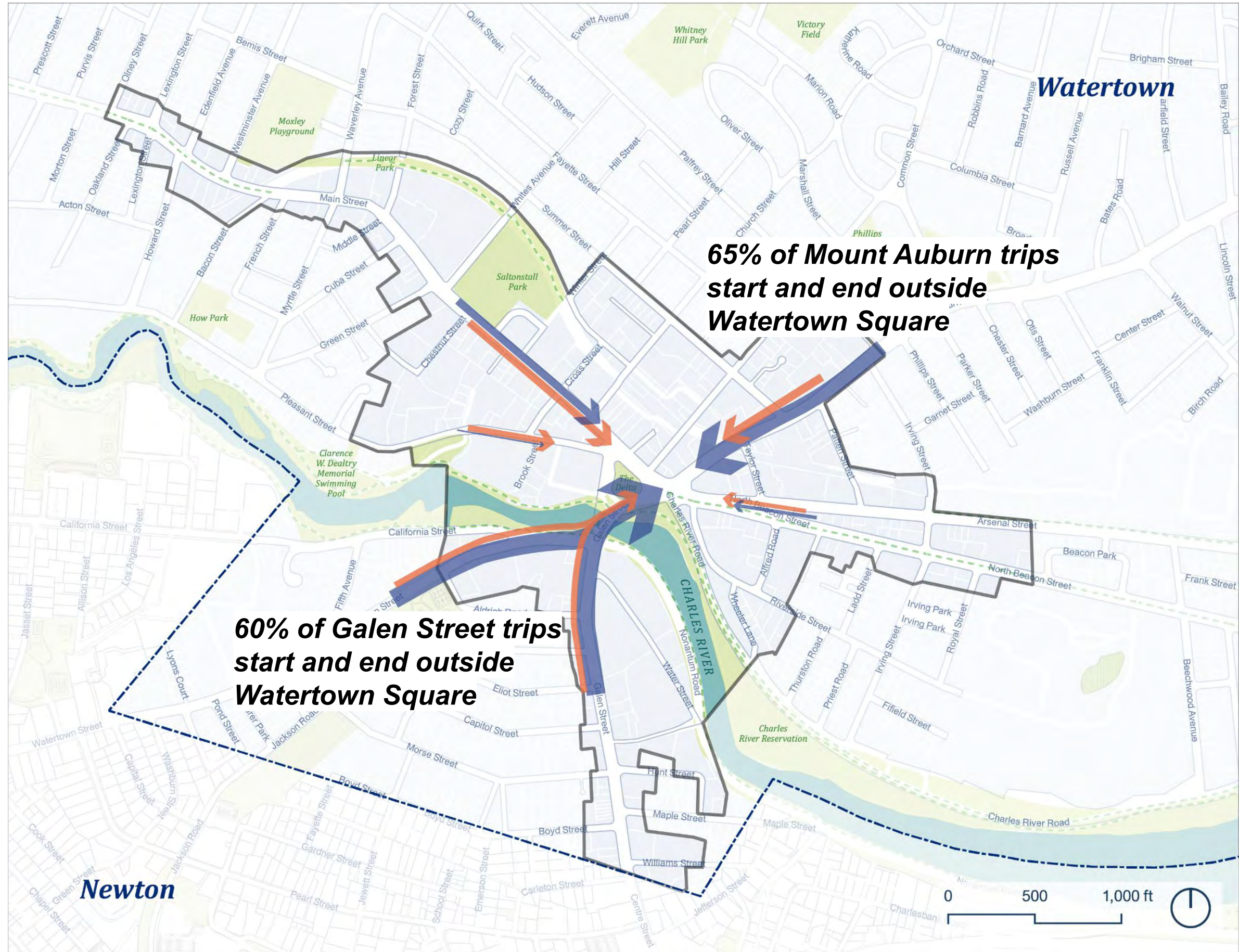


1/3 Vehicles in Watertown Square are going to/coming from Mass Pike

Issues and Opportunities

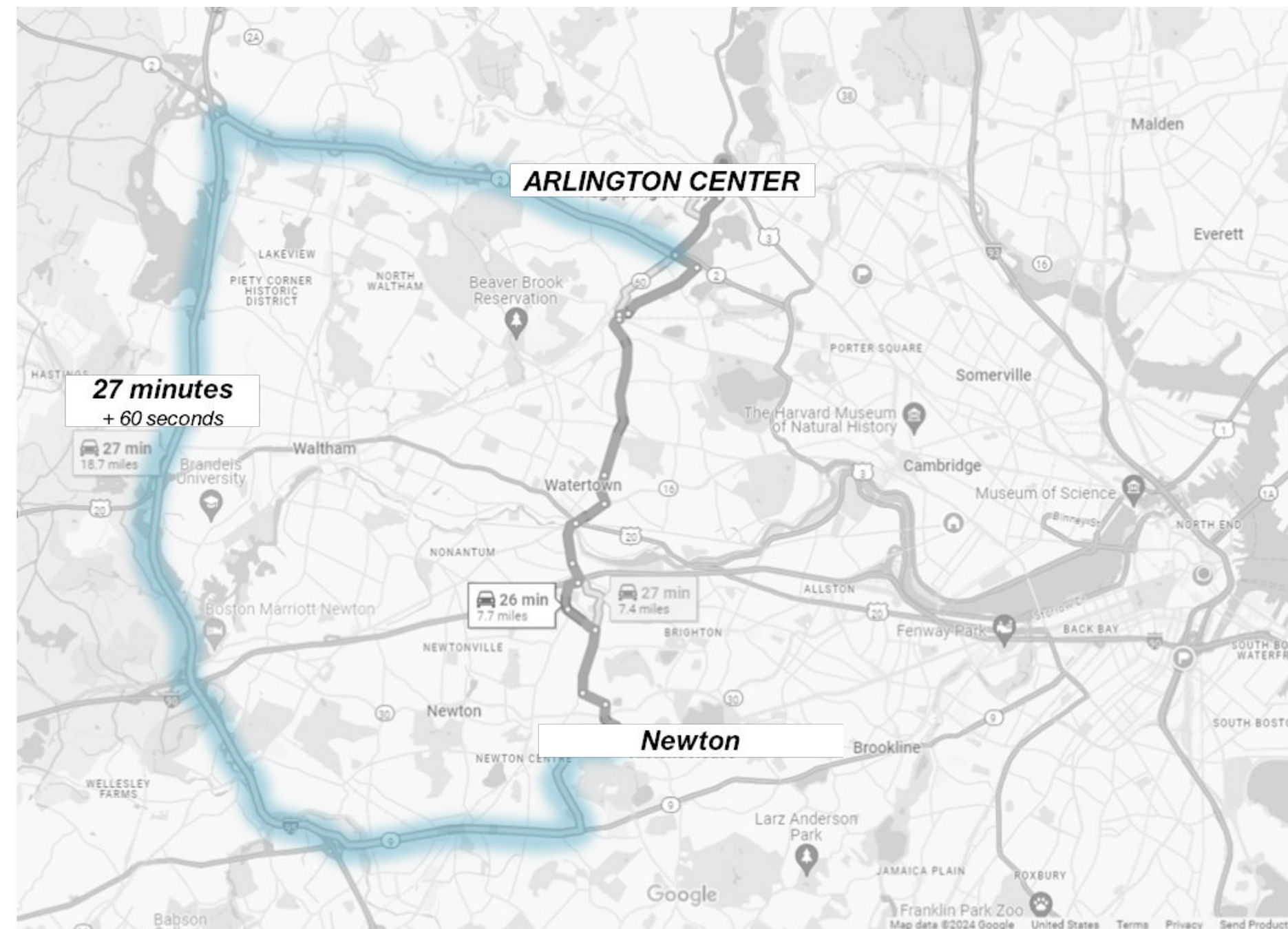
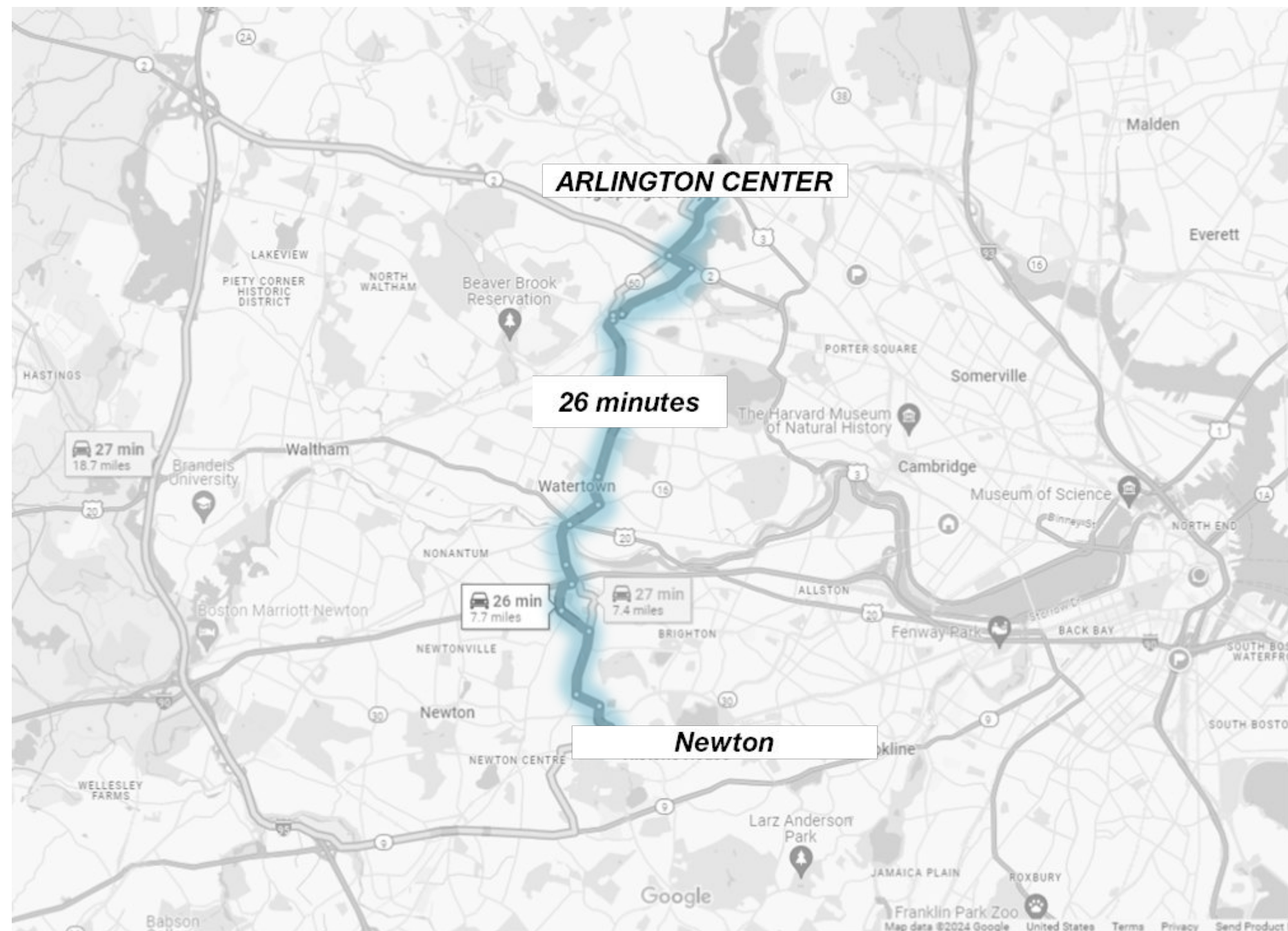
Pass-through Trips in Watertown Square

