

# MASS AVE News



## MASS AVE PLANNING STUDY RELEASED

After 18 months of community engagement, careful analysis, and visioning, the City of Cambridge has drafted the Mass Ave Planning Study—laying the foundation for the future of one of its most iconic corridors. Stretching from Alewife Brook Parkway to Cambridge Common, this segment of Mass Ave is more than just a street—it connects neighborhoods, businesses, transit hubs, and cultural landmarks. This plan envisions a Mass Ave that is more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient—where walking, biking, and transit thrive; local businesses flourish; and public spaces invite people to gather, connect, and create. Grounded in the values of Envision Cambridge and shaped by voices from across the community, this plan charts a path toward a more livable, people-centered Mass Ave—one that will evolve, organically and incrementally, over the next 15 years.

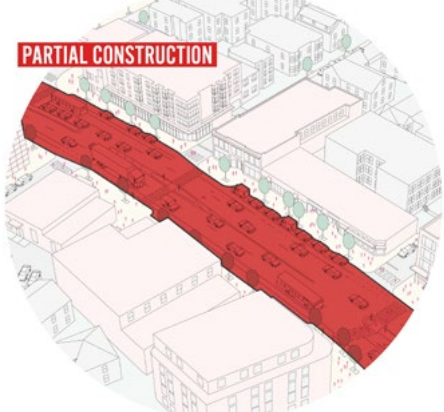
### WHAT THIS PLAN COVERS

The **Mass Ave Planning Study** is a 15-year vision plan for the properties surrounding Mass Ave, including zoning, urban design, housing, and business supports.



### WHAT IT DOES NOT COVER

The Mass Ave Planning Study will not address the street design of Mass Ave. Currently the City is implementing separated bicycle lanes in response to the city's Cycling Safety Ordinance, known as the Partial Construction.



For more information: [cambridgema.gov/MassAve4A](https://cambridgema.gov/MassAve4A)

# 4 GOALS FOR THE FUTURE OF MASS AVE

*By 2040, Mass Ave is:*

- 1. MORE OF A NEIGHBORHOOD & DESTINATION
- 2. MORE INVITING
- 3. EASIER TO GET AROUND
- 4. MORE HOUSING OPTIONS



# OUR PROCESS

MAPS began in the fall of 2023. The process included eight community meetings and nine MAPS Working Group meetings, alongside targeted stakeholder meetings designed to gather input, share updates, and refine project goals. The engagement was structured by geography—starting with the South of Porter study area, followed by North Mass Ave and Porter Square—and conducted in four phases. Phase 1 was the project introduction and information gathering. Phases 2 and 3 were area planning focused meetings, and Phase 4 were final recommendations. Once the final plan is complete, implementation phases are set to kickoff in summer 2025.



## COMMUNITY MEETINGS

There were four phases of community meetings. Phases 1 and 4 were for the entirety of the corridor, while Phases 2 and 3 had three meetings each for each of the two study areas - South of Porter followed by North Mass Ave & Porter Square. The City hosted both in-person and virtual community meetings to reach a diverse audience.

- Phase 1: Project Kick Off
- Phase 2: South of Porter Square
- Phase 3: North Mass Ave + Porter Square
- Phase 4: Final Plan

## STAKEHOLDER WORKING GROUP

The 14-member working group, composed of local residents, business owners, employees, property owners, and institutional representatives, was selected through an application process and approved by City Council. Throughout the planning process the team met with the working group nine times, including a walking tour to kick off the project, zoning specific meetings, and a developer roundtable. All meetings were open to the public, and provided the opportunity for public comment.

## FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were conducted to engage in targeted discussions with community organizations, youth and seniors on the corridor:

- North Cambridge Senior Center
- Russell Apartments
- Burns Apartments
- Gately Youth Center
- Baldwin Neighborhood Council
- Baldwin Community Center
- Porter Square Neighborhood Association

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The team conducted approximately 30 meetings with a diverse range of businesses and stakeholders, including property managers, developers, and institutions.



### COMMUNITY MEETING

JOIN US ONLINE!  
Thursday, February 29  
6:00 PM – 7:30 PM  
To participate on Zoom  
Login on your computer tablet or smartphone  
[bit.ly/MAPS\\_2024](https://bit.ly/MAPS_2024)  
OR  
Call: 646 931 3800  
MEETING ID: 847 123 4567  
Scan to RSVP  
zoom link

### NORTH MASS AVE + PORTER SQUARE Round 2

Lesley University Hall  
November 14, 2024  
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm  
IN-PERSON COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE!



**favorite place**

**insight**

**idea**

## OUTREACH

In addition to traditional methods—such as promoting meetings and events through the City calendar, City Daily update, project mailing list, schools, community centers, and senior centers, and posts on CDD’s social media channels—the team implemented several targeted strategies. Bluebikes ads were installed at stations along the corridor, and two rounds of mailers were sent to 10,800 households across all mail routes intersecting the corridor. An online collaborative map was created for the project and active for eight months. The “MAPS Map” received over 900 comments and 4,000 interactions, and provided the opportunity for the public to let us know their favorite places, and place specific ideas and insights.

