

WATERTOWN SQUARE AREA PLAN

For years, the heart of Watertown, well located between Boston and its western suburbs, has been blighted by cut-through traffic. Its response in the 20th Century was to welcome that traffic by widening its roads, such that almost every approach to Watertown Square is now 5 lanes of asphalt. Residents have come to learn that they will always face congestion at rush hour, but that they can decide how many lanes of it they want.

This discussion has been prompted in part by the MBTA Communities Act, which rewards communities for upzoning properties in proximity to transit hubs like Watertown Square. It became clear that a comprehensive downtown plan—one that integrated a framework for smart growth into a street network reconfiguration—was the best path to transforming the Square back into the walkable commercial center that it once was.

Speck Dempsey teamed up with Utile and Stantec Urban Places to create that plan, dieting and reorganizing the streets, adding curb parking and bike lanes, proposing the shape of new development, and creating a form-based code to welcome more than 3000 new housing units into downtown. Presented with three different street networks and three different density outcomes, an active and vocal population came together to embrace a single solution that Council could support and adopt in short order.

CLIENT
City of Watertown, MA

COLLABORATORS
Utile
Stantec Urban Places

TIMELINE
2023 - 2024

CATEGORY
Streets & Networks

BUDGET
Likely \$ 30 million public investment

SCALE
100 acres

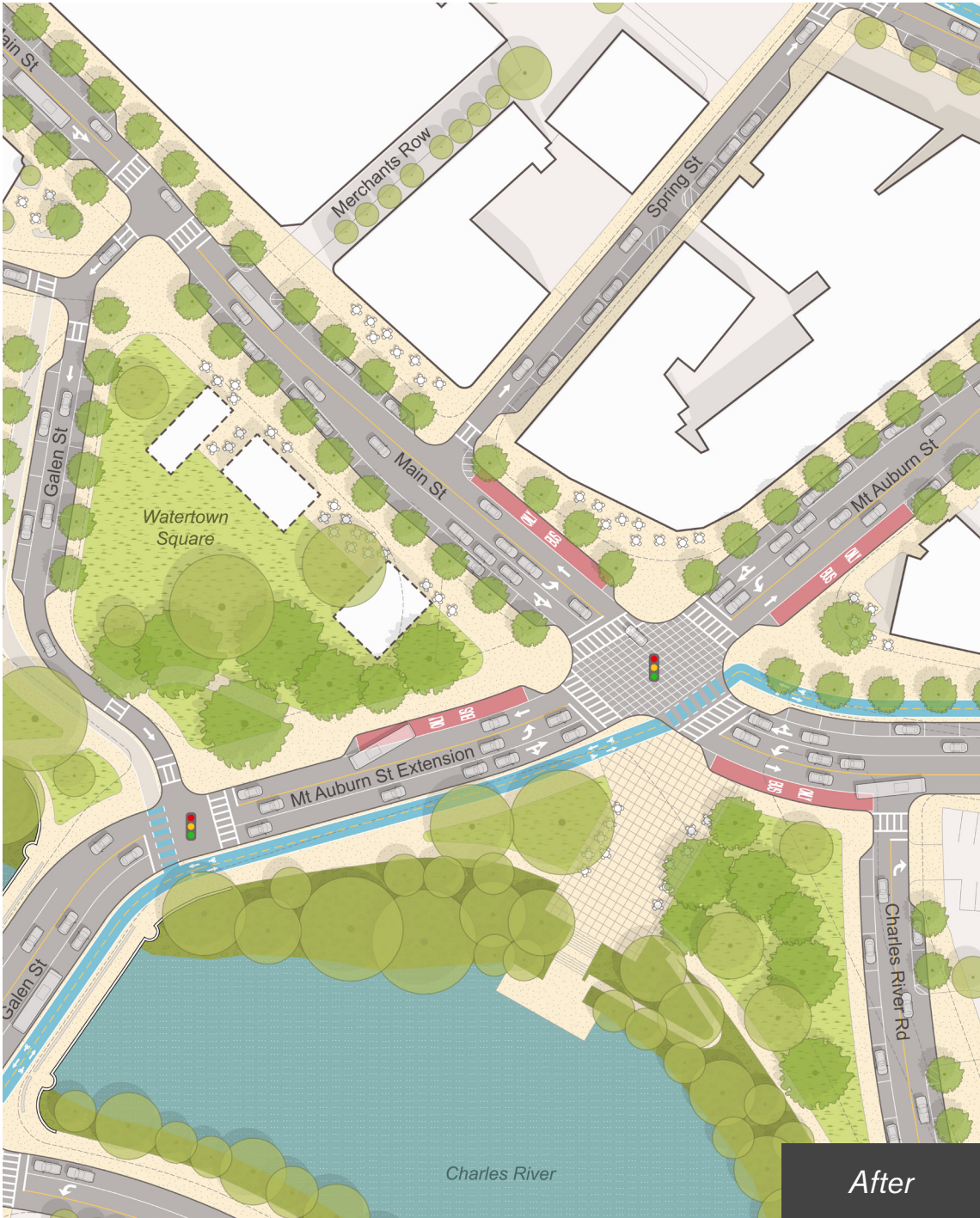
STATUS
Adopted

AWARDS
Congress for the New Urbanism 2024 New England Urbanism Award

REFERENCE
George Proakis, City Manager, gproakis@watertown-ma.gov, 617-388-8459

Watertown, Massachusetts

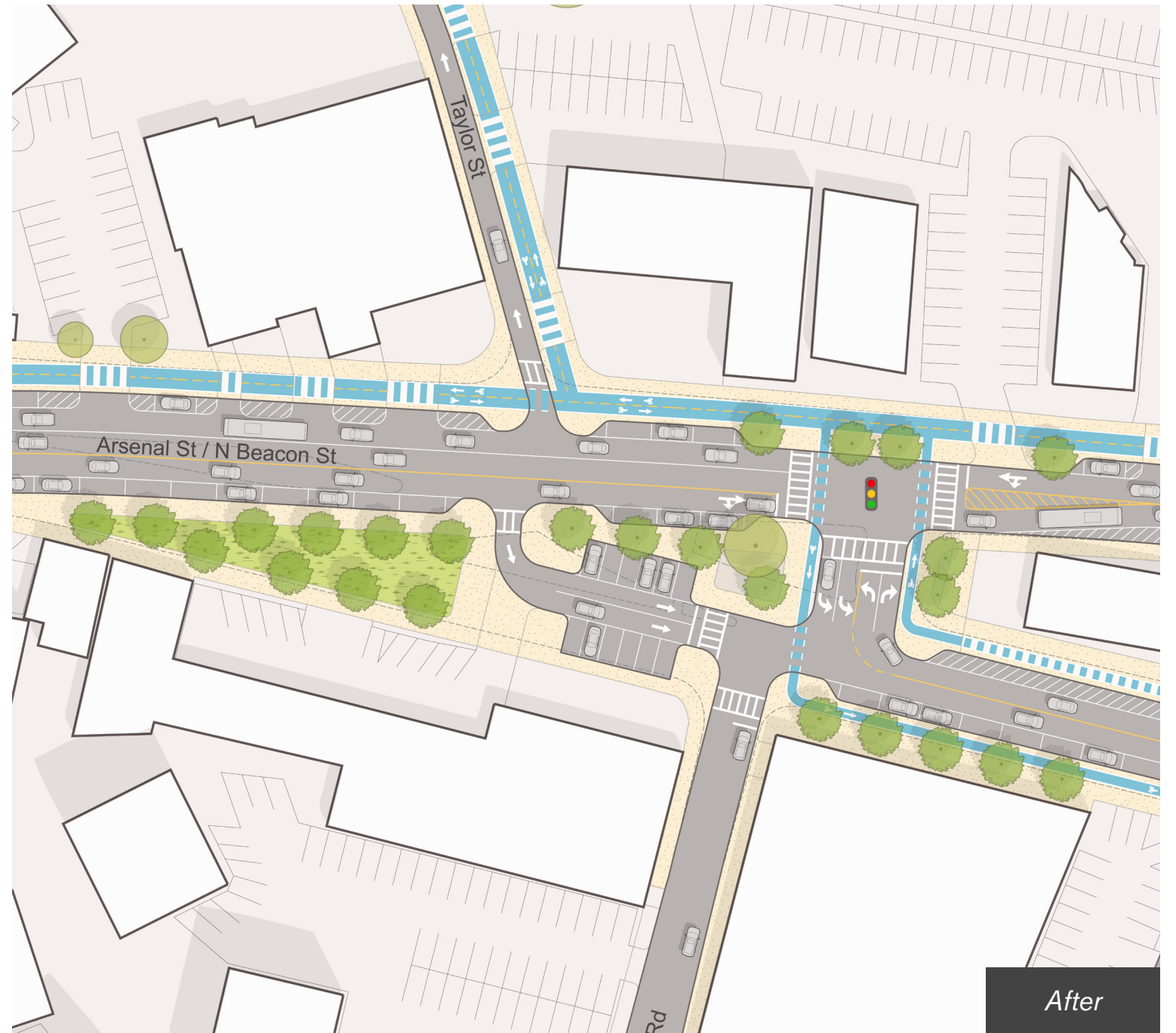
Emboldened by the MBTA Communities Act, a suburban downtown overrun with cut-through traffic redesigns itself around increased housing density and safer streets.



