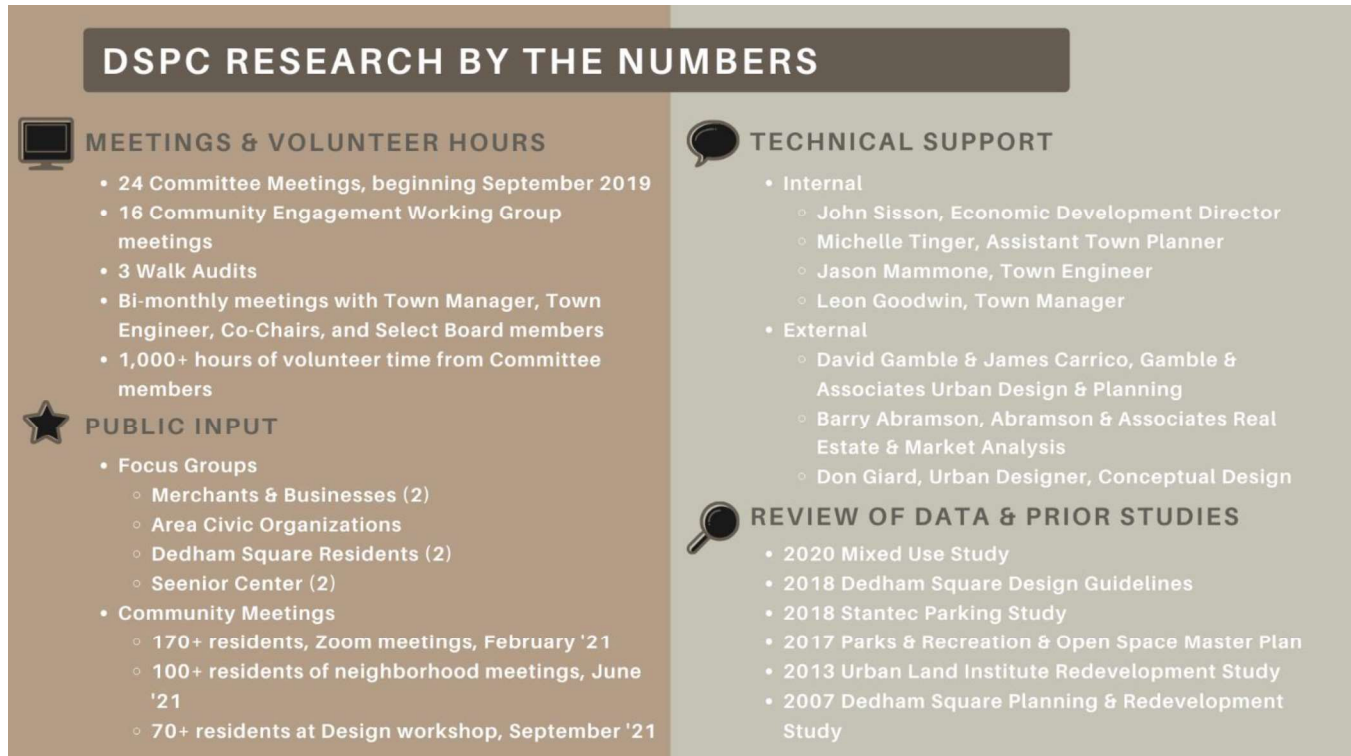


## Analysis and Investigation

The Dedham Square Planning Committee engaged in extensive research, with technical assistance from planners, real estate finance analysts, and urban designers. This report represents the work of over a thousand hours of volunteer time by committee members representing every precinct in Dedham, as well as significant support from Town staff across multiple departments.



## Architectural & Economic Impacts Analysis

The goal of this examination was to provide the Select Board and Town Meeting with recommendations about potential future uses for these properties. The study was budgeted at \$50,000 and was funded by \$20,000 of the original appropriation from Town Meeting as well as \$30,000 of Economic Development funds. The consulting team that was hired was Gamble Associates and Abramson & Associates. Gamble Associates is an urban design and planning firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts that focuses on community redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization, and helped Dedham create the Dedham Square Design Guidelines in 2018. Abramson & Associates is a real estate advisory firm that specializes in real estate market and financial evaluations, with a specialty in public-private partnerships.

The objective of this analysis was to develop a strategic plan and property analysis for two municipally owned parcels that are instrumental to downtown's development, the Police Station lot at 600 High Street and the Keystone Lot at the corner of High Street and Eastern Avenue. The consulting team evaluated possible development scenarios for both of the sites to understand how each could be used and what the market would be for different uses (such as office, retail, or housing). The analysis included financial *pro formas* to understand relative costs and potential income from each scenario, both short- and long-term. Abramson & Associates' full technical report can be found on the town website at <https://www.dedham-ma.gov/home/showdocument?id=15560&t=637600536450134778>.

