

# Gilman Square Station Area Plan: Implementation update

**Presentation by:** Rachel Nadkarni, Director of Economic Development, and  
Ben Demers, Economic Development Planner, *OSPCD*

Wednesday, November 15<sup>th</sup>

# Agenda

I. Plan overview and history

II. Reviewing the Plan's main goals

III. Reviewing Plan implementation

- a) Civic spaces
- b) Zoning reform
- c) Private development
- d) Streetscape design
- e) Use of City-owned parcels
- f) Engagement strategy

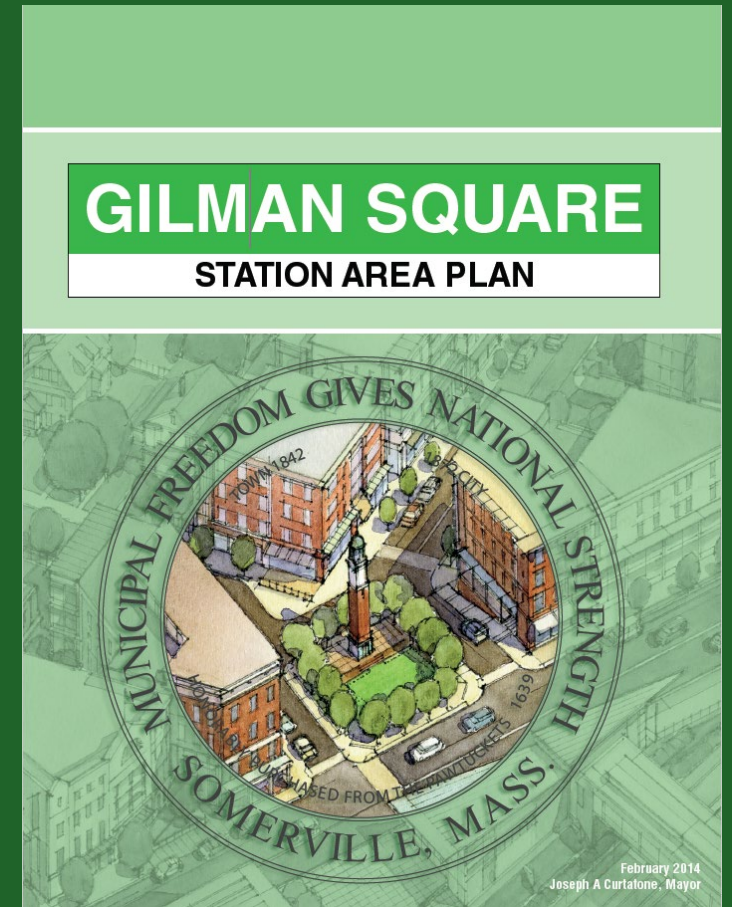
IV. Where are we now?

# I. Plan overview and history

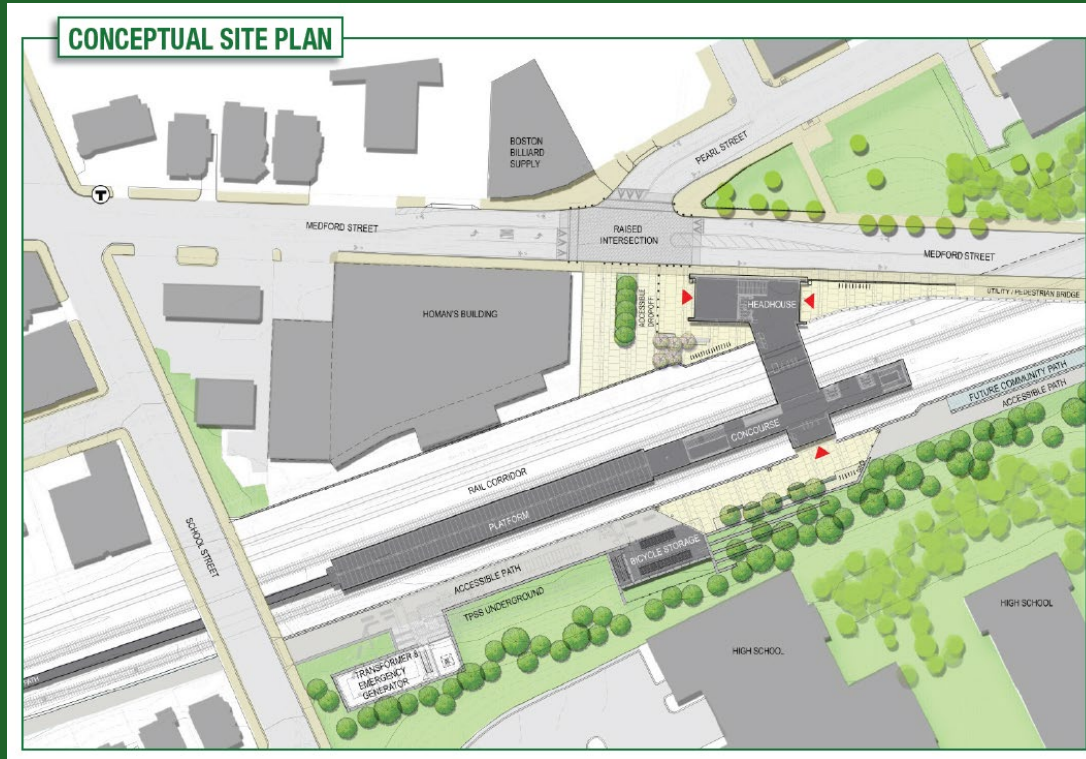
Published in February 2014.