Watertown Square Trip Origin and Destinations



Issues and Opportunities

Redirecting Regional Traffic



Making a Walkable Watertown Square



4 Corners



4 Corners

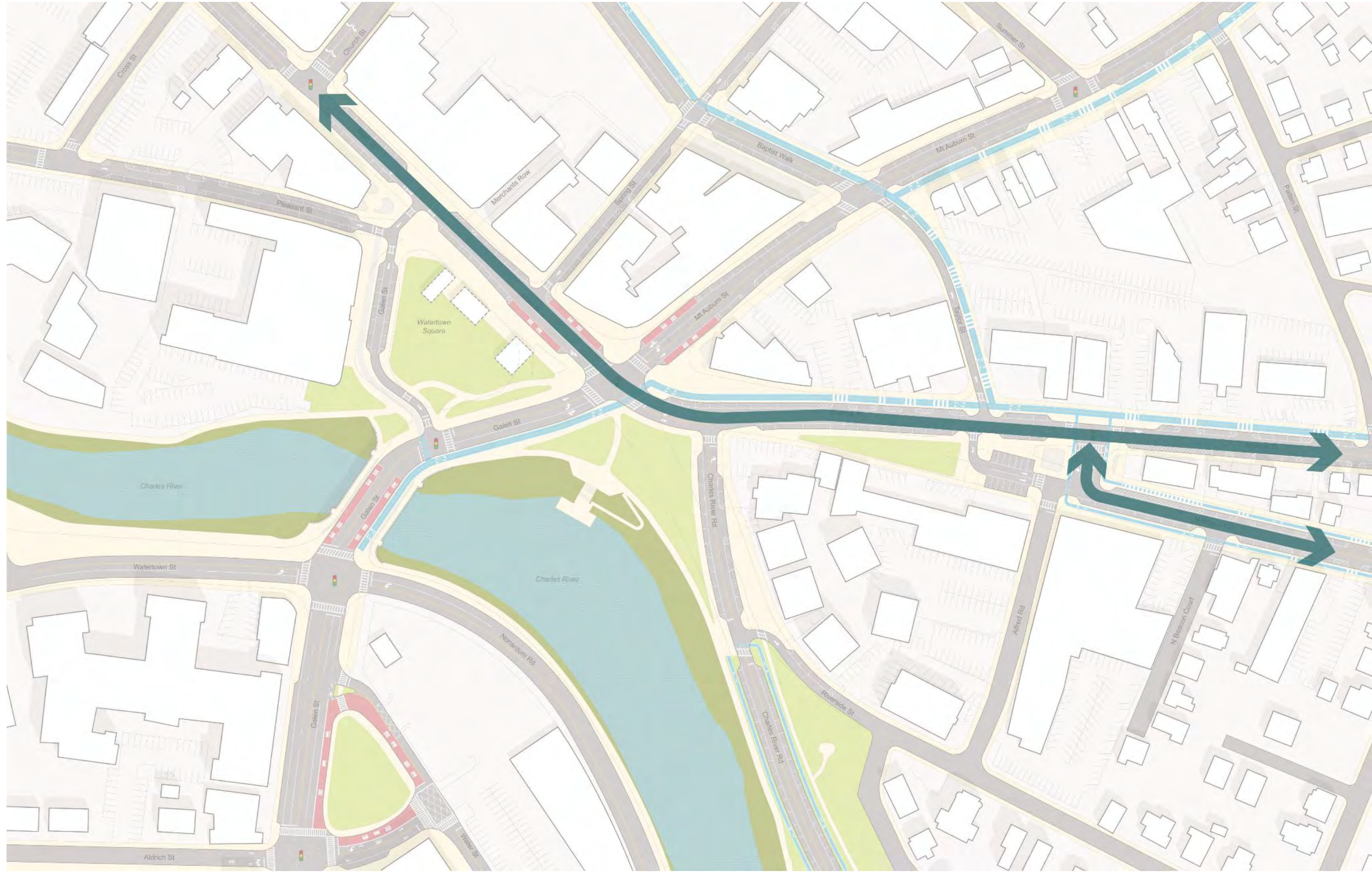


<25'
crosswalks

32'
crosswalks

