

9 Things to Know About the Future Custom House Square Park



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Ready or not, the Custom House Square parking lot is destined to become an urban park. Construction will start in early March and should be completed in July. It will be partially open to pedestrians this summer, but events will NOT be held there until after the greenscape takes hold.

Currently, the Custom House Square parking lot between The Garden bar and Carter's Clothing provides downtown New Bedford residents with long-term parking. Since the meters only allow for 2-hour parking, people seeking long-term parking will have to park their vehicle at the Elm Street garage or Zeiterion Theatre parking lot once the Custom House Square parking lot begins its transformation into a park. What exactly will a Custom House Square Urban Park look like? Will there still be major events like the Taste of Southcoast, Chowder Festival, New Bedford Folk Festival (formerly the New Bedford Summer Festival or Summerfest), 50s Night and other events hosted there? There is a lot of rumor and misinformation spreading around New Bedford, and I hope this article helps clear things up. Here are nine things you need to know about the future Custom House Square Urban Park.

1. Most of the major events will still be held at the Custom House Park, but while the park is being converted over and

grass grows, they will temporarily be hosted elsewhere in New Bedford. Most events will likely move to the New Bedford waterfront, a short distance east of Custom House Square. Follow New Bedford Guide's Facebook and you'll get updates on each festival as we get word.



Currently, Custom House Square is the main long-term outdoor parking lot downtown.

2. The Custom House Square Park will be better connected to Wings Court. In 2011, Wings Court received a major makeover with new bricks/setts, trees, stone tables/seats and outdoor seating for the restaurants that surround the court yard. The northeast entrance of Wings court will connect to the Custom House Square park with traffic on Acushnet Avenue being the only barrier to entry.



Wings Court and Custom House Square foot traffic flow.

3. The new Custom House Urban Park will be a place to read books and have lunch for 100s of New Bedford Residents at once. Currently, there is only a tiny sliver of grass near the water fountain between the Custom House Square Parking lot and William Street. This future park will significantly add grass, trees, seating and other features that will make for fantastic summer picnics, book reading and other outdoor activities. Here are some artist renditions of the future park, materials used and plant life.

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4. The Custom House Square Park will host the downtown Farmers' Market. In the past, the downtown farmers' market was held at Wings Court and the grassy area in front of the New Bedford Public Library. There will be a significant increase in size of the downtown farmers' market as the park will be able to host up to 600 people.



A look at the downtown New Bedford farmers' market will look like.

5. Barkers Lane will be closed to vehicular traffic. The street on the backside of The Garden bar will become a place to walk or sit, covered with trees and plant life. This linear area will will host tents during events.

6. Custom House Square Urban Park will be a great place to take a walk at night.

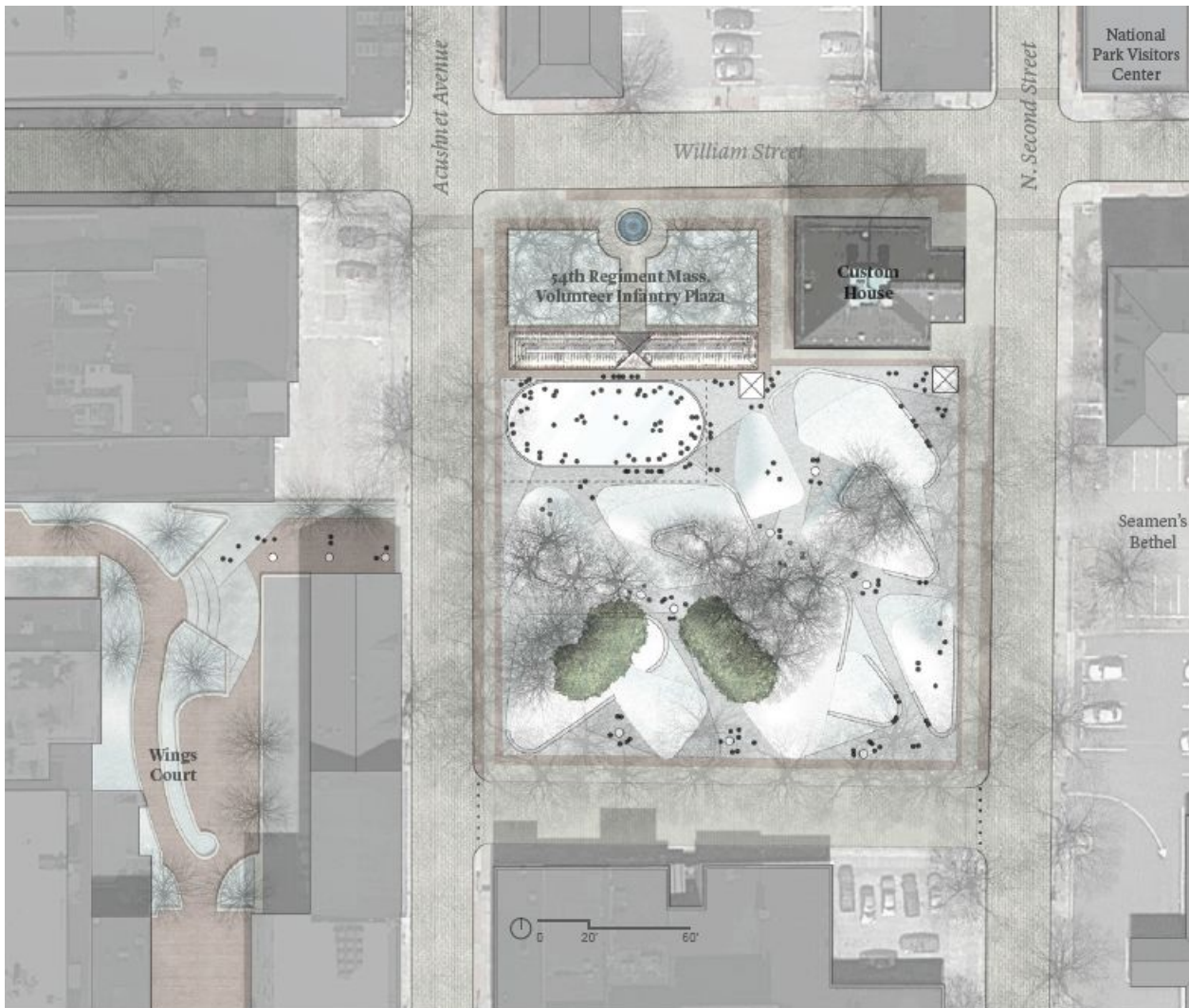


A look at the Custom House Square Park's night time lighting.

7. Major events will be able to host up to 2,400 people. There are several configurations organizers can use and Wings Court will be better utilized.

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8. There will be winter time events with ice skating. Did you know that New Bedford has a portable ice skating rink, but is rarely used? This configuration allows for ice skating and other events for up to 180 people in downtown New Bedford.



9. The Custom House Square Urban Park is one piece on the overall effort to make downtown greener. When you combine the changes on Route 18, Wings Court and Custom House Square, you have a significant increase in green land. More grass and trees are a good thing and the construction connects these areas better.

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What do you think about these changes? Post a reply and let us know!

I'd like to thank Anne Louro, the New Bedford Preservation Planner, for contributing the photos used in this article.