

## TRANSCRIPT BULLETIN

# Dedham Square committee reimagines downtown

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Almost 200 Dedham residents and community members joined a Zoom meeting to help reimagine the property of the current Dedham Police Station in a way that could benefit the entire community.

The Dedham Square Planning Committee hosted the meeting via Zoom with its consultants from Gamble & Associates and Abramson & Associates (an urban design and planning firm), David Gamble and Barry Abramson. It is one of the first community discussions about the project of redoing/reimagining the Dedham Police Station property and the Keystone lot. The site will be available after the new Public Safety Building is completed in 2022.

The current Police Station site is 14,500 square feet and will be vacated in 2022.

In 2017, the Planning Board formed the Dedham Square Planning Committee, which “includes members from all seven precincts and representatives from the Planning Board, Select Board, Finance & Warrant Committee, Parks & Recreation, and Council on Aging.”

Since 2019, the committee has been tasked with researching potential uses/reuses of the Police Station and Keystone Lot parcels, as well as creating an economic plan for Dedham Square.

Prior to meeting with Gamble and Abramson, the committee held a wide range of studies and activities regarding the reimagining of the property, which included expanding the scope to include the examination of the Keystone lot, based on discussions with the committee, Select Board Chairman Dennis Teehan and Town Manager Leon Goodwin; reviewing the results of prior studies and planning efforts in Dedham; conducting several walk audits; holding a panel discussion with civic stakeholders in Dedham Square, including Dedham Public Library, Dedham Historical Society & Museum, Dedham Community House and the First Church; and hosting a panel with Dedham residents and merchants.

“In less than two years, the Dedham Police will move to the new safety building. Timing is critical to assure we have the start of construction, or replacement project,” said Peter Smith of the DSPC when opening the meeting. “We need you to help us with any questions or concerns you may have. We have dedicated time for comments, questions and answers. We’re going to look at economic costs and consequences, civic opportunities, and more that could make up a place that we could call a new town square. Our central goal is to get your input as citizens.”

“So much of downtown Dedham is remarkable when compared to many other towns and villages. There are a great deal of things that make this an attractive environment. And therein lies some of the tensions regarding what happens downtown, because the stakes are high. In some ways, there are fewer and fewer parcels to think critically about,” said Gamble.

Gamble opened his PowerPoint presentation by discussing “what makes a great town center” - characteristics such as a vibrant mix of uses, walkability, civic buildings, and a sense of town history and culture. Gamble explained that when designing an area, they try to avoid auto dominated spaces, lack of green spaces and infrastructure barriers. Gamble and Abramson presented photos of New England towns with “quintessential open spaces,” such as Norwood, Newburyport, Needham and Lexington.

With their analysis of the property, Gamble and Abramson presented the Zoom meeting members with two possible development scenarios.

Option one would be a “Mixed Use Development.” The town would sell the property, and the new building would include 14-20 units, a 24,000-square-foot building, and 20 parking spaces.

Option two would be a town common and pavilion, with the town keeping the property and a 1,500-square-foot pavilion with 13,500 square feet of open space.

“All of these things would need to be carefully thought out and programmed in as a series of planning principles, which would also be a developing conversation with you all. We think Dedham needs a signature open space, a backdrop to the Verizon building frame, the views of the historical society, a balance of trees and shade with a multi use, multi use community plaza active in the open space bunker. This is important and we also think this is going to be controversial,” said Gamble.

The preliminary estimated cost of this project is \$3 million. If fully funded by the town, it would be a \$20 annual property tax increase for single-family homes in Dedham. The cost to residents may be lower if there are other financing sources, such as state grants, private donations or development revenue, Gamble and Abramson explained.