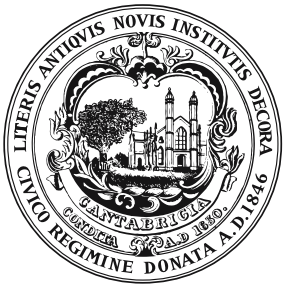




Future Carl Barron Plaza viewed from Mass Ave/River St corner. Color shown for the "Ribbon" is a placeholder, pending artist's final design.



River Street Infrastructure and Streetscape Project

Carl Barron Plaza Construction Update

DECEMBER 2023

Dear Central Square Neighbor,

We are pleased to inform you of the start of construction at Carl Barron Plaza, as part of the River Street Infrastructure and Streetscape Project. This is the first in what will be a series of construction-phase communications specific to Carl Barron Plaza. We will transmit occasional high-level project **Updates** such as this one, as well as more frequent **Notices** which will detail specific short-term construction operations impacting the Plaza and MBTA bus terminal.

We know that living, working, operating a business, and traveling through an active construction project will be challenging. We truly appreciate all of the efforts that the Central Square community have put forth so far during the planning and design phases of the project. Your active participation in the process has led to continuous improvements in the design. We join you in looking forward to a successful project, which will help reinvigorate the heart of Central Square and be a welcoming, attractive, and lively space for the entire Cambridge community.

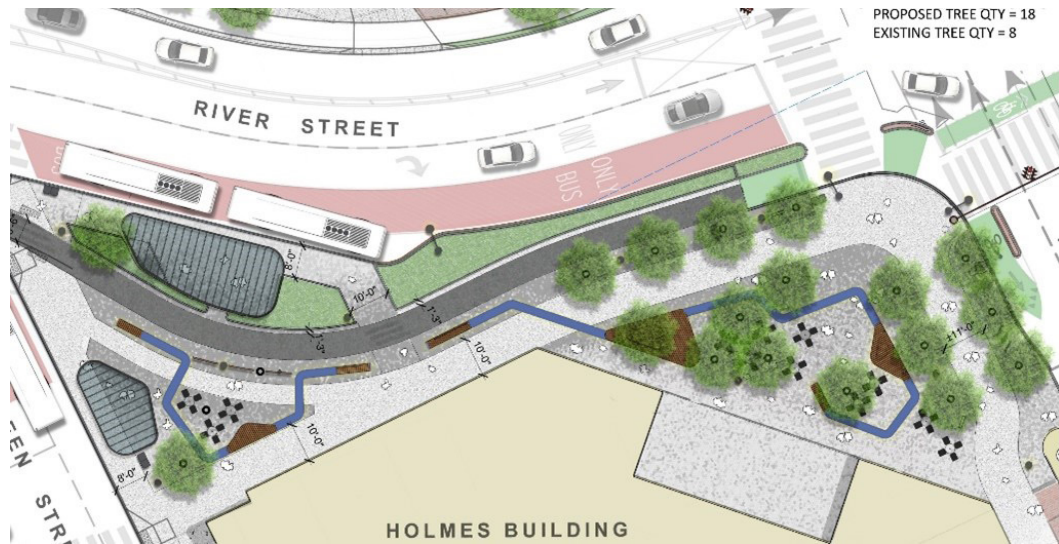
The City is committed to working with the Central Square community throughout the construction. We encourage you to reach out to us with any questions, concerns or suggestions; visit the Project website at www.CambridgeMA.gov/RiverStreet; and attend planned community events. We also urge you to continue to show your support for the local businesses that make Central Square the unique and vital heart of our city.

Sincerely,

Katherine Watkins
Commissioner, Dept of Public Works

What is Happening at Carl Barron Plaza?

Carl Barron Plaza, located at the intersection of Mass Ave and River Street, is the most significant public open space in Central Square. The redesign and reconstruction of the Plaza and the adjacent MBTA bus terminal at Green and Magazine Streets, has been a key component of the River Street project from the start. During the planning and design of the project, City staff and consultants worked closely with the Project Working Group, key stakeholders including the Central Square business improvement district (BID), users of the Plaza, the MBTA, and the broader community to develop goals and a vision for the plaza. Important goals which came out of this process included providing a Plaza that would be welcoming and safe for all users, and more fully integrated into the daily life and cultural activities of Central Square. The resulting design was shared with the public and stakeholders in 2021 and 2022.



Aerial view of Carl Barron Plaza. Color shown for the "Ribbon" is a placeholder, pending artist's final design.

Key Features

■ A significantly larger and more cohesive plaza.

The existing configuration of the MBTA bus area and its narrow connection to Carl Barron Plaza results in a number of awkward and indirect street crossings for pedestrians. It also can be crowded and confusing both for bus passengers and those just passing through. The new design connects the plaza at Mass Ave with the MBTA bus area, creating a single, more coherent and usable space.

■ Urban Design Features accommodating a variety of uses.