The DSPC worked with the consulting team to generate ideas on potential transformations of the sites in the coming decades; evaluate the viability of each scenario; and weigh the long-term economic, fiscal, and civic benefits of each site stated above. After evaluation, the Committee decided some scenarios, such as creating a parking lot at 600 High Street or selling the property, would provide significantly fewer financial, civic, and environmental benefits than other development options. The consulting team presented the findings regarding both sites at a forum with local merchants in December 2020 and at a combined meeting of the Select Board and Planning Board in January 2021.

Based on input from the Select Board and Planning Board, the Committee decided to focus on one property at a time and zeroed in on the 600 High Street parcel. In February 2021, the DSPC hosted a large community meeting to share the results of the study. Given Covid-19 safety precautions, this meeting was held via zoom with over 170 people in attendance. After hearing overwhelming support from the public to create a town Green, the Committee voted unanimously in March to recommend that the Town retain ownership of the site, demolish the existing buildings, and create a park on this key parcel in Dedham's town center.

### Conceptual Design Phase

To understand what it would cost the town to transform 600 High Street into a Town Green, the DSPC engaged in an intensive process to understand how the space could be programmed and what elements would fit. After hearing a wide range of suggestions from residents about desired park features, this was an important exercise to "pressure test" what elements were viable and what they would cost. The Town engaged urban designer Don Giard to work with the Committee on-site analysis, community visioning, understanding what was feasible, creating landscape design concepts, and generating a cost estimate. This work was budgeted at \$25,000. With the Town Manager's approval and following State procurement procedures, the conceptual design and cost estimate work was funded through the professional services budget of the Engineering Department.

Over the Spring and Summer of 2021, the Committee hosted a series of workshops to help create a community vision for this space. Many of these were in person, including two held with the Senior Center and others for the broader community held at the Endicott Estate, Mother Brook Arts & Community Center, and Town Hall. Specialized workshops were offered for local businesses, a Girl Scouts Troop, and nearby residents, respectively. The DSPC also offered an interactive Zoom workshop which was well attended. A full account of community engagement on this project can be found in the [Community Engagement Summary](#). At these workshops, community members expressed ideas about park elements, reacted to images of different styles and features, and gave important input about how they would use a town green. Staff, Committee members, and Giard documented residents' preferences through the course of these public engagements.

Design goals expressed by the community included:

- Creating a balance of hardscape (masonry) and softer, landscaped areas.
- Ensuring flexibility of the space to accommodate different functions: games, events, exhibits, gatherings, and concerts.
- Creating a buffer between the busy streets and the park area.
- Incorporating plants and trees to add shade and seasonal interest while reducing the impervious surface area.

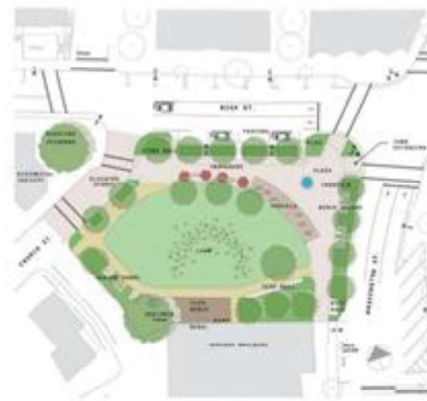
- Including different types of seating areas for people to gather, sit, eat, play, or relax.
- Creating different interior spaces that can engage people of all ages.
- Making improvements to pedestrian safety and reducing traffic noise and speeds in the area.
- Using sustainable designs to incorporate features such as a rain garden, solar collection, native plantings, etc.

In response to this feedback, and based on extensive site analysis, Designer Giard developed three possible scenarios for the DSPC and the public to react to, pictured below.