Mass Ave Comments	
An issue about mobility (cycling, transit, driving)	65
An idea about mobility (cycling, transit, driving)	49
An idea about accessibility	47
An idea about buildings & development	44
An issue about mobility (cycling, transit, driving)	42
An issue about parks & public spaces	41
An idea about mobility (cycling, transit, driving)	36
An idea about buildings & development	32
An idea about parks & public spaces	31
An issue about mobility (cycling, transit, driving)	29
An idea about housing	29
An issue about safety	29
An idea about sidewalks	28
An issue about community spaces or events	26

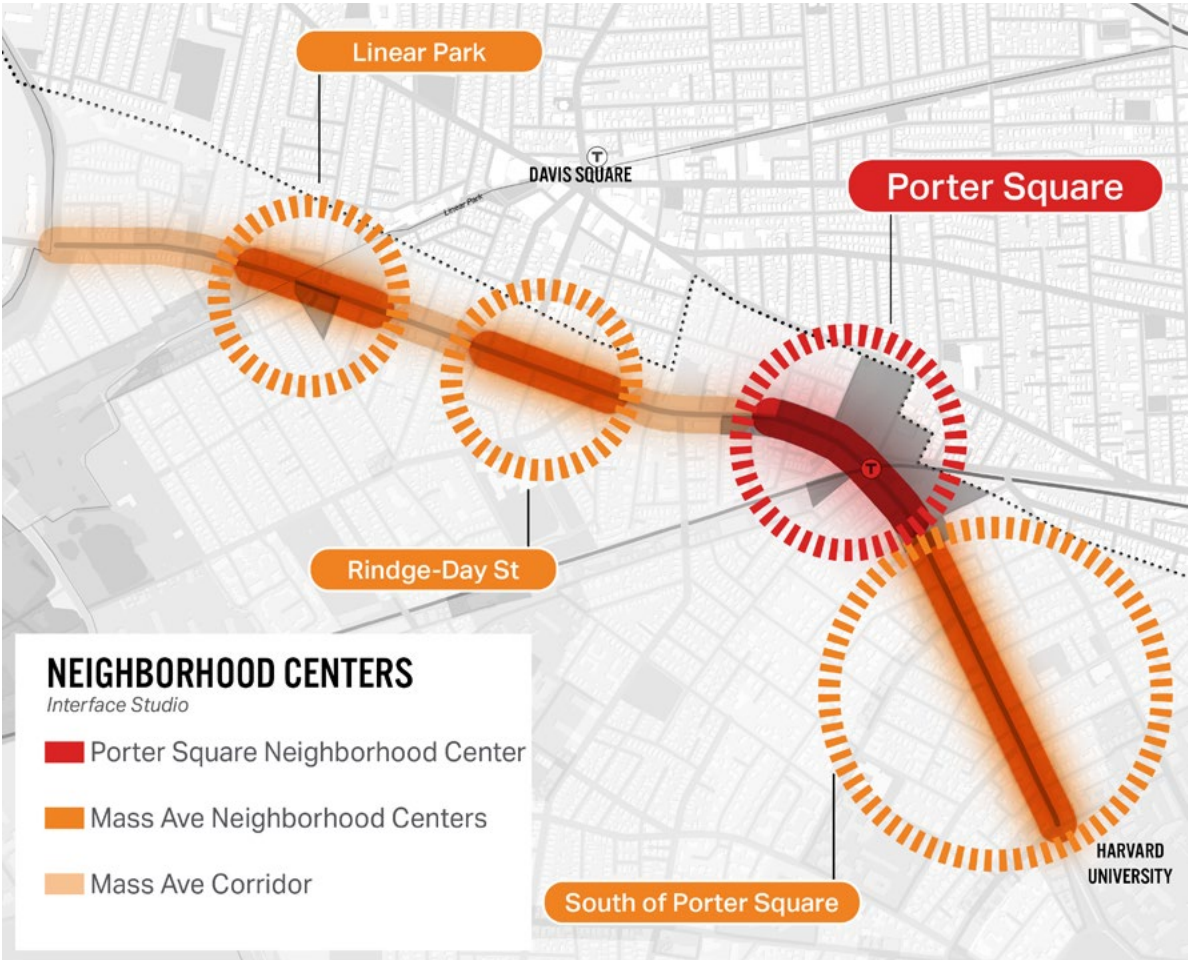
The ideas and strategies that follow were shaped by the valuable input received from the community, whose insights and perspectives played a foundational role in shaping the plan.



GOAL #1

MORE OF A NEIGHBORHOOD  
& DESTINATION

Transform the corridor as a livable, walkable neighborhood with improved amenities and places for all ages, and create a more vibrant atmosphere by encouraging pop-up shops, events and active storefronts.



