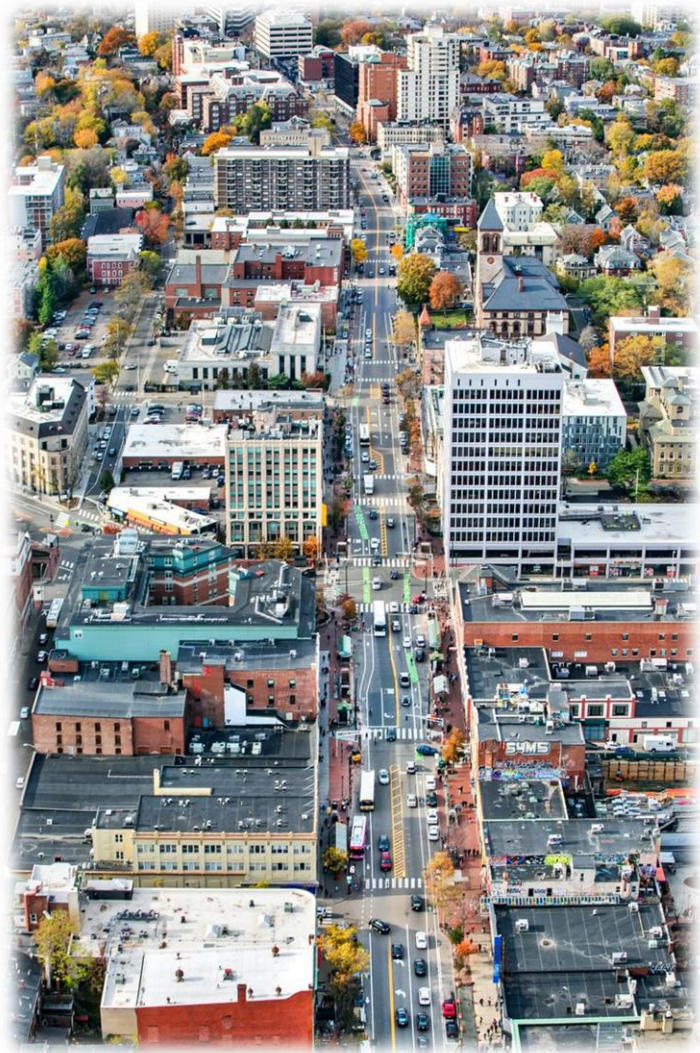


Placemaking in Central Square

Public spaces (plazas, squares, streets, districts, etc.) are critical to cities and to the quality of the experience and interactions that people have in them. These are places where stories and ideas are exchanged, where cultures and identities mix, where innovative and creative things happen, and where people come to be with and around other people. When these elements combine in a way that is thoughtful and unique, it makes for an unforgettable experience and a place that people always want to be in. After all, *public spaces are the “front porches” of our public institutions, and when these spaces work well, they serve as the stage for our public lives.*¹

Because of the importance of public space to public life, there are and always will be strong feelings and opinions on what it should look and feel like, the quality and quantity of activities and amenities available, how it is accessed and navigated, how it is maintained and protected, and who it belongs to – which may be explicit or implicit. The sense of pride and ownership over public spaces necessitates open-minded, thoughtful, and honest conversations that extend beyond ourselves and genuinely consider the public that these spaces currently serve and will be designed to serve.



The Central Square Advisory Committee (the “Committee”) was created to establish a formal, ongoing body that would review all major development actions in the Central Square Overlay District (the “District”), and to provide a forum where a wide range of perspectives can be heard. The Committee’s charge also includes advising public agencies and private interests on development and urban design issues, and suggesting alternatives that might create opportunities for projects and design proposals to resolve identified conflicts in the District. The Committee is comprised of professionals, representatives of the business community, and residents from the adjoining neighborhoods.

Ahead of the River Street Reconstruction Project, which includes the process for the reimagining and redesign of Carl Barron Plaza, I would like to engage the Committee in a series of critical conversations with City staff on public spaces, with a close examination of the City’s approach to public spaces through urban design, transportation, programming and the arts, public health, and public safety. ***The objective of “Placemaking in Central Square” is to (re)introduce or (re)visit the City’s approaches to public spaces on these topics, and to synthesize a set of values or “best practices” for public spaces in Central Square that, at the appropriate time, can help inform the reimagining and redesign of Carl Barron Plaza.*** This effort is consistent with the Guiding Principles of the Central Square Study (K2C2), and builds on the expressed goals and recommendations of the study, specifically the desire

¹ Project for Public Spaces. “What Makes a Place Successful?” | <https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat>

for community building through and in public spaces. These conversations are an opportunity for the Committee and City staff to engage in critical thinking on what has worked, what has not worked, and how public spaces in Central Square can best meet the goals and recommendations of the K2C2 Study moving forward.

Why is this necessary? The River Street Reconstruction Project presents a unique opportunity to thoughtfully engage with and reconsider one of the most important, eclectic, and challenging public spaces in Cambridge. The reimagining and the redesign of Carl Barron Plaza is about **placemaking** – “*the collective reimagination and reinvention of public spaces as the heart of every community*” – and the desire to promote better urban design, programming and activities, access, and culture and identity in public spaces. Placemaking is also the collaborative process where the reimagination and reinvention of public spaces takes place by strengthening the connections between people and the places that they share. In other words, placemaking is both the process and the outcome.²

Wendell Joseph, *Neighborhood Planner, Community Development Department*

² Project for Public Space. “*What Is Placemaking?*” | <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>