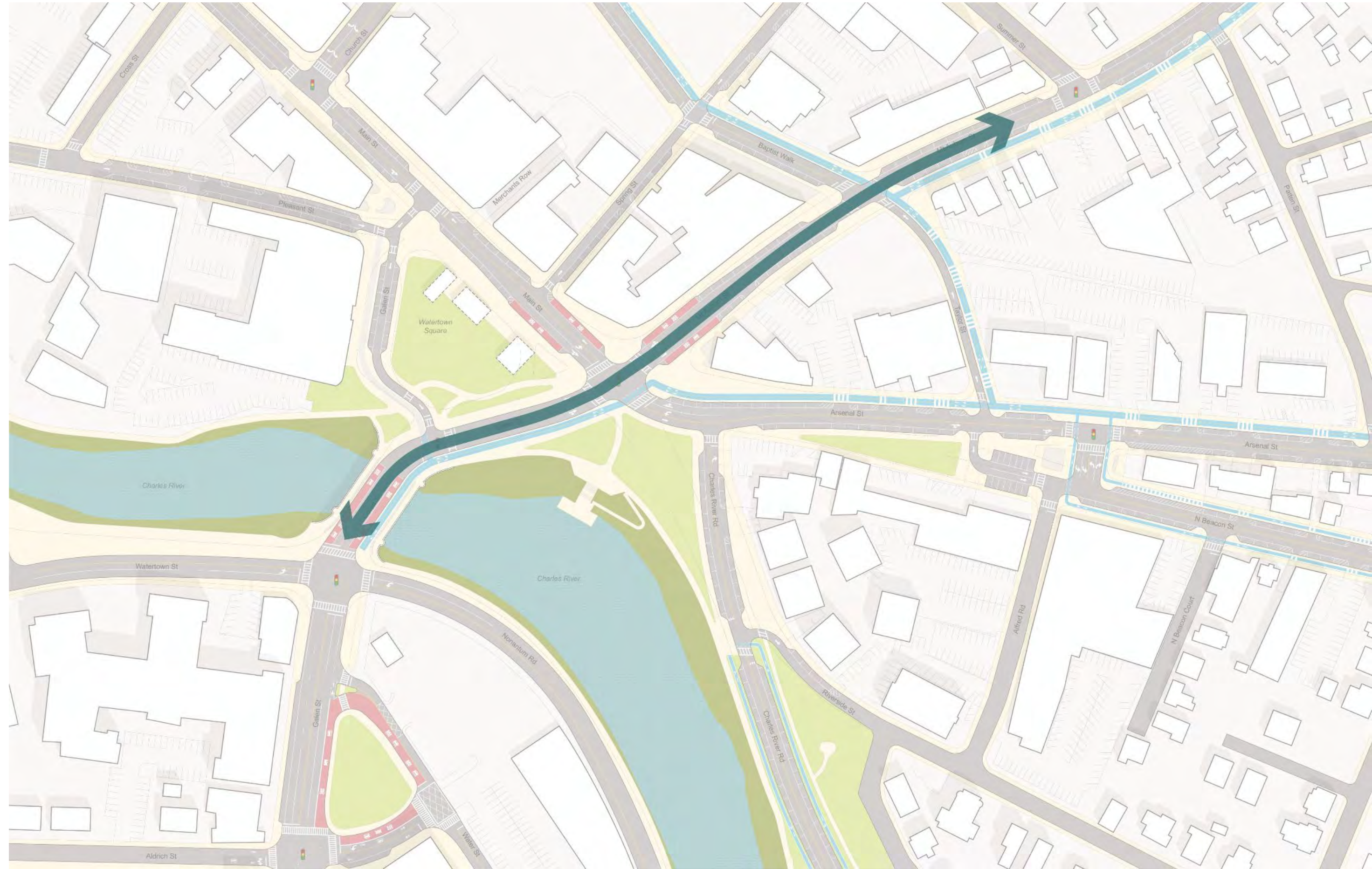
4 Corners

East/West Connections



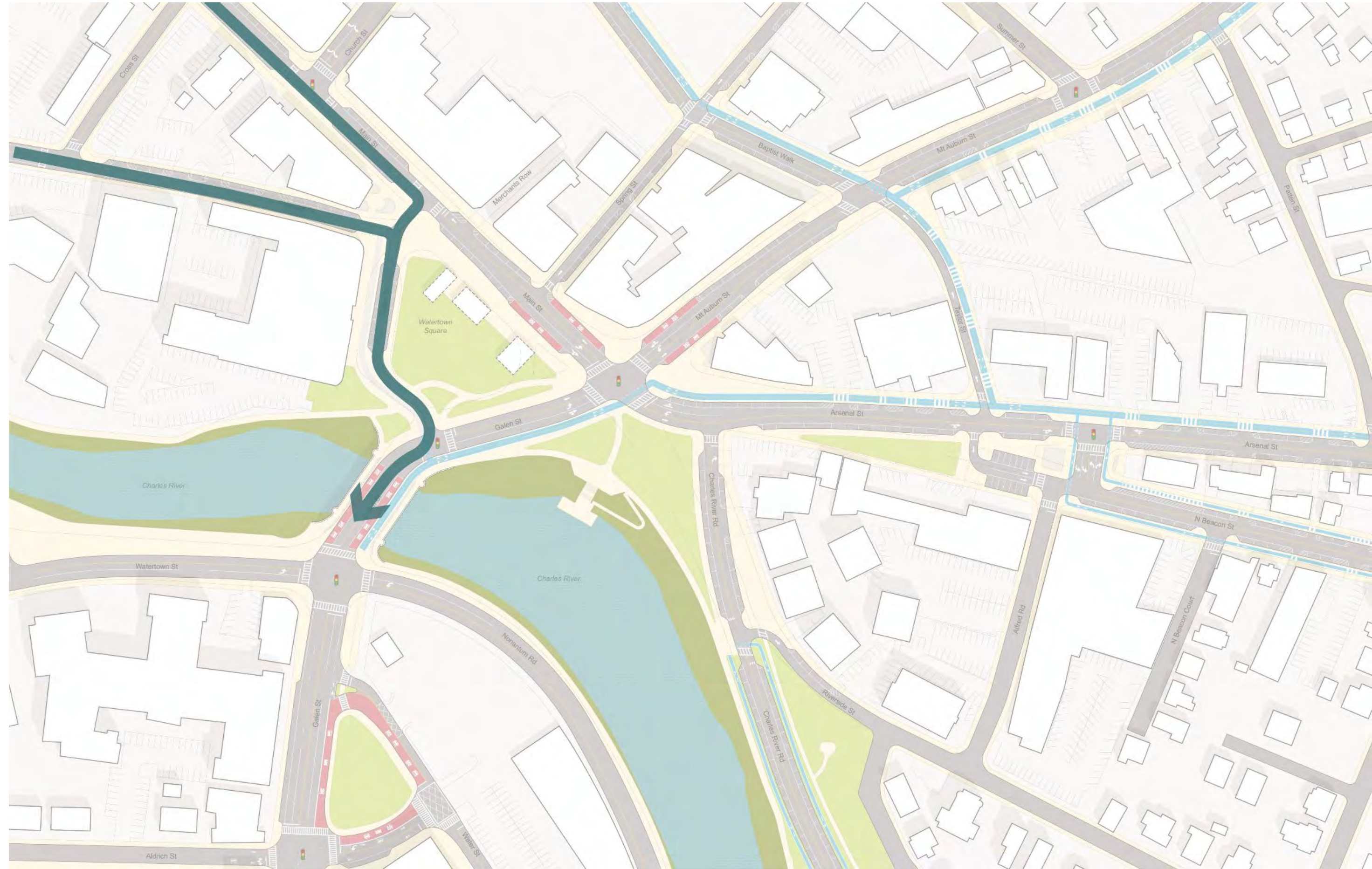
4 Corners

North/South Connections



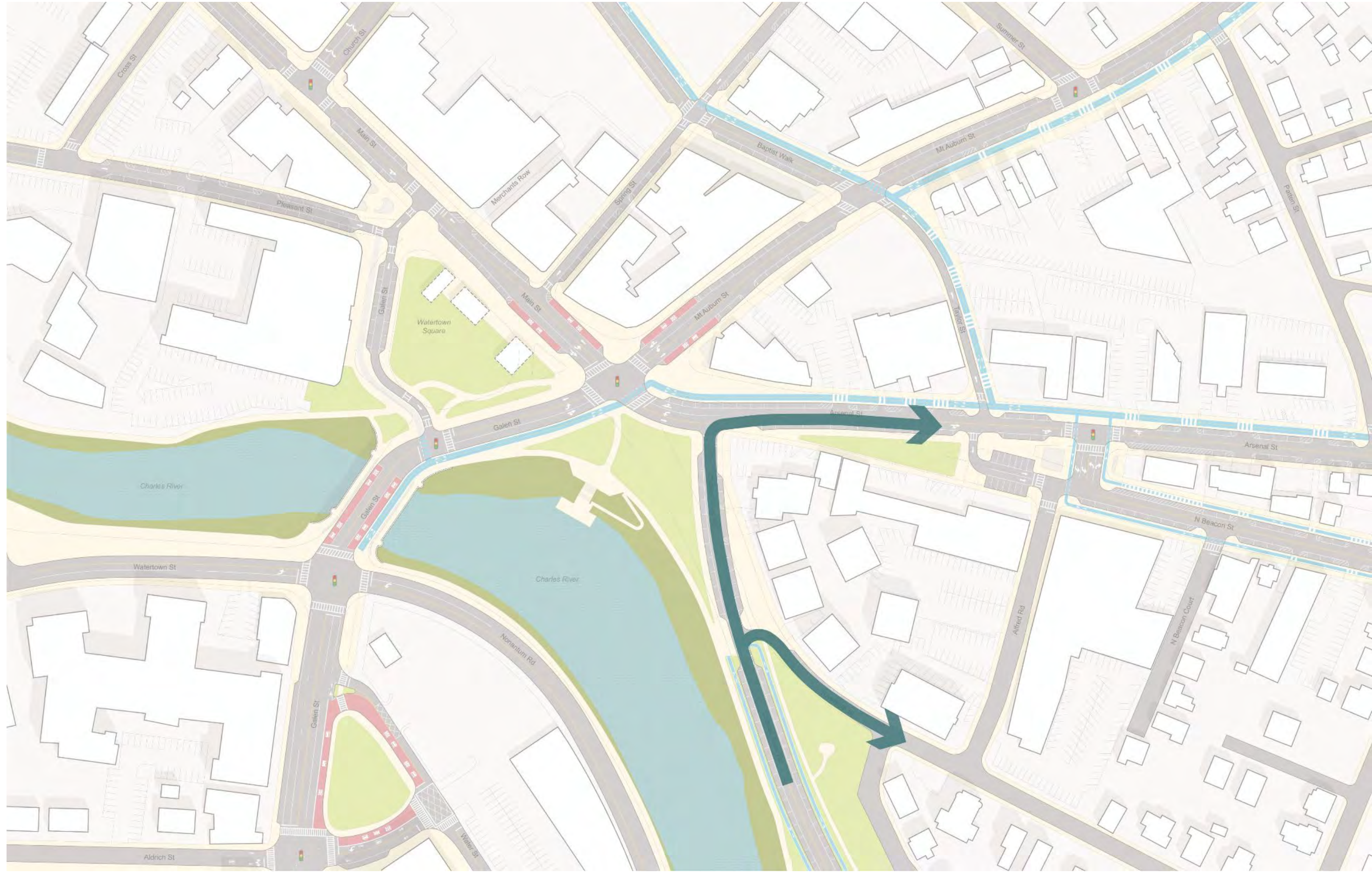
4 Corners

North/South Connections