**A** FOSTER A MIX OF NEIGHBORHOOD-SERVING, FAMILY-FRIENDLY GOODS AND SERVICES

Supporting local businesses along Mass Ave helps create an exciting, welcoming, and family-friendly community where residents can find unique goods and essential services close to home. By prioritizing neighborhood-serving shops, restaurants, and service providers, we strengthen the local economy, foster connections among neighbors, and preserve the avenue’s distinct character.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- 1. Conduct a feasibility study to create a playbook to form a local business association
- 2. Target outreach to existing businesses on available grants and programs.
- 3. Explore ways to keep commercial rents affordable and vacancies low.

**B** MARKET THE CORRIDOR TO SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

Marketing Mass Ave & Porter Square can boost local businesses by highlighting their unique offerings through coordinated promotions, events, and branding efforts to attract visitors and boost foot traffic.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- 1. Create and implement a branding strategy to highlight Mass Ave’s identity
- 2. Recruit new businesses to the corridor.
- 3. Provide business and marketing support.

IMAGINE IT!  
*A pop of color*  
to brand Mass Ave around Porter Square

LIGHTPOLE BANNER



COLORFUL FURNITURE



WAYFINDING SIGNAGE



CORRIDOR GATEWAY SIGNAGE

**C** ORGANIZE AND HOST MORE COMMUNITY EVENTS AND PERFORMANCE ART

More programming like seasonal markets, community events and performance art along Mass Ave with a potential business association can activate public spaces, draw foot traffic to local businesses, and foster a stronger sense of neighborhood identity. By featuring local artists, musicians, and cultural programming, these events create dynamic, inclusive experiences that make Mass Ave a vibrant destination for residents and visitors alike.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- 1. Partner with local institutions and property owners to organize and fund events.
- 2. Connect with local artists and performers from the community and local student population

WHAT CAN A LOCAL BUSINESS ASSOCIATION DO?

NORTH

MASS AVE

BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

ADVOCATES FOR BUSINESSES

MARKETS THE CORRIDOR

PROVIDES BUSINESS SUPPORT

ORGANIZES COMMUNITY EVENTS

SOMERVILLE PORCHFEST

INMAN SQUARE EATS AND CRAFTS



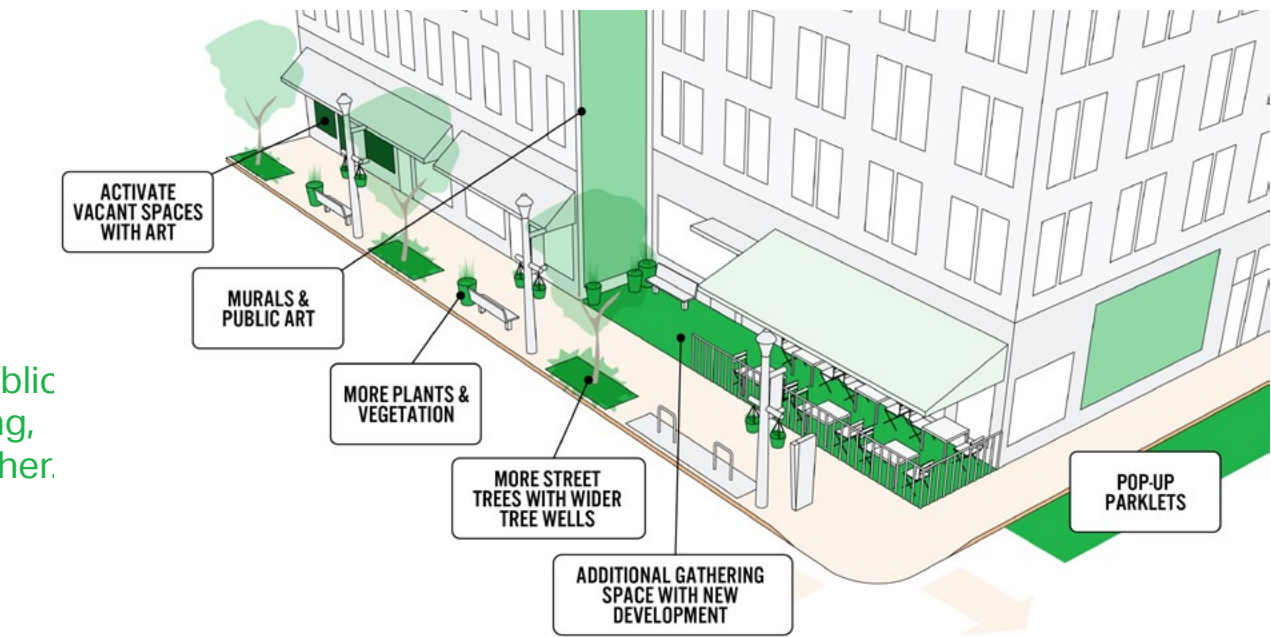
# GOAL #2 MORE INVITING

Focus on creating a more attractive public realm along Mass Ave through greening, public artwork, and more places to gather.



