

# Background

## History



*The gate to the Mount Auburn Cemetery with Mount Auburn Street in the foreground, circa 1849.*

When Fresh Pond Parkway was first built in 1899 to intersect with busy Mount Auburn Street, the amount and variety of traffic it services today could not have been preconceived. At the time, the intersection was located next to a farm belonging to the Coolidge family, and the area closer to the Charles River was still a marshy river bank. What became the numbers 71 and 73 streetcar lines, installed around the same time, soon assumed the role of the main form of transportation on Mount Auburn Street, connecting nearby Harvard Square with Watertown Square and Waverly Square, and sparking the development of new housing and small businesses along the street.

When the Larchwood neighborhood was built in 1915, there were no horse-and-carriage traffic jams at the intersection of Huron Avenue and Fresh Pond Parkway; when Coolidge Hill was sold off by the Coolidge family into private lots that became handsome homes in the mid-1920s, traffic was equally light, making the decision to keep the family driveway (now Coolidge Hill Road) directly on the intersection seem like a safe one. However, in 1929, Fresh Pond Parkway was extended northward to Concord Avenue, and a connection to Alewife Brook Parkway was completed. Traffic began to increase significantly. It rose to new levels when Gerrys Landing Road and the Eliot Bridge were completed in the early 1950s.



# Today



*Mount Auburn Street looking east, toward the intersection with Fresh Pond Parkway.*

Today, the patchwork evolution of these roadways, and the signals that control them, is causing a host of problems for residents and commuters. The neighborhood of today is largely residential, with small business districts at Mount Auburn Street's major intersections with Aberdeen and Belmont Streets. In addition to Watertown's eastern edge, several Cambridge neighborhoods abut on the project area, including Coolidge Hill, Larchwood, Strawberry Hill, and Huron Village – all of which are considered part of West Cambridge. Residents here are very active and engaged, and a host of planning studies and existing projects were reviewed to inform this study including:

- Cambridge Bicycle Plan (2015);
- Cambridge Pedestrian Plan (2000);
- Cambridge Riverfront Plan (2011);
- Cambridge Transit Strategic Plan (Interim 2014 and Current);
- DCR Charles River Connectivity Study (2014);
- DCR Charles River Connectivity Study (2014);
- DCR Parkways Study (Current);
- Envision Cambridge (Current);
- MBTA Key Bus Route Improvement Program (2013);
- MBTA Focus 40 (Current);
- Strawberry Hill Neighborhood Plan (2007);
- Watertown Bicycle Transportation Plan (2003);
- Watertown Comprehensive Plan (2013); and
- West Cambridge Neighborhood Study (2007).

The latest drawings of the following ongoing roadway design projects were also collected to ensure this project took them into account:

- Belmont-Trapelo Reconstruction Project-Trapelo Reconstruction Project;
- Mount Auburn Street Corridor Study (Watertown);
- Huron Avenue Reconstruction Project;
- Greenough Boulevard Greenway Project; and
- Watertown-Cambridge Greenway Project.

The relevant highlights of these studies were the need to improve bicycle and pedestrian connections to the Charles River; the importance of reducing bus crowding and delays

on the Mount Auburn Corridor; and the need for stronger east-west bicycle connections that are safe and comfortable. The Strawberry Hill Neighborhood Plan also cited a desire to make the Belmont and Mount Auburn Streets intersection a “gateway to the neighborhood,” and the Watertown Comprehensive Plan designated the same intersection as an area for enhancement. The intersection will also connect to the future Watertown-Cambridge Greenway Project.

These existing planning studies introduced the project team to some of the most significant problems in the project area; however, engaging the community illuminated many of the details that led to the engineering solutions proposed in this study. See all related projects and historic districts in **Figure 1**.



*The Belmont and Mount Auburn Streets intersection will serve as an entry point to the future Watertown-Cambridge Greenway Project.*



Figure 1. Local Area Projects