### CONCEPT A THE COMMUNITY PORCH



### CONCEPT B THE CRESCENT



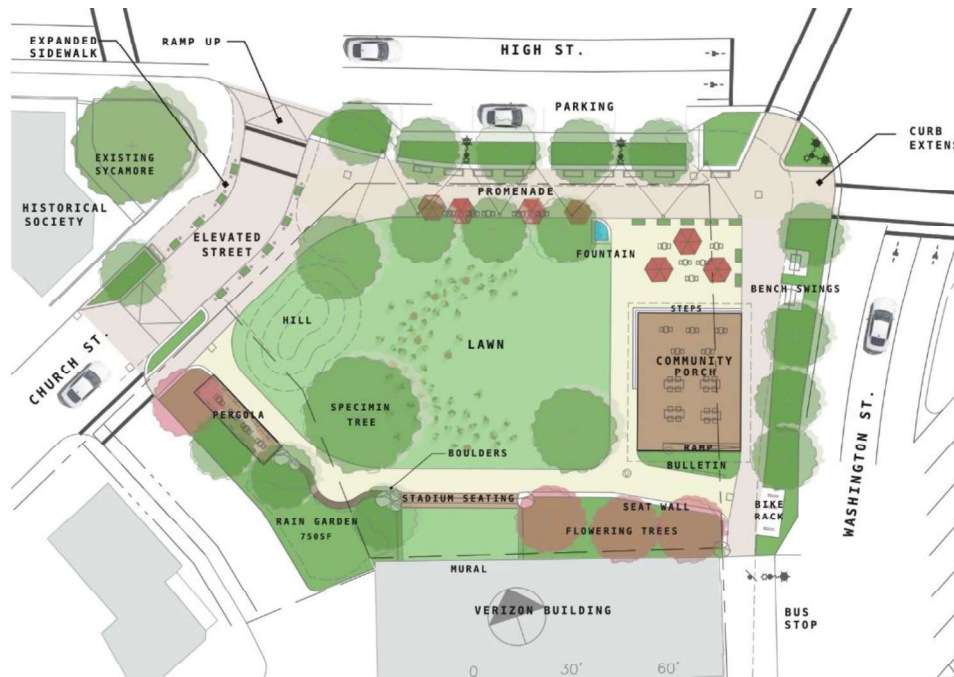
### CONCEPT C THE SQUARE



All three “Town Green” concepts included some of the same design elements:

- Substantial lawn and plaza areas;
- Different types of outdoor seating, including some with tables;
- Public pavilion and/or flexible stage area;
- Water feature;
- Raised surface level of Church Street to improve pedestrian safety and discourage cut-throughs;
- Reduced vehicular lane widths and curb bump-outs;
- Parallel parking replacing angled parking on High Street; and
- Elements such as historical displays, ornamental lighting, bike racks, and a drinking fountain.

In September of 2021, the DSPC presented these three concepts to the Community at a virtual public forum called *Hey Dedham. What's next for 600 High Street?* At the forum, DSPC members facilitated breakout sessions to get input on the merits and drawbacks of each of the designs. Giard incorporated this community feedback into a final conceptual design that combined the most popular features of the three drafts previously presented.



The DSPC decided to use this revised concept as the basis for creating a cost estimate. That approach ensured the estimate would test out the cost of each of the main elements, with the goal of giving the Select Board a full set of information to make decisions about features and budget. Mr. Giard engaged a professional architectural construction cost estimator, Estimatica Cost Estimating, to generate a detailed cost estimate. The cost estimate is comprehensive and inclusive, including design and construction contingencies, escalation, appropriate public construction wage rates, and full design details on critical components like the pavilion, hardscape, benches, and lighting. More information on the cost estimate can be found in the [Cost Estimates & Funding Sources](#) section, the full cost estimate is in [Appendix C: Town Green Cost Estimate](#).

### Community Engagement

The historical context in which the DSPC has operated is worth noting. Covid-19 safety protocols changed meeting patterns during the scope of the project. Despite the restrictions and conditions, the Committee led an intensive public engagement process to best inform design options, obtain desired park elements, and determine potential costs for development. This process started with a virtual community meeting in February 2021, *Help Reimagine Our Downtown*, by Gamble & Associates. Later in the year, during the Summer of 2021, the Committee held several public meetings, in-person and virtual, prior to Mr. Giard developing any design concepts and found that virtual public events resulted in robust attendance.

- June
  - Co-hosted 2 meetings with the Dedham Senior Center
  - Public meetings at:
    - Town Hall
    - Endicott Estate

- Mother Brook Arts and Community Center
    - Via Zoom
  - Co-hosted a meeting at the Dedham Historical Society & Museum for residential neighbors
  - Workshop with downtown businesses at Town Hall
  - Workshop with a local Girl Scout Troop
- September
    - *Hey, Dedham. What's Next for 600 High Street?*

The purpose of holding meetings throughout various locations in Town and via Zoom was to ensure the use of multiple methods that would allow the Committee to reach a large number of diverse residents and stakeholders of Dedham. On top of these community meetings, the Committee continued to meet on a monthly basis, and even bi-weekly for those that were involved in the Outreach Working Group.

At in-person and virtual workshops, members of the public could “vote” by placing stickers on the types of features that appealed to them. This exercise helped Mr. Giard and the DSPC rank the relative importance of different features, prioritizing some and eliminating others. Some elements, like a community porch, were extremely popular and included in the conceptual design. Other elements, such as public restrooms and a small cafe, received mixed reviews and were taken off the list of features to include.

Outreach efforts to ensure public participation included:

- flyers posted throughout the area, including at the Post office and Libraries
- postcard mailouts to abutters surrounding 600 High Street
- Dedham Times advertisements
- news articles in the Dedham Times, Dedham Patch, and Town website
- Dedham TV broadcasting
- social media posts on Town’s Facebook Page, Instagram, and Twitter pages
- 1-1 visits to local shops
- hand-delivered invitations to a meeting for residential neighbors
- email blasts to nearly 900 unique email addresses from the Planning & Zoning Department email list
- special invites to precinct officers asking them to forward meeting invitations to town meeting members
- engaging banners at the site itself with interactive components





\*Result of the community engagement efforts combined.

With substantial feedback from the community, Mr. Giard was able to create 3 design concepts that offered approaches that would address the Committee’s design goals. In addition, each concept proposed solutions to address traffic in the area by raising the surface level of Church Street. These three design concepts were then taken to the community during a virtual event in September 2021, *Hey Dedham. What’s Next for 600 High Street?*, where the Committee solicited comments and concerns from the community.