LUNDER ARTS PLAZA

Collaborate with private property owners to help activate publicly accessible spaces



## A SHARE COMMUNITY IDENTITY THROUGH CREATIVITY AND ART

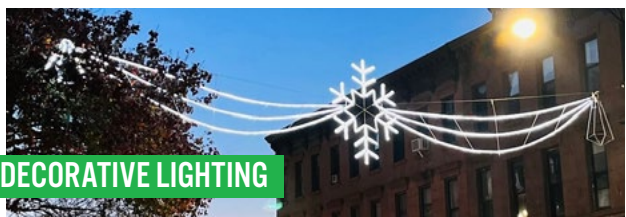
Public art, murals, and creative installations can tell local stories, highlight cultural diversity, and make shared spaces more welcoming and engaging for residents and visitors alike.

### KEY STRATEGIES:

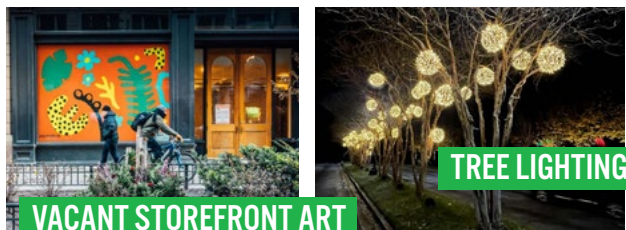
- 1. Target larger walls and open spaces as locations for neighborhood murals and public art
- 2. Install decorative street lighting and tree lighting in key commercial areas.
- 3. Activate vacant commercial spaces with public art



MURAL



DECORATIVE LIGHTING



VACANT STOREFRONT ART



TREE LIGHTING

## B PLANT MORE TREES AND VEGETATION ALONG CORRIDOR AND OPEN SPACES

More trees are needed to help the city create Cool Corridors for all modes of travel and activity with a goal of developing large mature canopies that can both mitigate heat impacts and beautify the corridor. These recommendations are aligned with the Urban Forestry Master Plan.

### KEY STRATEGIES:

- 1. Install more street trees and maximize planting in public spaces.
- 2. Enlarge existing street tree wells and provide more space for additional ground-level vegetation.
- 3. Work with property owners to maintain trees and vegetation on their property.
- 4. Explore opportunities to expand public realm space for trees and more plantings.
- 5. Coordinate with citywide green stormwater infrastructure mitigation measures.



SHADE STRUCTURES



WIDE TREE WELLS

## C CREATE MORE PLACES FOR THE COMMUNITY TO GATHER

Open spaces are critical for community health and community building. They foster social interaction, recreation, and provide respite from urban heat. However, with limited publicly owned land opportunities and relatively narrow sidewalks, Mass Ave must take an innovative approach to maximizing existing spaces. This could include reclaiming underutilized areas, integrating parklets, enhancing streetscapes with seating and greenery, and designing flexible public spaces that serve multiple community needs. By creatively reimagining these shared spaces - both public and private - Mass Ave can be a more inviting corridor for all.

### KEY STRATEGIES:

- 1. Partner with property owners and institutions to activate underutilized spaces.
- 2. Identify opportunities for pop-up parklets and curb bumpouts on Mass Ave and side streets.
- 3. Advocate for affordable indoor community event or meeting space on ground floor in new developments.
- 4. Create meaningful connections to existing open spaces nearby.
- 5. Leverage new large-scale development to create new open space.