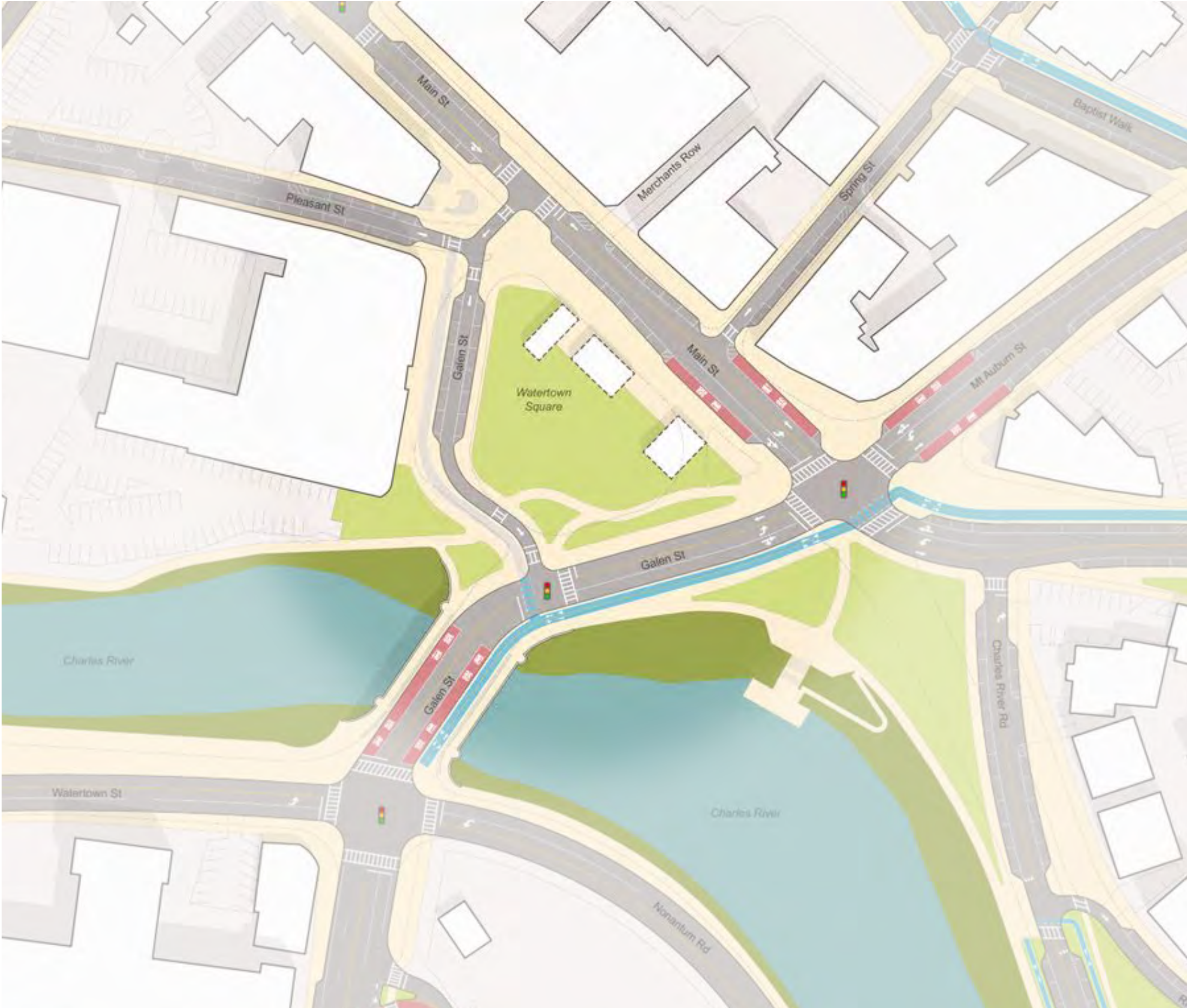
4 Corners

Charles River Road



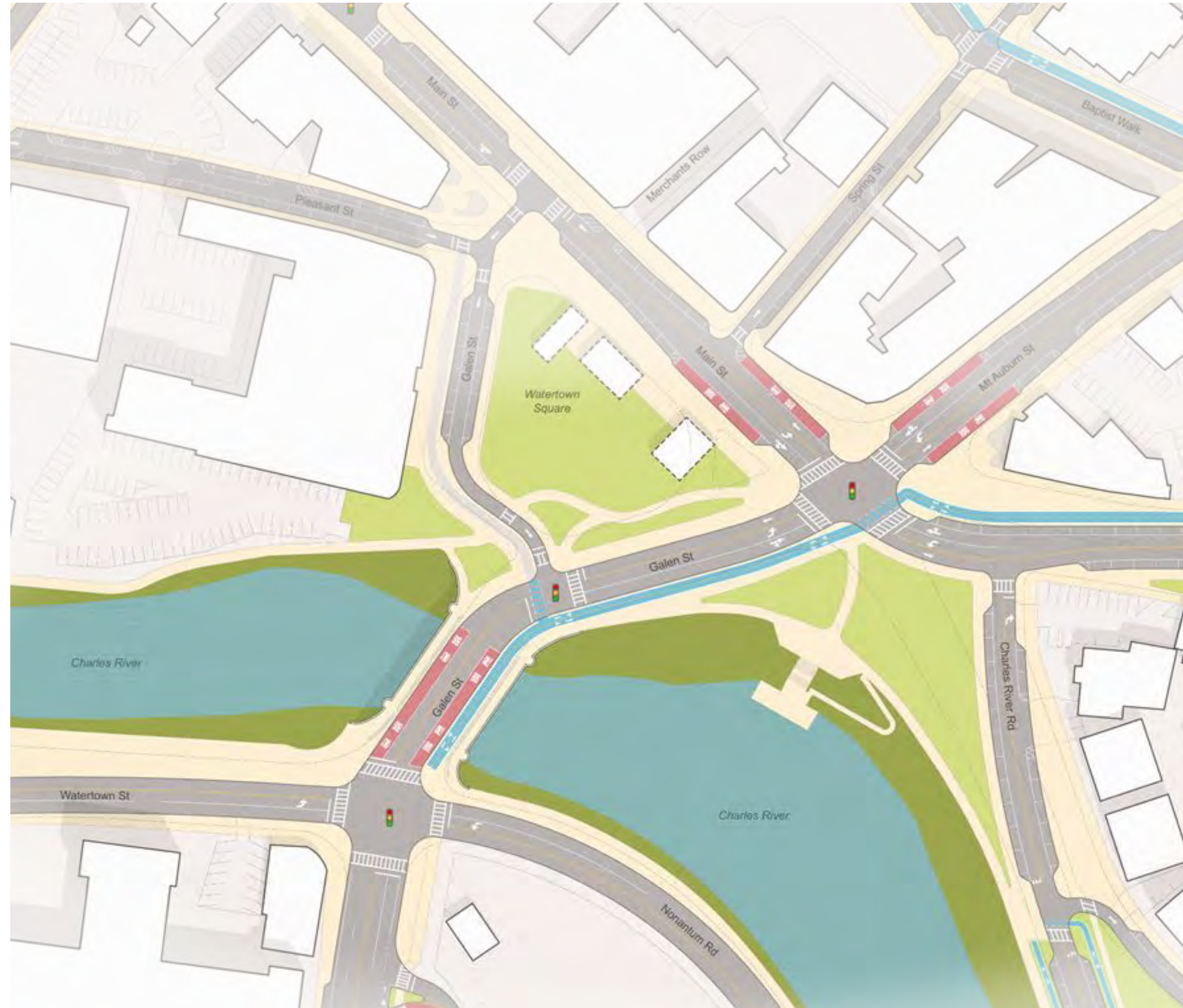
4 Corners

Expanded Delta



4 Corners

River Connections



Mini Main Street



Mini Main Street



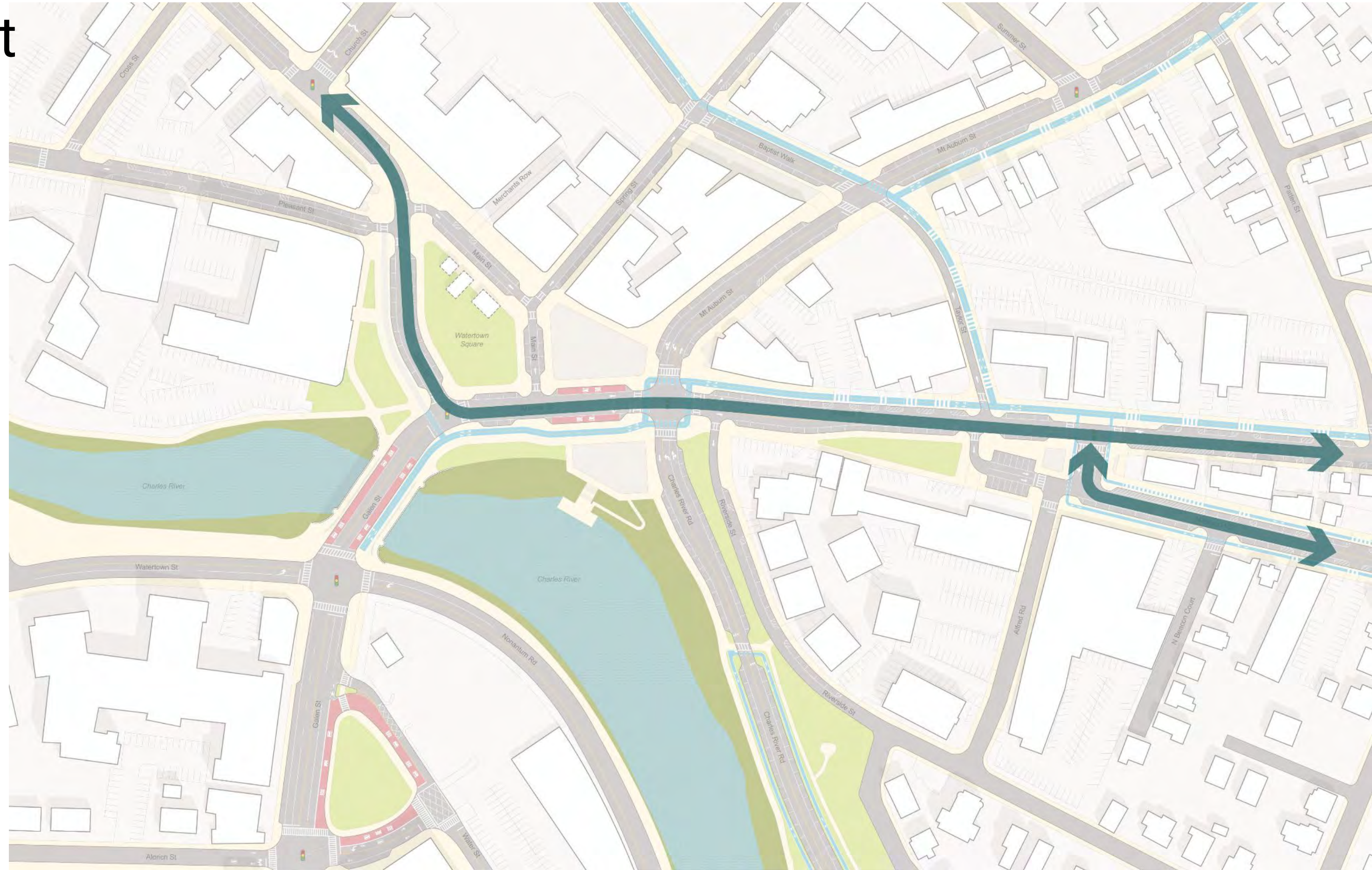
