



*A public/private land swap and street reconfiguration creates a new heart for the Square.*

Completed with Stantec Urban Places, Reed Hildebrand, Studio Gang, and others.

Boston's Kenmore Square, the gateway to Boston University, the Back Bay, and Fenway Park, has never been a good place for walking. Public space is tight—there's no square in the square—and both pedestrians and cyclists face long wait times at some truly hairy crossings. Despite these circumstances, making change there has always been a challenge.

When neighborhood opposition to new hotel in the heart of the Square seemed insurmountable, the hotel developer asked Speck & Associates whether an urban design solution might exist. Could a revised layout offer public benefits that would more than compensate for the addition of a 300-foot tower at this historic crossroads?

Jeff Speck's initial proposal, hardly modified since its first drawing, was to create a small new city block by reconfiguring the overtaxed fork intersection into what is effectively a signalized triangular roundabout. Through a public/private land swap, a new southbound street crosses the former building site, and the tower shifts east to sit on a new plaza.

By distributing the traffic of one intersection into two, the plan maintains vehicular flow while reducing crossing times for pedestrians. In addition to being amenitized through the plaza, a typical walk across the square will now take more than a minute less time. Kenmore square is also an important cycling corridor, despite being considered quite dangerous; bike lanes are currently exposed to traffic or missing. The new plan creates a complete network of protected sidewalk-level cycle tracks across the entire site.

Speck & Associates also introduced the developer to the renowned Chicago architect Jeanne Gang, who has created an iconic structure for the site. The new plaza, by Reed Hilderbrand, will give Kenmore Square a much-needed social heart. With public spaces and dining at street level, the hotel will serve the plaza with food, drink, and activity. The new design resulted in widespread public support, and the plan has been approved by the Boston Planning and Development Agency and the City Zoning Commission.

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