A combination of flexible and fixed seating and tables will offer numerous gathering opportunities, and can also allow for larger programmed events. Unique platform seating is included, which can also be used for performance opportunities. In total, seating in the Plaza is increased by about 50%. Other Plaza amenities include drinking water/bottle fill stations; trash and recycling receptacles; and numerous public power and USB charging outlets.

■ Lighting and surfacing have been designed with an emphasis on safety, accessibility, durability, and attractiveness.

Pedestrian-scale LED lighting is provided on poles, within the bus shelters, and as an integrated feature of the "Ribbon", which is described below. All of the existing brick surfacing is being removed. The primary pedestrian routes through and around the Plaza will consist of wide concrete sidewalks; with accessible concrete unit pavers used around seating areas.

■ Landscaping.

The expanded Plaza includes more than double the number of trees which exist today, providing shade at seating and gathering areas. Extensive grasses, groundcover and perennials will also be planted to provide seasonal color and interest. To promote the long-term health of the trees and plantings, the design includes a sophisticated yet proven system of pervious pavers, extensive subsurface horticultural soil, and irrigation.



Night view of Carl Barron Plaza. Color shown for the "Ribbon" is a placeholder, pending artist's final design.



View of new River Street bus shelter at Carl Barron Plaza.

■ **"The Ribbon"** is a bold sculptural feature which winds horizontally and vertically through the Plaza, visually and functionally connecting the Mass Ave and Green Street halves. It will frame the plaza at the key Mass/River/Western corner, and serve as an iconic feature both day and night. The Ribbon integrates seating and lighting, as well as a platform which can be used for performances. The Ribbon will also reflect the artistic character of Central Square, as it will be painted by artist Sophy Tuttle, recently selected by the Cambridge Arts Council. The City is excited to be engaging Sophy, and will provide information about her design as it develops!

■ **Reconfigured bus stops along the outside of the Plaza.** These bus stops will be equipped with custom shelters featuring real-time bus information, and provide enough space for passengers to wait comfortably and get on and off buses free of obstacles. One shelter includes an integrated workspace for MBTA bus operations staff, replacing the current wooden shed structure.

■ **A separated bicycle lane** will connect people riding in the new River Street separated lane with existing and planned bike facilities on Mass Ave.

Construction Schedule & Plaza Conditions

The Contractor for the River Street/Carl Barron project, P. Gioioso & Sons (PGS), plans to begin initial exploratory and demolition activities in the Plaza and MBTA area in December 2023. As a complex project in a busy urban environment and transit crossroads, the total duration of Plaza work is expected to be around 24 months.

During all phases of the work, there will be unavoidable disruption to the Plaza. DPW will review all proposed PGS work plans prior to each activity or phase of construction. The safety of the public is critical, and as space becomes more constrained not all current Plaza activities will be able to be maintained.

Construction Phase Priorities



Maintaining access to building and business entries which directly abut the Plaza



Maintaining safe and direct-as-possible pedestrian access between Green Street and Mass Ave. It is likely that various portions of the Plaza will be fenced off during construction, and fencing and pedestrian routes will shift from time to time. We will be working with PGS, the BID, and others to develop ornamental scrims for the fences to provide an attractive visual environment.



Maintaining efficient and convenient MBTA bus operations and bus passenger access. It is likely that bus stop locations will need to change during construction, and we are working closely with MBTA to plan these changes so that inconvenience is minimized. Detailed public notifications will be posted on-site and distributed electronically by the City and MBTA prior to any changes.

What Activities Will Occur First?

■ **Tree removals.** In December, PGS will remove the existing trees from the Plaza. These trees are near the end of their life span due to their confined condition in raised planters. As noted above, the final design features significantly more trees and much better growing conditions. A public tree removal hearing was held on November 17, 2022, and additional details may be found at www.CambridgeMA.gov/RiverStreet.

■ **Partial Demolition/Exploratory Test Pits.** Following the tree removals, PGS will excavate test pits at various locations in order to verify underground soil and utility conditions, especially where foundations for the future Ribbon and bus shelters will be located. A number of these locations coincide with existing bench seating and other elements in the Plaza, so these items will need to be removed. It is expected that this work will first be performed in the “north” Plaza closest to Mass Ave; and then in the “south” or MBTA area closest to Green Street.

■ **Subsurface work.** After the initial preparatory items above are completed, PGS will begin to work “from the bottom up” to construct the new Plaza. Work in 2024 is expected to consist of installation of utilities, foundations, and subsurface horticultural soils and irrigation systems. Work in 2025 is planned to include above-ground structures, trees and landscaping, lighting, curb and sidewalks, and urban design furnishings.

Stay Informed!

To learn more about the project or to receive future project updates by email please sign up for the project email list by scanning the QR code below or visit:

www.CambridgeMA.gov/RiverStreet



Birds-eye view of Carl Barron Plaza. Color shown for the “Ribbon” is a placeholder, pending artist’s final design.