Mini Main Street

New Main Street



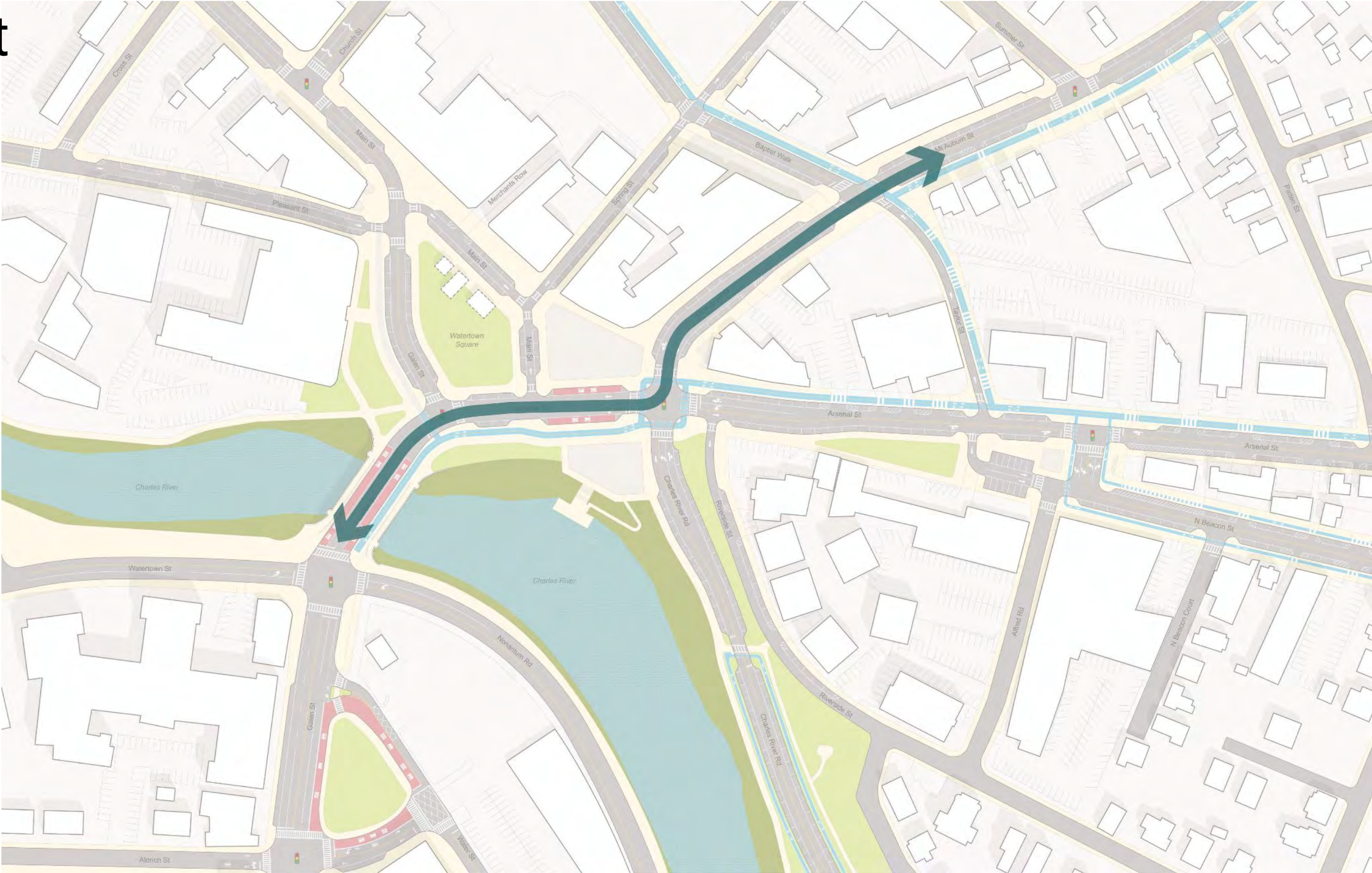
Mini Main Street

East/West Connections



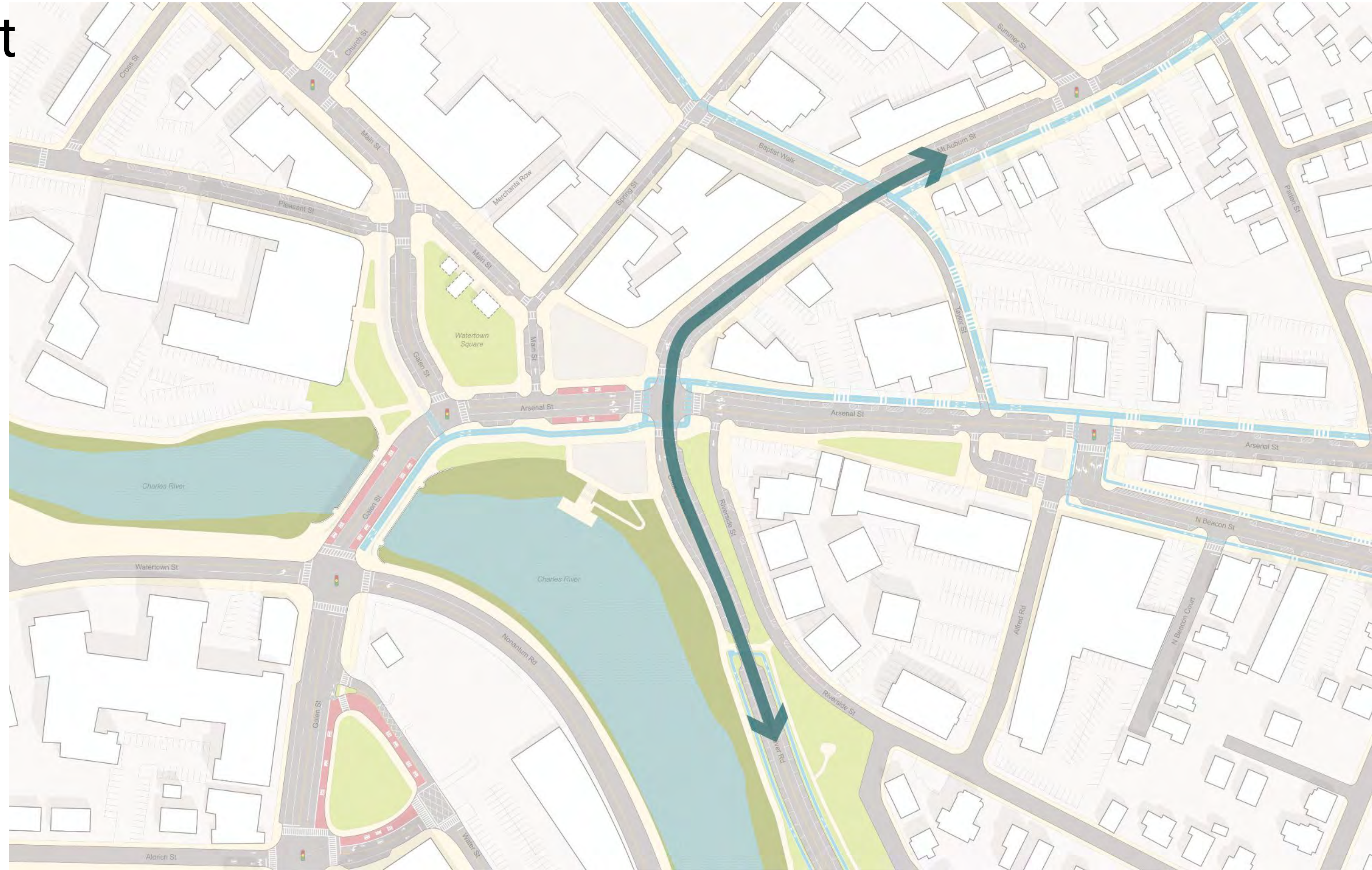
Mini Main Street

North/South Connections