“The purpose of this plan is to shape both public and private investment that will coincide with the arrival of the Green Line rapid transit system to Somerville.”

Content was drawn from a series of visioning sessions, stakeholder meetings, an open design studio, a pin up presentation, and a final plan presentation from October 2012 through January 2013.



# I. Plan overview and history



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The Plan refers to Gilman Square as a small square within the larger Winter Hill neighborhood.

“At its core is the intersection of Medford Street, Pearl Street, and Marshall Street where a small node of business activity historically existed... This station area plan focuses on the area within a five- to ten-minute walk around the commercial core of Gilman Square and the future MBTA Green Line station.”





## II. Reviewing the plan's main goals

“A consensus solidified around a vision that Gilman Square’s future should resemble its past: a neighborhood square that offered a **mix of service, employment, cultural, and transportation options** to residents of the station area. Participants called for **new four-story, mixed-use development** in the core of the former business district to **complement the surviving historic commercial buildings.**”

The plan distilled the desires of residents into a series of **nine broad objectives...**

## II. Reviewing the plan's main goals

**1** Bring back  
the square

**2** Fill in  
the gaps

**3** Invite  
public life

**4** Complete  
the streets

**5** Invest in  
civic spaces

**6** Promote affordable  
housing

**7** Adopt smart  
parking policy

**8** Improve zoning  
regulation

**9** Support the  
local economy

# OPPORTUNITY SITES





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# III. Reviewing Plan implementation



*Marshall St. Playground,  
Renovated 2015*



*Winter Hill School yard,  
Renovated 2018*



*Miyawaki forest planting,  
Completed 2023*

Improvements to **Marshall Street Playground** and **Otis Street Playground** were completed in 2015/2016. A renovation of the **Winter Hill Community Innovation School yard** was then completed in 2018. The City has also made additional investments in **Ed Leathers Park**, including tree maintenance and plantings, and is currently renovating the Walnut Street sidewalks.

Central Hill has also undergone design and construction work over the past several years. Just this past month, SHS's **Reavis Field** was completed, and the City planted its first **Miyawaki forest** behind SHS. The extension of the **Community Path**, which passes through Gilman Square, also opened this past June.