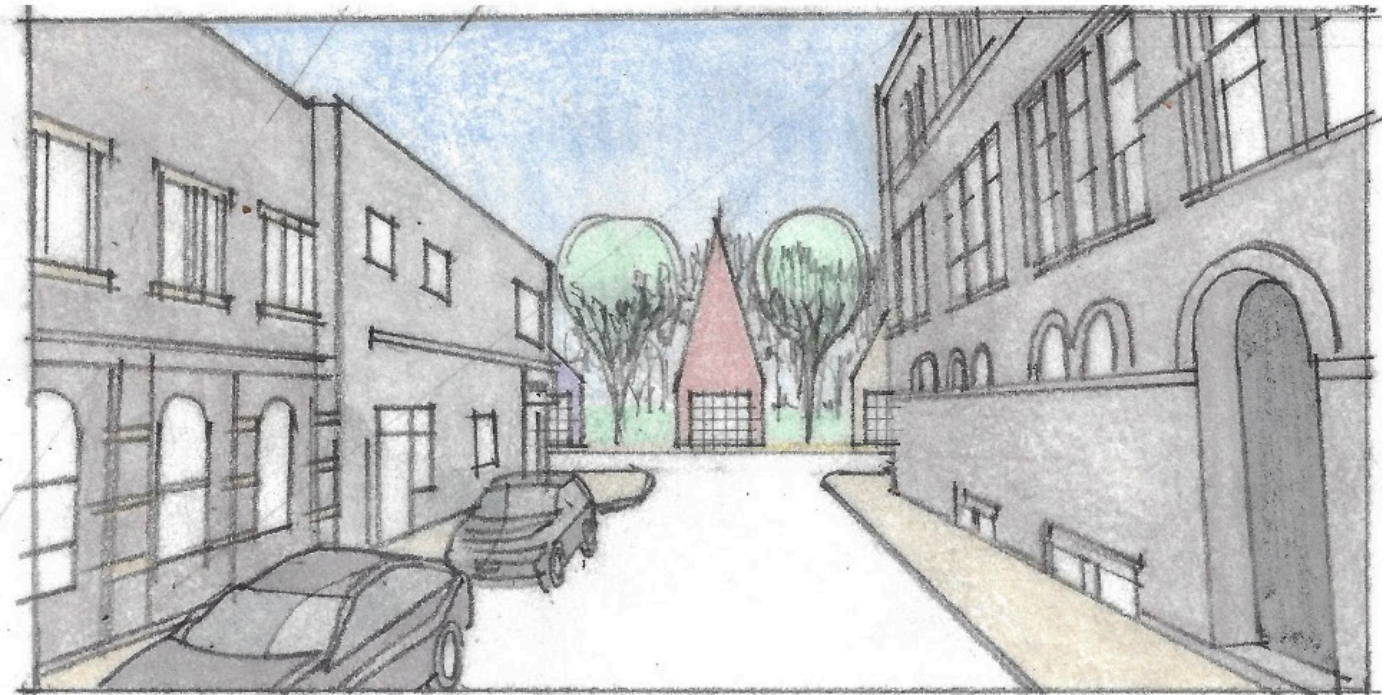
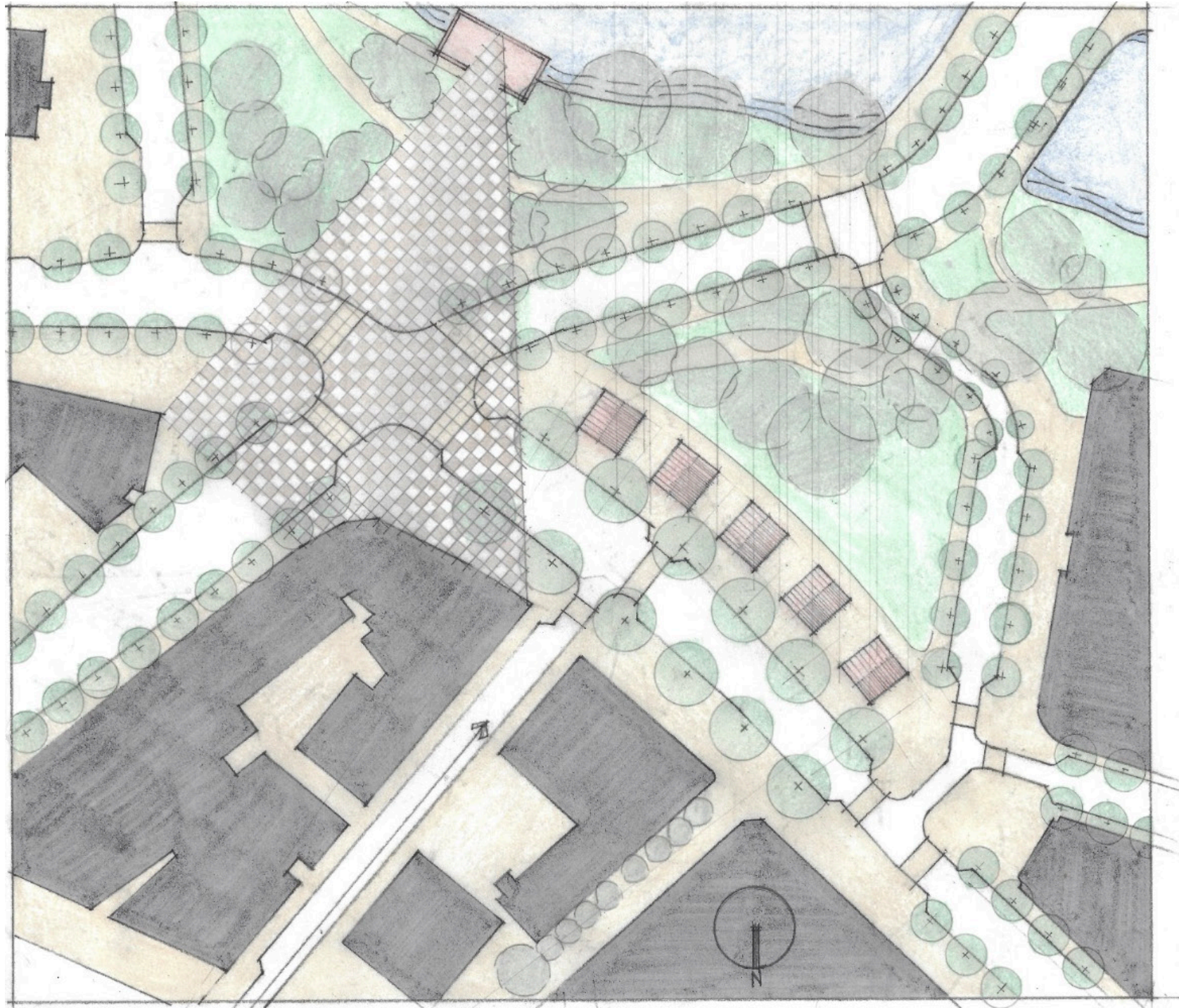
The plan eliminates half of the 24 vehicular lanes that currently enter and exit the primary intersection to enhance transit, pedestrian, and cycling networks.



Utile's form-based code formalizes a Speck Dempsey urban design proposal into spatial envelopes welcoming new development.



East of the square, redundant roadway is reorganized to simplify traffic flow and create new green space.



Jeff Speck's proposal for retail kiosks on the main square creates a two-sided shopping street while introducing an element of civic art.



A six-month design process included a weeklong design charrette with dozens of workshops, site walks, public presentations, and other events.



Jeff Speck leads a mid-project meeting in which three street network alternatives are presented for public reaction. Attendance at these events outpaced all former planning efforts in Watertown.