

2021

Dedham Town Green



Dedham Square Planning Committee,
Economic Development, and Planning & Zoning
Town of Dedham
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DEDHAM TOWN GREEN: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dedham Square Planning Committee (DSPC) is pleased to provide this report to the Select Board and the Dedham community. The work in this report represents extensive research, detailed financial and real estate analysis, and two years of Committee meetings, focus groups, and community events. The Executive Summary provides a high-level overview; detailed background information and rationale appear in the body of the report itself. Wherever possible, hyperlinks will take the reader to a detailed explanation of the topic.

The Opportunity of a Lifetime

On or about October 2022, the Dedham Police Department is scheduled to move from 600 High Street to a new Public Safety Building at 26 Bryant Street. 600 High Street sits at the main intersection of Dedham Square in the Central Business Zoning District. It is within a short walk to civic resources such as Dedham’s Town Hall & Senior Center and Public Library; cultural assets such as the Dedham Historical Society and Museum; Norfolk County resources such as the Registry of Deeds and Superior Court; more than 150 small businesses, and hundreds of residential homes and apartments. More than a thousand people are employed in the immediate area and thousands more come to the district each week to visit shops, restaurants, recreational facilities, professional and personal service establishments, and conduct business at Town and County buildings.

Upon the departure of the Police Department, Dedham is provided with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a half-acre Town Green (about the size of Needham’s) in the center of Town, and at the heart of its local economy. Unlike surrounding communities, Dedham’s downtown area evolved over centuries without a central public green space. In most New England towns, a central public green space provides a hub for civic and economic activity. Public green spaces strengthen community ties by providing gathering space and increasing personal connections. They also create tremendous economic benefits, supporting the local businesses that are an important engine of a thriving economy. Dedham now has the good fortune to create a vibrant public space that will foster community interaction and promote economic development. The Town Green is a public improvement project which will benefit residents and visitors for generations to come.

Summary of Findings

Financial analysis revealed that selling 600 High Street would offer fewer benefits than keeping it. The most likely private development scenario would be a mixed-use building with retail on the ground floor below three stories of apartments. The building is in significant disrepair and contains asbestos; analysis showed selling the property would likely raise no more than \$750,000 and the expected yearly property tax income would be \$70,000 at most. The low financial benefit to the Town, combined with the intangible cost of losing Town control of a key downtown corner, led the DSPC to strongly recommend keeping ownership of the land.

The DSPC examined three alternatives for keeping the parcel: repurposing the buildings for community or commercial use; demolishing the buildings to create a surface parking lot; and demolishing the buildings to create a Town Green. Analysis showed that creating a Town Green will reap many more benefits than the other options by every metric – economic, community, and environmental. Keeping the

buildings would mean costly renovations, and there was not a clear civic use for the buildings. A parking lot at this location would increase traffic congestion and confusion at a busy intersection that is already perceived as unsafe and unpleasant.

On the other hand, creating a Town Green would create long-term economic benefits by raising nearby commercial property values (and tax revenue) as well as increasing foot traffic in support of local small businesses, including restaurants that generate meals-tax revenue for the Robin Reyes Fund. In addition, a Dedham Town Green establishes a civic gathering space for all of Dedham and a green respite from the pavement and concrete of a built-up area. Public input at meetings about this space was overwhelmingly in favor of creating more green space in the downtown area. This is consistent with survey results from many recent planning efforts including the 2020 Mixed Use Study and the 2017 Parks and Recreation and Open Space plan. After a public meeting with 170+ members of the community, the DSPC voted in March of 2021 to pursue a Town Green.

The DSPC then engaged an urban designer to help analyze site conditions and the feasibility of public green space to understand cost implications. The Committee and designer, with guidance from staff, held an extensive engagement process in the spring and summer of 2021 with ten community meetings, in-person and virtual. The resulting design concept is ADA accessible and includes flexible space for community activities, an interactive water feature, a community "front porch," public art, significant pedestrian safety improvements, and linkages to the existing open space network. Careful consideration was given to the wide range of potential users to ensure that the park would be enjoyed by all Dedham residents.



The project's combination of economic and environmental benefits make it well suited for outside funding, particularly given current priorities around Covid-19 economic recovery, infrastructure improvement, and climate change preparedness. The estimated cost of this project to the average Dedham household would be about \$9/year. This reflects anticipated federal, state, and private funding of \$2 million and an estimated net Town investment of \$2.3 million. The total cost to demolish the existing police station and build the Town Green, as pictured above, is \$4.3 million. For a breakdown of costs and a description of potential funding sources, please see [Cost Estimates & Funding Sources](#).

Given the parcel's location in Dedham Square, any change of use would raise questions about traffic and parking. A Town Green would not generate additional traffic or parking demand, particularly compared to an active police station or other potential redevelopment scenarios. The report contains a full project overview, explanation of the process, and findings.

Dedham can create a vibrant Dedham Town Green that will encourage economic activity, add green space, and provide a gathering place for residents of all ages for an opportunity for an approximate investment of \$2.3M by the Town.