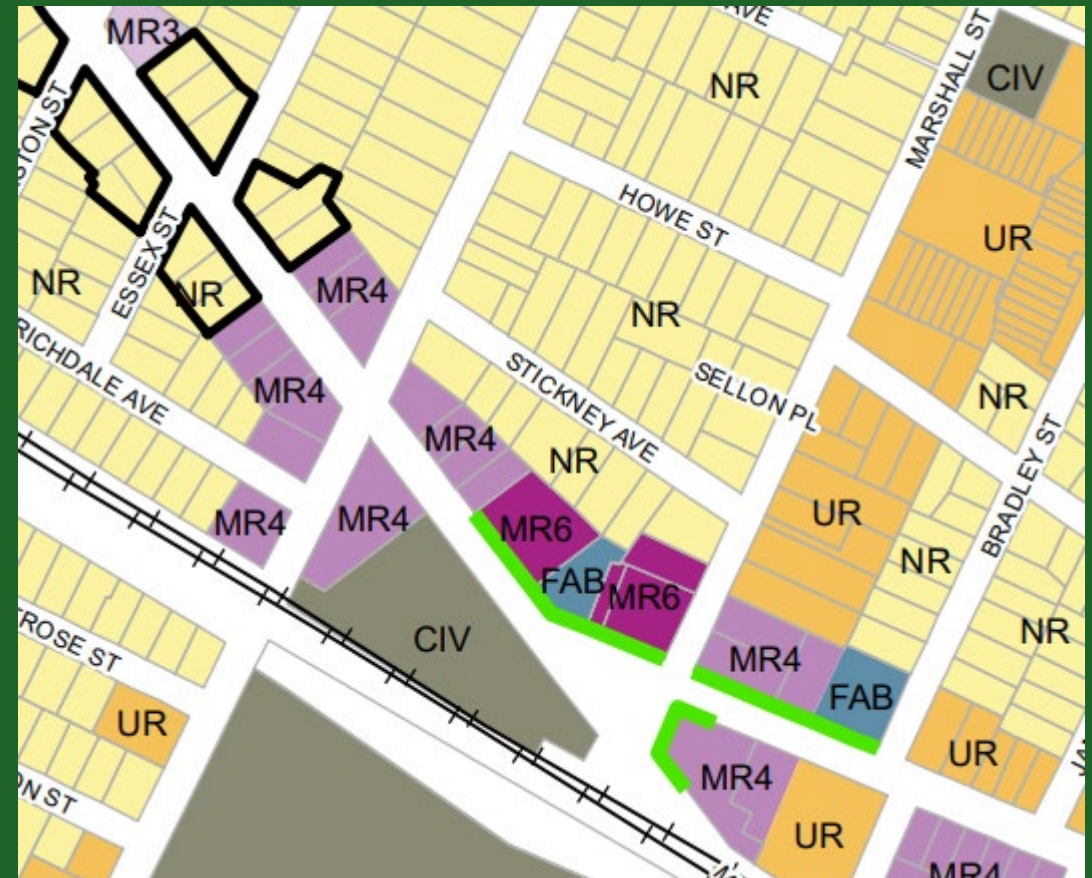


# III. Reviewing Plan implementation

The 2019 Somerville Zoning Ordinance achieved many of the goals in the Plan, including:

- zoning the neighborhood for mid-rise development,
- allowing for flexibility of building types,
- lowering parking ratios, and
- protecting Arts and Creative Enterprise uses and Fabrication uses through new zoning designations.

In 2020, a part of the neighborhood was again upzoned from MR4 to MR6 to allow for greater density.



# Timeline

- ◆ 2014  
Plan Adopted
- ◆ 2017-2018  
Green Line Station  
Redesigned

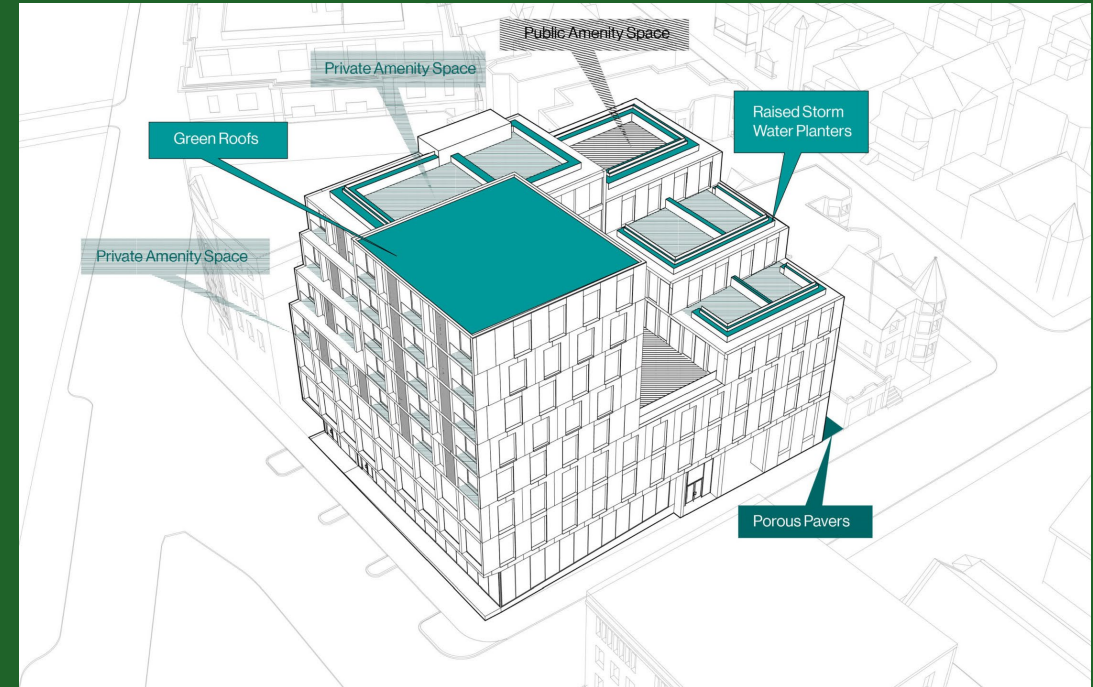
Focus on saving the Green  
Line Extension