PARKLET



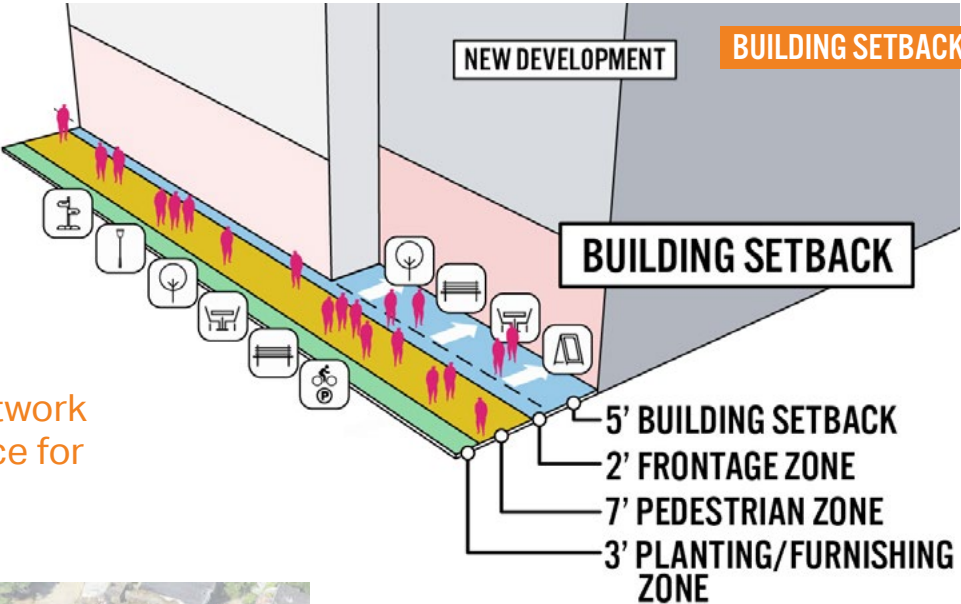
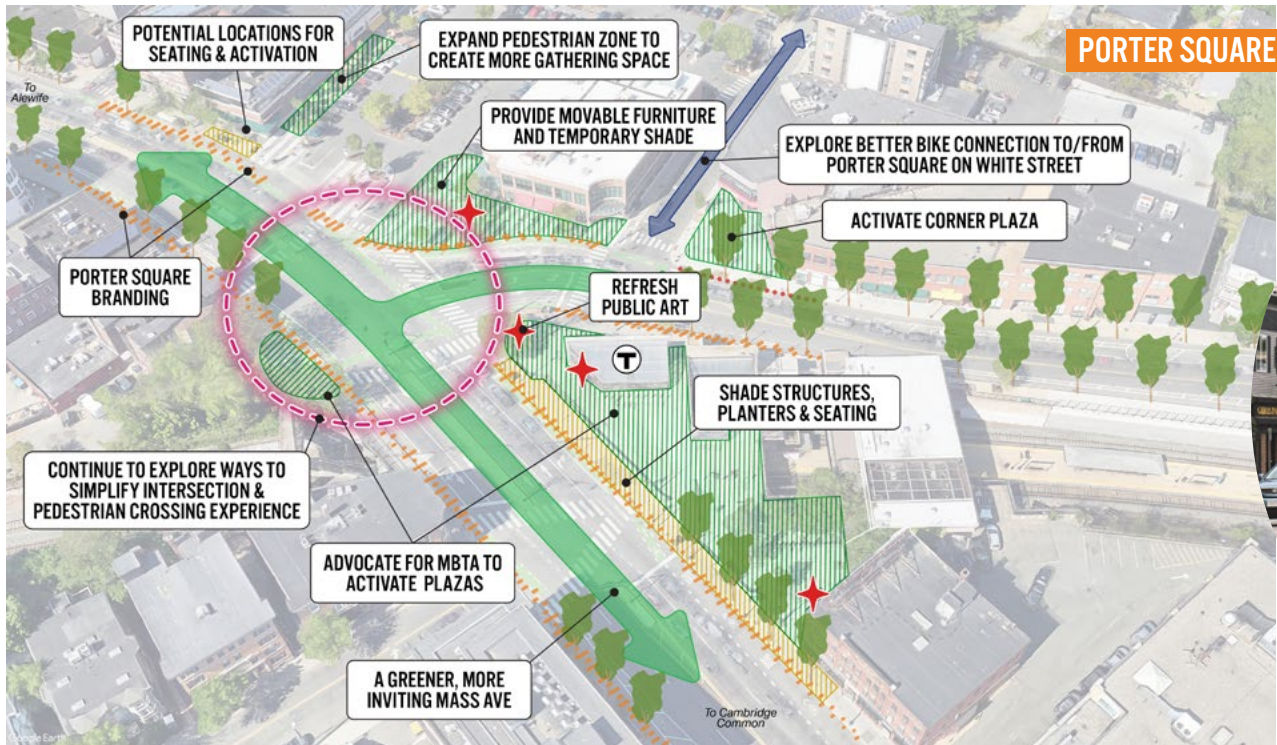
PROGRAMMABLE PLAZA



GOAL #3

EASIER TO GET AROUND

A balanced and integrated sustainable transportation network that focuses on actions to improve accessibility and space for people walking.

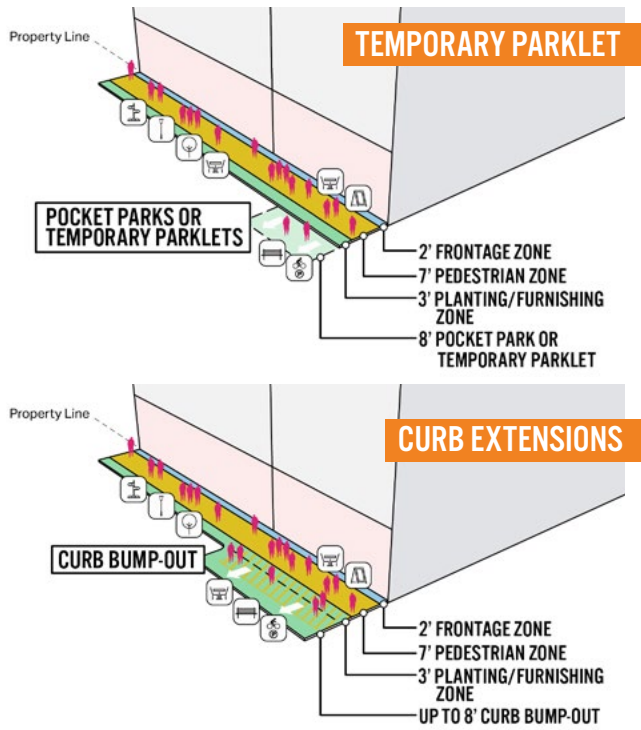


A DESIGN FOR PEDESTRIAN COMFORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

A pedestrian-friendly environment is essential for creating a vibrant, inclusive, and accessible Mass Ave. Prioritizing pedestrian comfort and accessibility helps to increase foot traffic for businesses, promotes social interaction, and enhances safety for all users, including individuals with disabilities, seniors, and families with young children.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- 1. Install more benches, shade structures, and other public infrastructure.
- 2. Balance sidewalk activity with access.