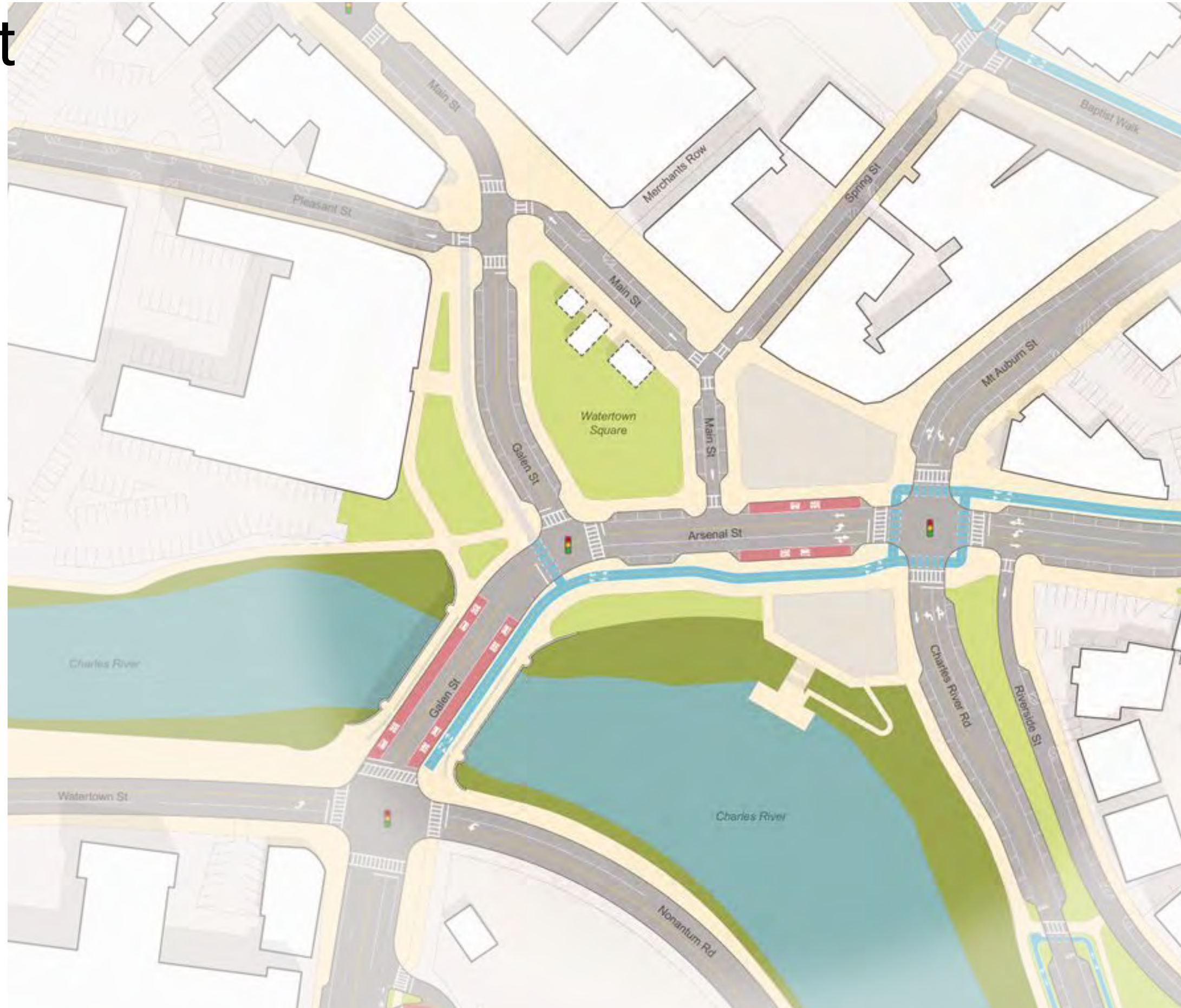
Mini Main Street

Charles River Road



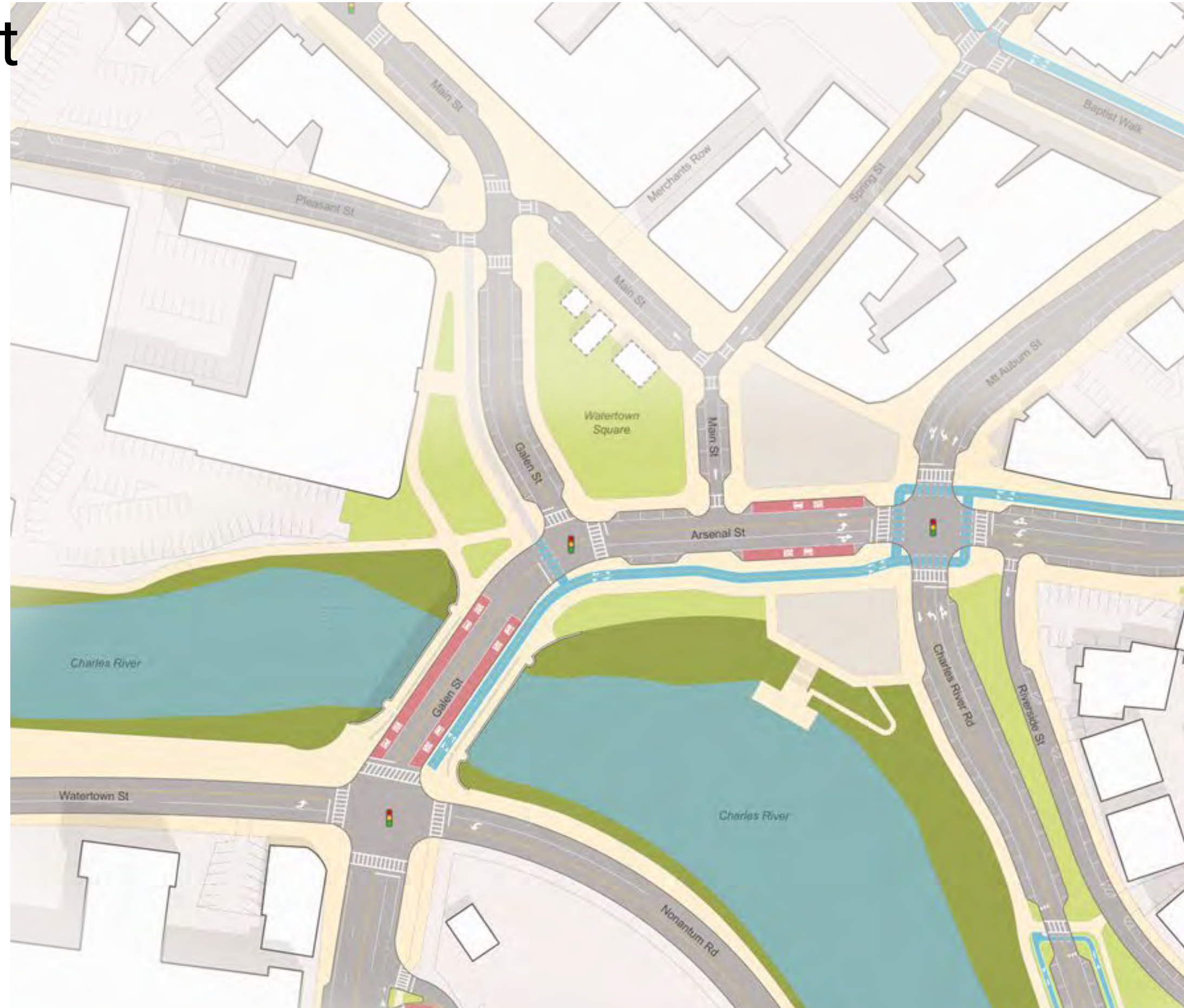
Mini Main Street

New Plazas



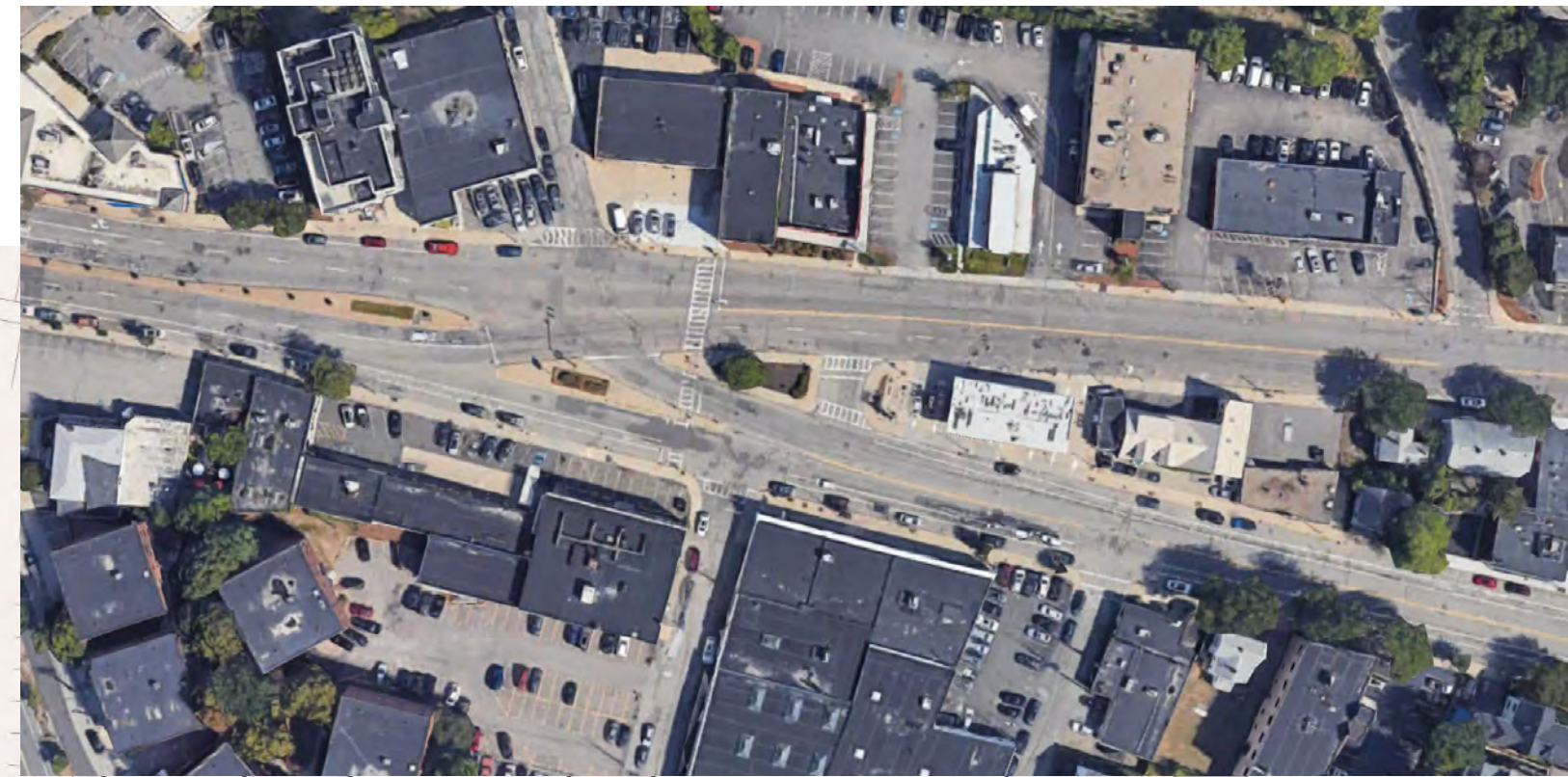
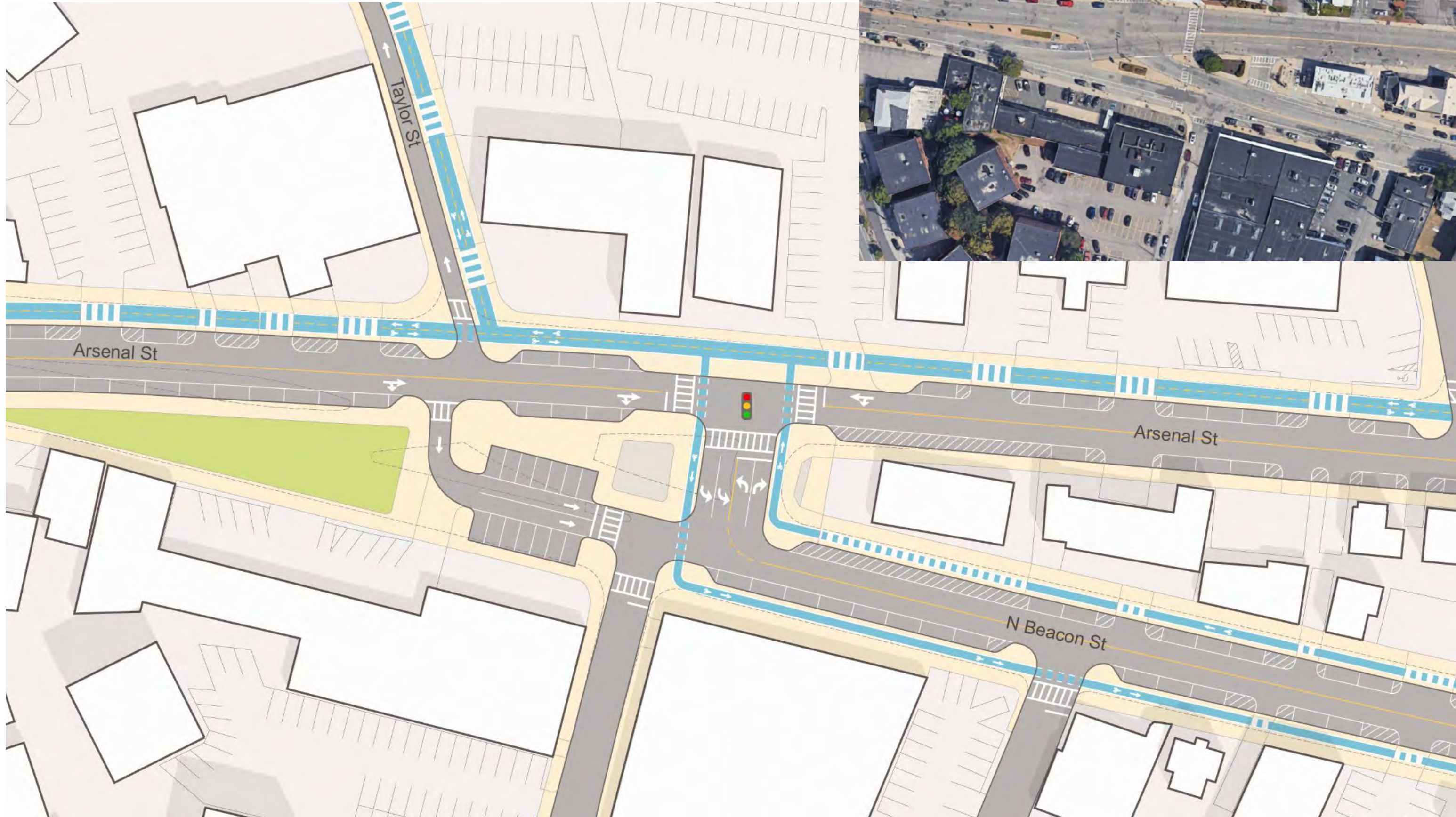
Mini Main Street