# III. Reviewing Plan implementation



[https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/Medford%20St%2020345%20-%20Drawings%20\(1\).pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/Medford%20St%2020345%20-%20Drawings%20(1).pdf)



<https://bos-ua.com/project/gilman-square-mixed-use/>

Development proposals were prepared for 2 of the 3 privately-owned opportunity sites identified in the Plan, but lawsuits filed by abutters and the pandemic both contributed to pauses.



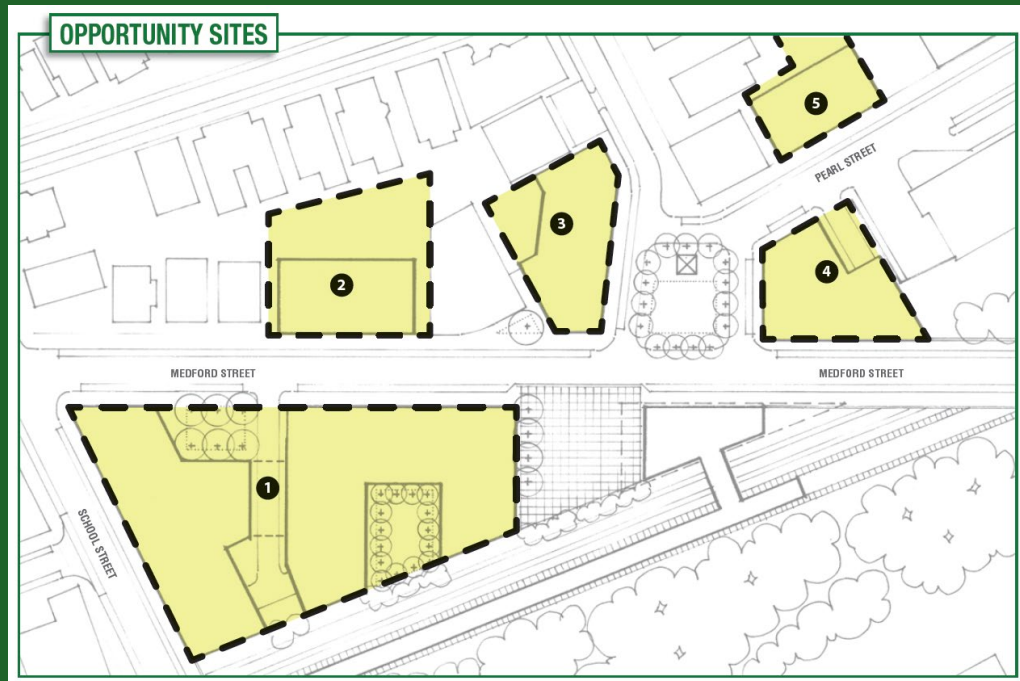
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  - ◆ 2019  
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  - ◆ 2020-2022  
Covid Pandemic