B PROVIDE SAFE, CONVENIENT ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Enhancing access to sustainable transportation options along Mass Ave will promote safer, more convenient mobility for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders while balancing the needs of local businesses and vehicle access. While the scope of this study does not include street design, continued coordination will be necessary for long-term safety and mobility goals.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- 1. Provide safer, more visible crossings on Mass Ave and intersecting streets.
- 2. Work with MBTA to install more bus shelters where appropriate.
- 3. Provide additional bike parking and Bluebike station areas.
- 4. Encourage shared off-street parking facilities.
- 5. Coordinate for better curb management.



C STREAMLINE SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

Improving signage and wayfinding along Mass Ave will enhance navigation for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers while contributing to a more cohesive and visually appealing streetscape. Focusing on clear, well-placed signage at key locations will help residents and visitors easily find destinations, transit connections, and key landmarks, while reducing visual clutter caused by outdated or redundant signs.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- 1. Locate branded pedestrian wayfinding signage at key gateways and destinations.
- 2. Consolidate and clarify roadway signage.

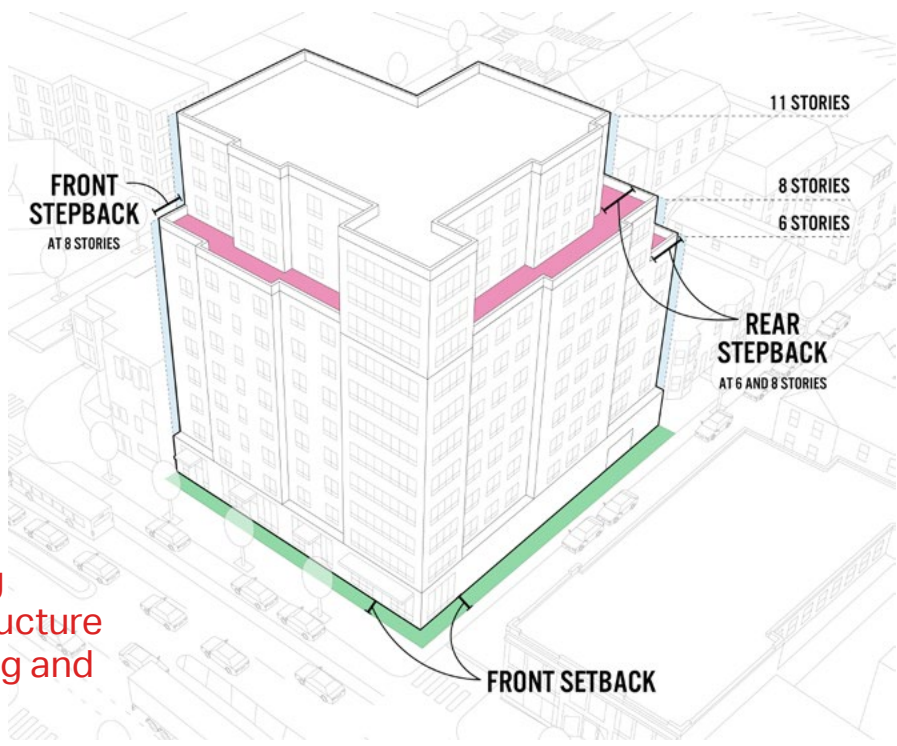
D STUDY SPECIFIC LOCATIONS AND INTERSECTIONS ALONG MASS AVE

The community brought certain intersections and locations to project team's attention in this study. Because this was a planning study, we could not assess these intersections in great detail. This plan recommends further study of Porter Square, Linear Park crossing, and Alewife Brook Parkway in greater detail. These locations experience high volumes of pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, creating complex circulation challenges that require significant data collection and traffic analysis to identify targeted improvements. Future studies should explore potential solutions such as signal optimization, intersection redesigns, pedestrian safety enhancements, and bicycle infrastructure improvements.