River Connections



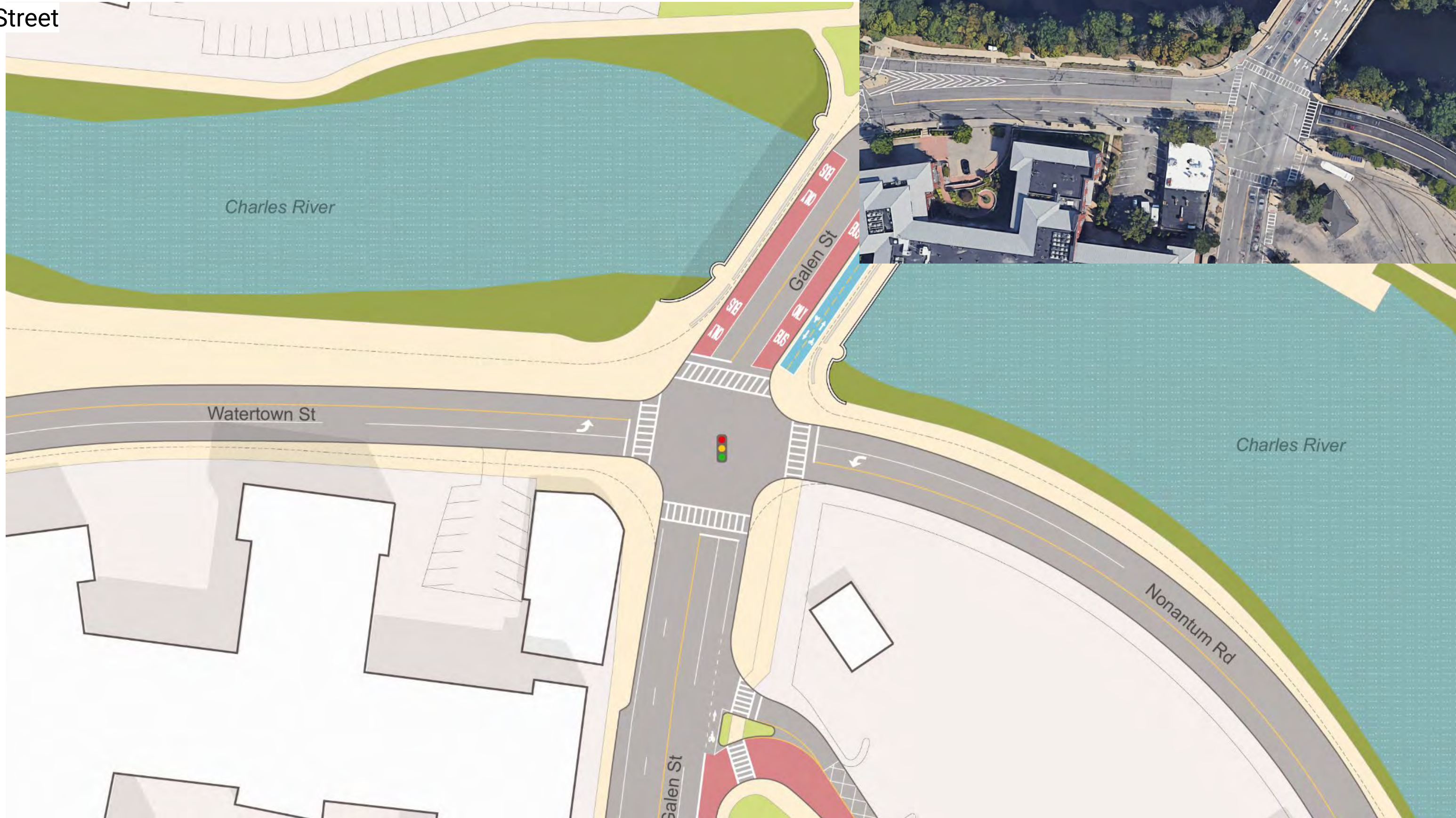
Common Elements

The Wedge



Common Elements

Watertown Street



Curbside Use

Four Corners



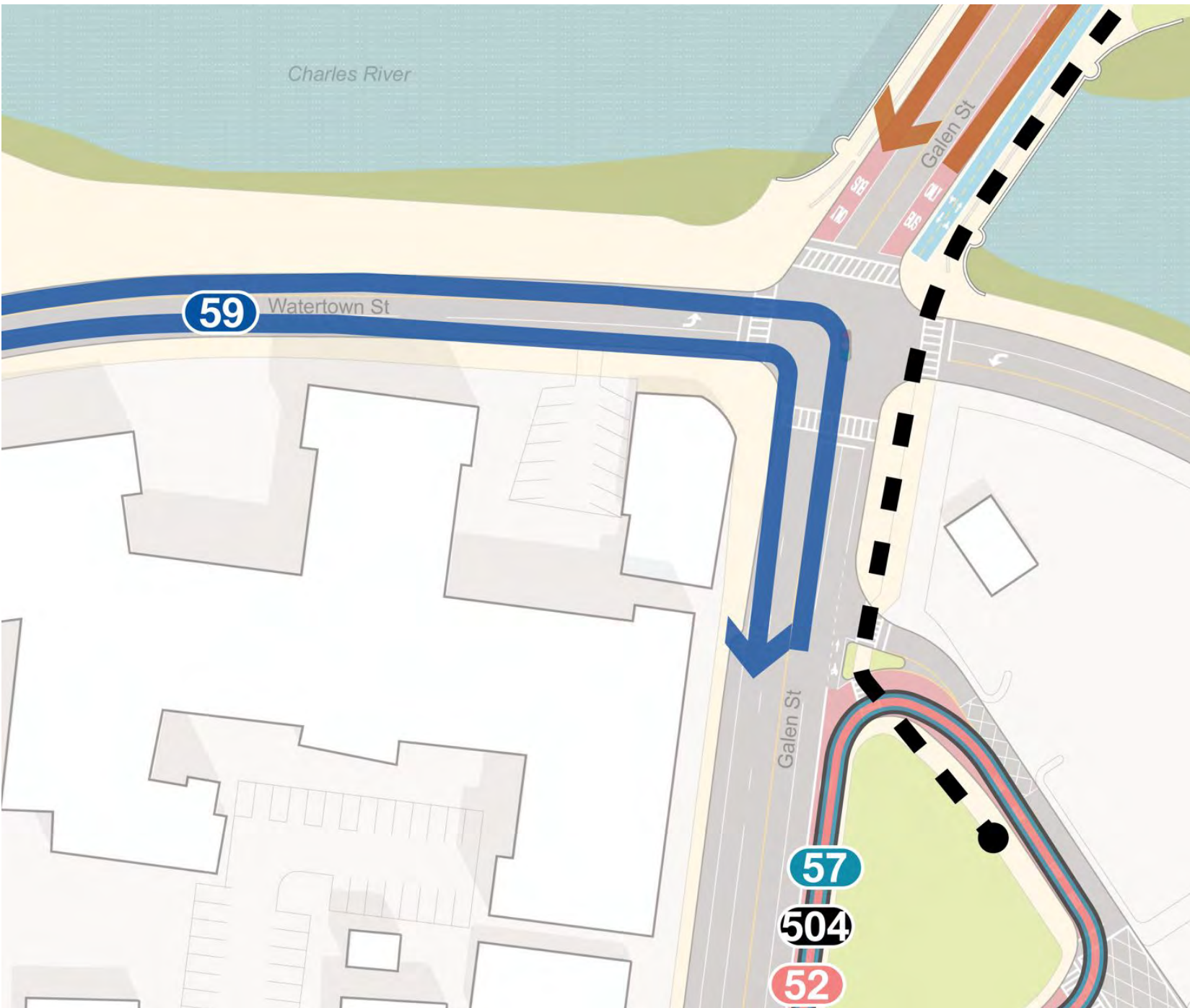
Mini Main Street



Bus Relocation

Terminate Routes 59 and 71 at Watertown Yard with Routes 57, 504, and 52

Bus priority on Galen Street Bridge

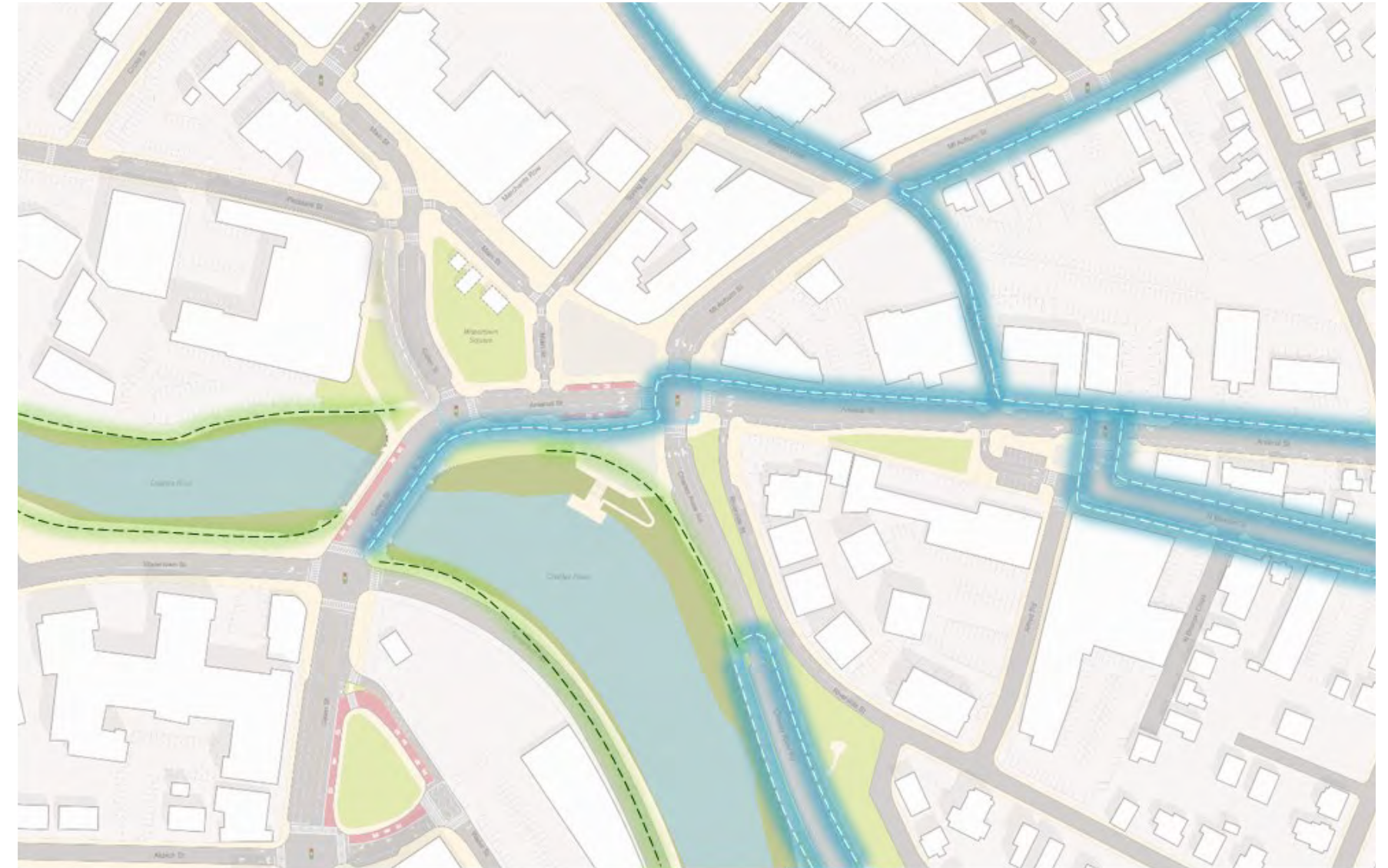


Bicycle Connections

Four Corners

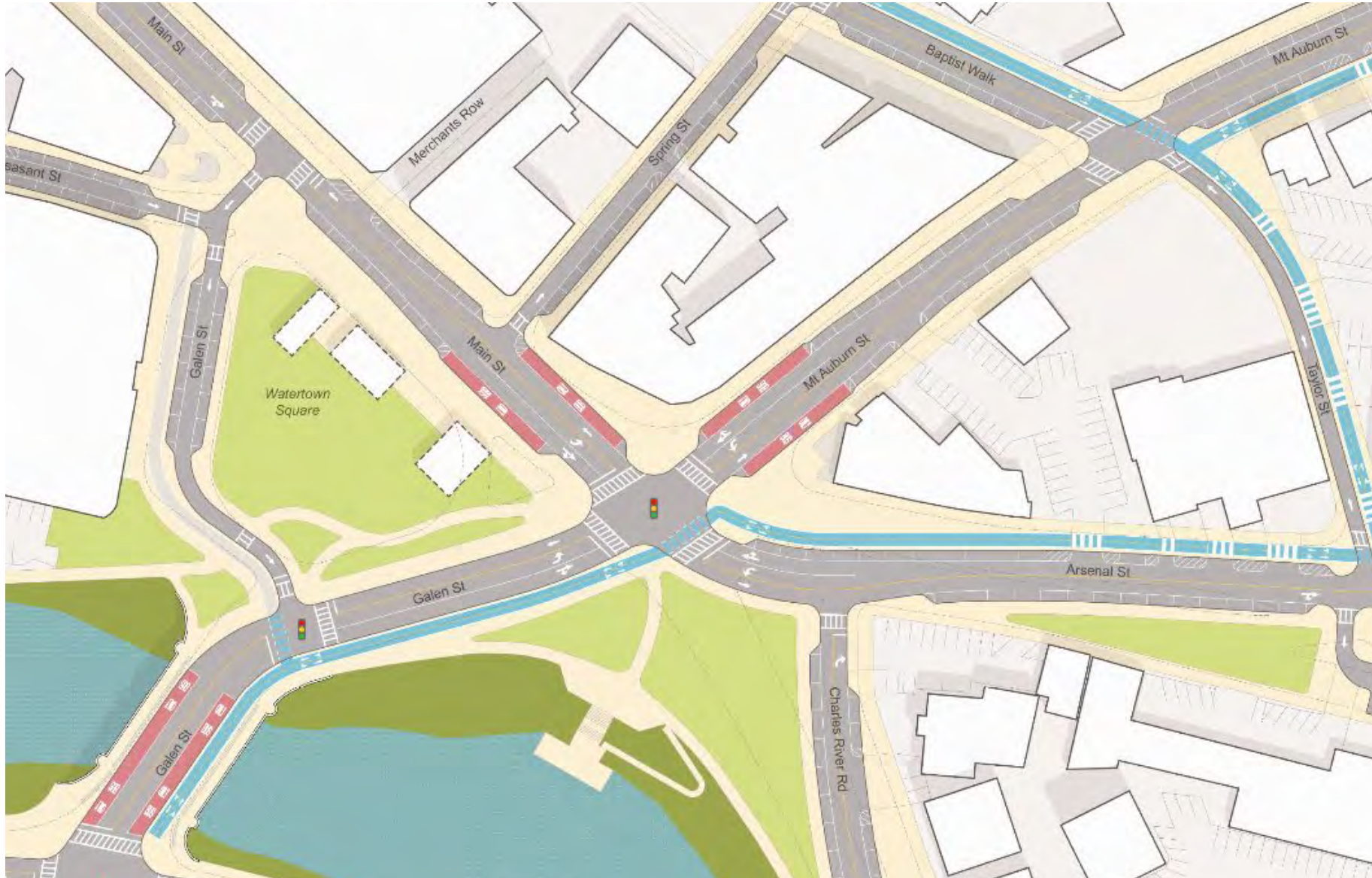


Mini Main Street