Focus on saving the Green  
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Private development  
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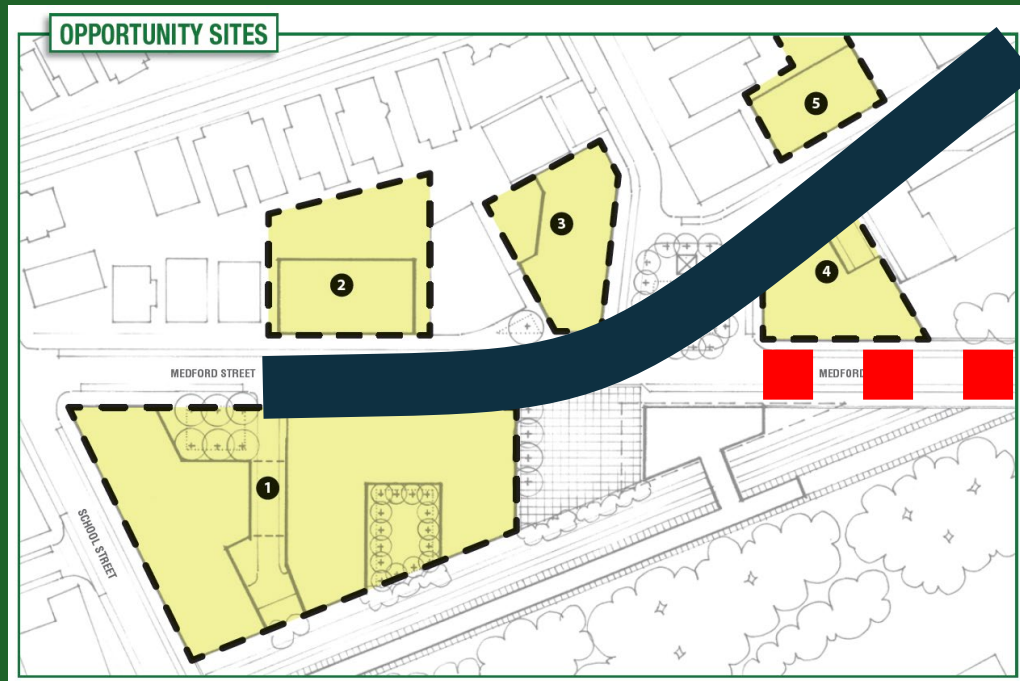
# III. Reviewing Plan implementation



Design work on the streetscape done in 2020 showed that the existing designs for a square at the intersection of Medford and Pearl were infeasible. This was a necessary learning in implementing the Plan. Studies also began exploring the idea of closing the Medford Street Bridge for a longer period and focusing traffic down Pearl Street.

60% construction designs (above) have now been completed for the streetscape. The next step will be 100% construction documentation, to be coordinated with development on the Homans site.

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# Timeline



Focus on saving the Green Line Extension

Private development advances, then stops

Idea development for street and block layout

# III. Reviewing Plan implementation

The City still owns 350 Medford Street (aka the Homans lot) and the triangular park at the intersection of Pearl and Medford Streets and has explored development possibilities on these sites.

A major question has also been whether to incorporate the Mobil station at the intersection of School and Medford Streets into a design on the Homans lot.





# III. Reviewing Plan implementation



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# III. Reviewing Plan implementation

## **Gilman Square Neighborhood Council (GSNC)**

The City signed a “Principles of Cooperation” document with the GSNC (then-GSNA)—an independent nonprofit group—in 2019, which lasted one year. Staff and GSNC members have collaborated on design and outreach work. Staff continue to meet monthly with GSNC leadership.

## **Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels Civic Advisory Committee**

In 2022, the City convened the Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels Civic Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC is meant to advise both the City and the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) on the disposition of City-owned parcels, especially given the potential for using urban renewal processes and eminent domain.



# III. Reviewing Plan implementation

Because this is one of the few City-owned lots of this size and in this area, the Homans lot faces competing priorities.

Given the prevalence of flooding in Gilman Square, the City's Engineering Division had considered the site for a **stormwater tank** to reduce flooding. The City has since stated publicly that this will not be used to hold up long term development.



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## IV. Where are we now?

The Economic Development Division is taking a **pause** to allow the WHCIS team to determine if the Homans site will be needed for a longer-term response.

In that time, we will aim to complete a **Disposition Study** of City-owned land, with the expectation that the Homans site will be identified as a high priority. This has the added benefit of **waiting out more of the current real estate cycle**, which has seen a significant rise in construction costs that reduces development project feasibility. We will also continue to explore **grant opportunities** to fund infrastructure to make connections to the station easier.

Economic Development has also been working with the City's Procurement department to release an RFP to **hire someone with ARPA funds to coordinate temporary placemaking** at the Homans site, the triangular park, and the Medford Street Bridge, among other locations in the City.



**Thank you!**

**Questions?**