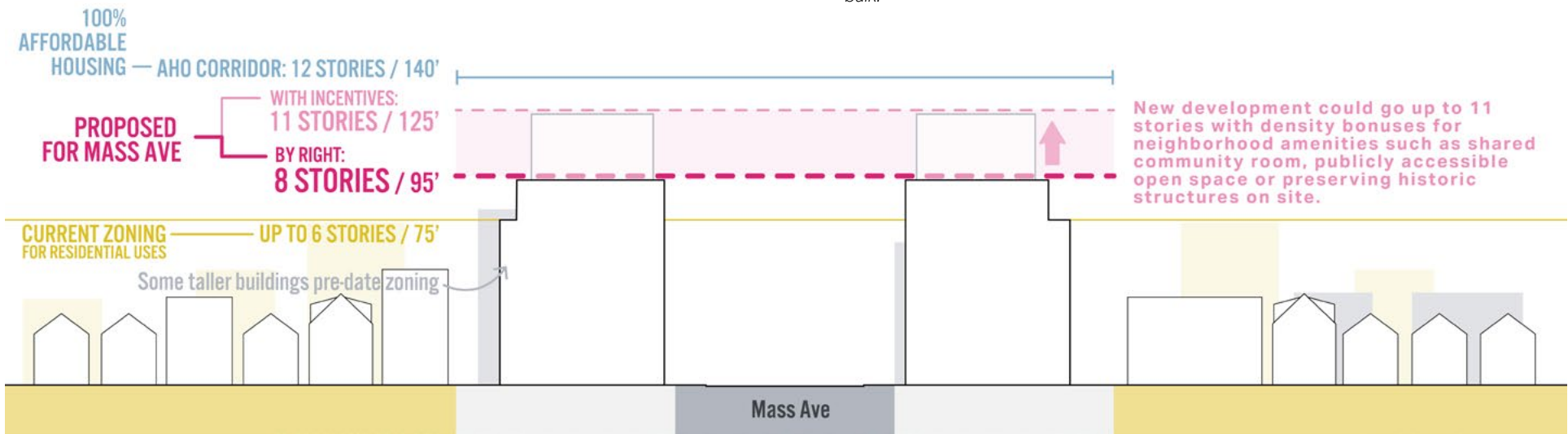


# GOAL #4 MORE HOUSING OPTIONS

Accommodate more housing development along Mass Ave through increased density and infrastructure planning. Address the need for affordable housing and integrate it into the existing neighborhood fabric.



Drawing showing how new development could provide setbacks and stepbacks to reduce bulk.



Elevation showing proposed zoning changes to Mass Ave to allow for greater density.

## A ENCOURAGE MORE HOUSING ON THE CORRIDOR

More housing and residents on the corridor will help to support more retail activity, transit ridership and non-car travel, and help reduce some of the housing pressure due to limited supply. Increasing density can also provide opportunities to gain community benefits, such as active ground floor uses and additional public space.

### KEY STRATEGIES:

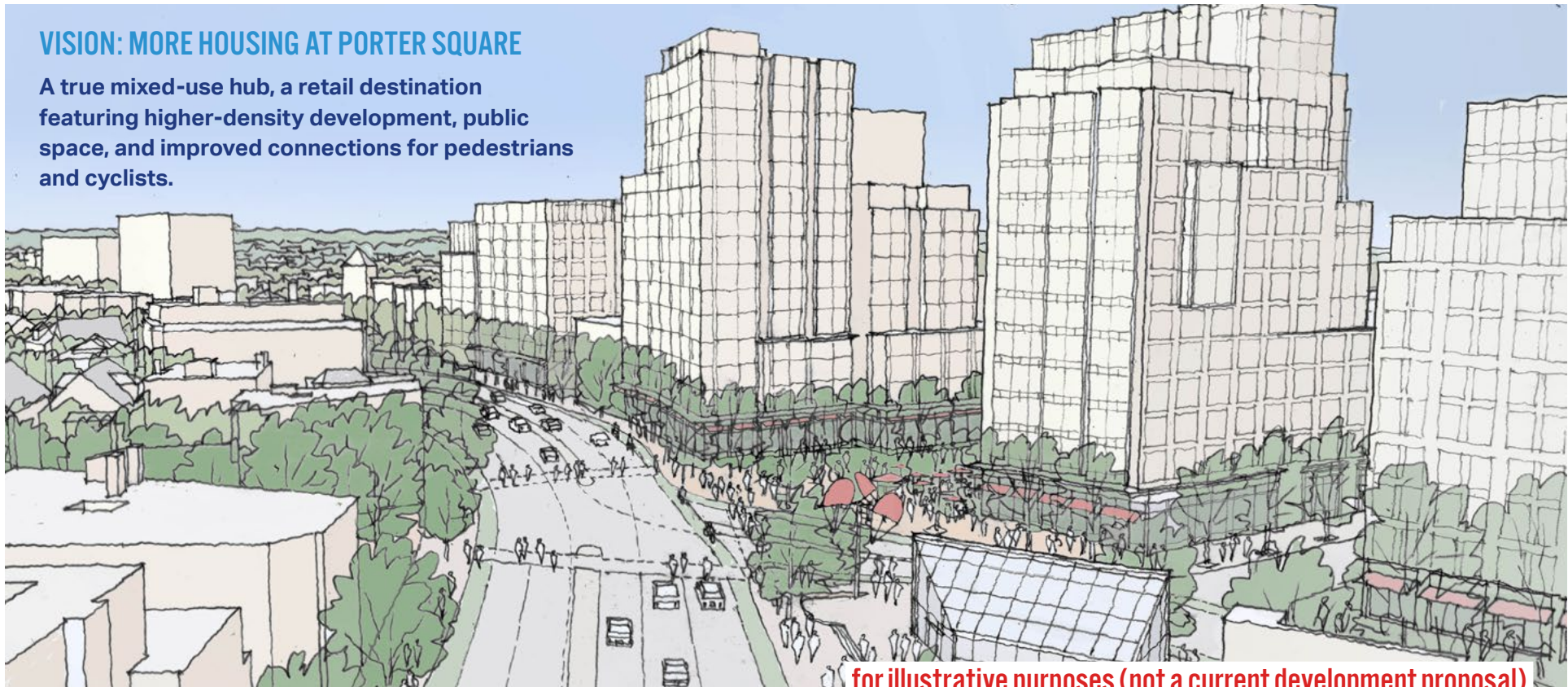
1. Simplify the zoning code and streamline processes
2. Adjust zoning along the corridor to achieve zoning objectives to build more housing and prioritize mixed use development