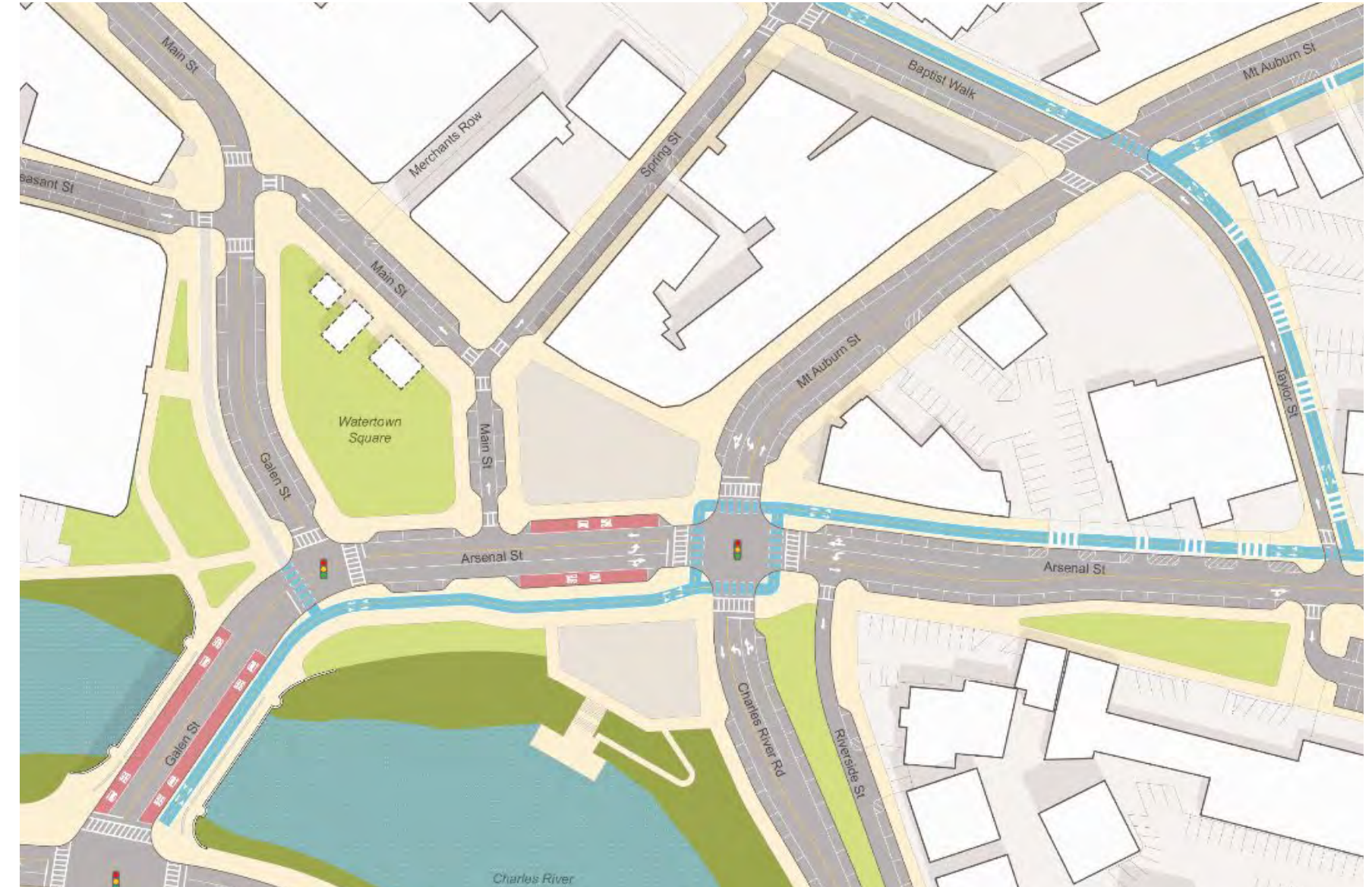
Scenario Comparison

Summary



Four Corners

- Expanded Delta
- Pleasant Street/Main Street Right to Galen Street Extension
- 4-way intersection
- Charles River Road vehicles rerouted



Mini-Main Street

- More plaza areas
- Calmed, local serving Main Street
- Mount Auburn Street/Charles River Road Connection
- Main Street diversion through Square

slido



Which scheme would you like to see the design team develop further?