## B CONTINUE TO SUPPORT CITY POLICY FOR A DIVERSE MIX OF HOUSING PRICE POINTS

As Mass Ave evolves over the next 15 years, it is essential to ensure that new development contributes to a range of housing options at different price points, with a strong emphasis on affordability. Supporting the city's broader housing goals means encouraging both market-rate and income-restricted affordable units, expanding access to housing for a diverse range of residents.

### KEY STRATEGIES:

1. Encourage the development of both market-rate and affordable housing
2. Explore other strategies and funding mechanisms for encouraging affordable and mixed-income housing



for illustrative purposes (not a current development proposal)

Looking north at Somerville Ave from Porter Square MBTA station



# CLASSIFIEDS

## WANTED ALONG MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE

The following reflects quotes and feedback provided by participants throughout the public engagement process.

### PUBLIC SPACE

**WANTED**—The Porter Square T Station to be “completely re-envisioned with better visibility, better accessibility, and made into a more inviting space.”

**SEEKING**—“A pocket park [on the south corner of Mass Ave and Harvey Street] so that this could be a desirable place for a restaurant or just to make more pedestrian-friendly.”

**WANTED**—“Convert the section of [the Porter Square Shopping Center] parking lot between the buildings into a public plaza.”

**SEEKING**—“A sizable plaza-type area [in Porter Square] that supports gathering and is inviting to hang out in, instead of smaller barely used or poorly activated spaces like [the stripey plaza] scattered about.”

### BUSINESSES

**SEARCHING FOR**—“Community/business associations that have full time staff to organize events, support retail, restaurants, etc.”

**WANTED**—“Subsidies for small businesses (not chains) to keep area lively.”

**SEEKING**—“Density bonuses for preserving existing businesses.”

**SEARCHING FOR**—The parking lot behind the businesses on Mass Ave between Harvey Street and Alberta Terrace “to be reused for the community somehow, pop-up markets, events, etc.”

**WANTED**—“Community-serving business here instead [of gas stations].”

**LOOKING FOR**—“A way where people who don’t live near by or unable to walk can access and support these businesses.”

### HOUSING + DEVELOPMENT

**SEARCHING FOR**—“Dense mixed-use multi-family housing on Mass Ave instead of just single story retail.”

**SEEKING**—“Redevelopment of one of the two parking lots owned by Lesley right on Mass Ave. One is empty most of the time.”

**WANTED**—“Some dense, micro-housing that is affordable to young single people/couples, mix of market and subsidized, with modest co-living amenities (communal kitchen, co-working space, rec room, bike storage).”

**LOOKING FOR**—Porter Square as “a great opportunity to replace the parking with high density housing with ground level businesses.”

**WANTED**—“Work with the T to explore air rights housing over the bus yard.”

### MOBILITY

**WANTED**—“A consistent approach to the design of safe pedestrian crossings – curbs, traffic lights, signage, etc.”

**LOOKING FOR**—“Improved connections from Mass Ave to the Alewife Greenway”

**WANTED**—“More Bluebike stations”

**SEEKING**—“Some biking parking” at the Porter Square Shopping Center.

**WANTED**—“A diagonal pedestrian crossing next to the bike crossing and directly along the [Somerville] Community Path.”

### STREETSCAPE

**WANTED**—“Filling the sidewalk with trees, planters, and Bluebikes to help this parking lot [of the 7-Eleven] aesthetically and pedestrian usability.”

**WANTED**—“Tree canopy on Mass Ave as an urgent, immediate, major priority across all departments”

**SEARCHING FOR**—Mass Ave as “a great and wonderful avenue, beautifully designed and furnished, planted with shade trees, and featuring beautiful materials. It should be the Champs Elysees of Cambridge.”

**SEEKING**—“Things that put more of a buffer between the sidewalk and road traffic, like planters and sidewalk-level bike lanes (like in Inman Square) would make it more pleasant to eat outside.”

**SEARCHING FOR**—“Plans for replanting trees along the entire area” of Mass Ave.

### PUBLIC ART

**SEEKING**—“A way to use old ATM vestibules for temporary art shows.”

**WANTED**—“The old rotating overhead sculpture [at the Porter Square T Station] could use some revitalizing freshening.”



