



# PLAN: Downtown

Advisory Group Meeting #2  
Existing Conditions & Character Areas

April 24, 2019



**boston planning &  
development agency**

# Agenda

## *Advisory Group Meeting #2 Agenda – Existing Conditions and Character Areas*

1. Advisory Group Schedule Update (45 minutes for #1–5)
2. Community Engagement Update
3. Advisory Group Meeting #2 Goals
4. Commonly Understood “Character Areas”
5. Analysis of Existing Characteristics
  - Historic Context
  - Urban Grain
  - Public Realm
  - Land Use
6. Character Area Group Discussion (45 minutes)

# Advisory Group Overview

*Preliminary Advisory Group Schedule—Subject to Change*

1	March 7, 2019	<b>Introduction &amp; Project Overview</b>
2	April 24, 2019	<b>Existing Conditions &amp; Character Areas</b>
3	<b>May 22, 2019</b>	<b>Preservation &amp; Growth</b>
4	<b>June 20, 2019</b>	<b>Mobility &amp; Public Realm</b>
5	<b>July 17, 2019</b>	<b>Climate &amp; Resiliency</b>
6	September 2019	<b>Development Scenarios</b>
7	October 2019	<b>Preferred Development Scenario</b>

8	November 2019	<b>Preferred Development Scenario</b> Impact Assessment
9	December 2019 / January 2020	<b>Urban Design Guidelines &amp; Zoning Recommendations</b>
10	February 2020	<b>Urban Design Guidelines &amp; Zoning Recommendations</b>
11	March/April 2020	<b>Draft PLAN: Downtown</b>
	May—July 2020	Meet as needed. PLAN: Downtown must be substantially complete by July 2020.

*Meeting dates and subjects are tentative and subject to change. Extra meetings may be scheduled and will be discussed in advance with the Advisory Group. Advisory Group members will be provided with schedule updates as the project progresses.*

# Community Engagement

## *Efforts to Date*

- **Open House** December 3, 2018
- **Stakeholder Roundtables**
  - Downtown Boston BID February 2, 2019
  - Preservation & Conservation February 19 & March 7, 2019
  - Institutions February 19 & March 19, 2019
  - Landowners & Developers February 20 & March 20, 2019
  - Business Owners March 20, 2019
- **Advisory Group Meeting #1** March 7, 2019



# Community Engagement

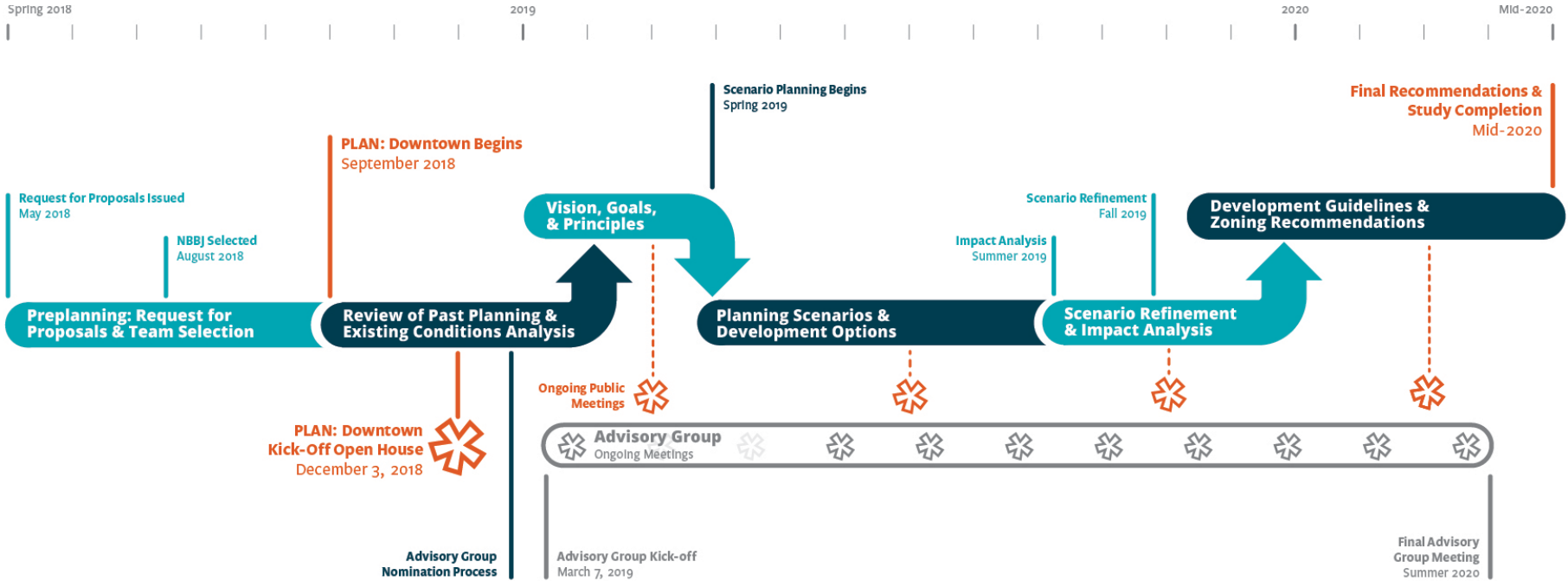
## *Upcoming Engagement Activities*

- **Visioning Workshop, April 30, 2019**
- **Public meetings** for entire study area and subdistricts (Summer & Fall 2019)
- **Tactical outreach** such as pop-up events, temporary interactive signage, and “wikimapping” (Summer & Fall 2019)

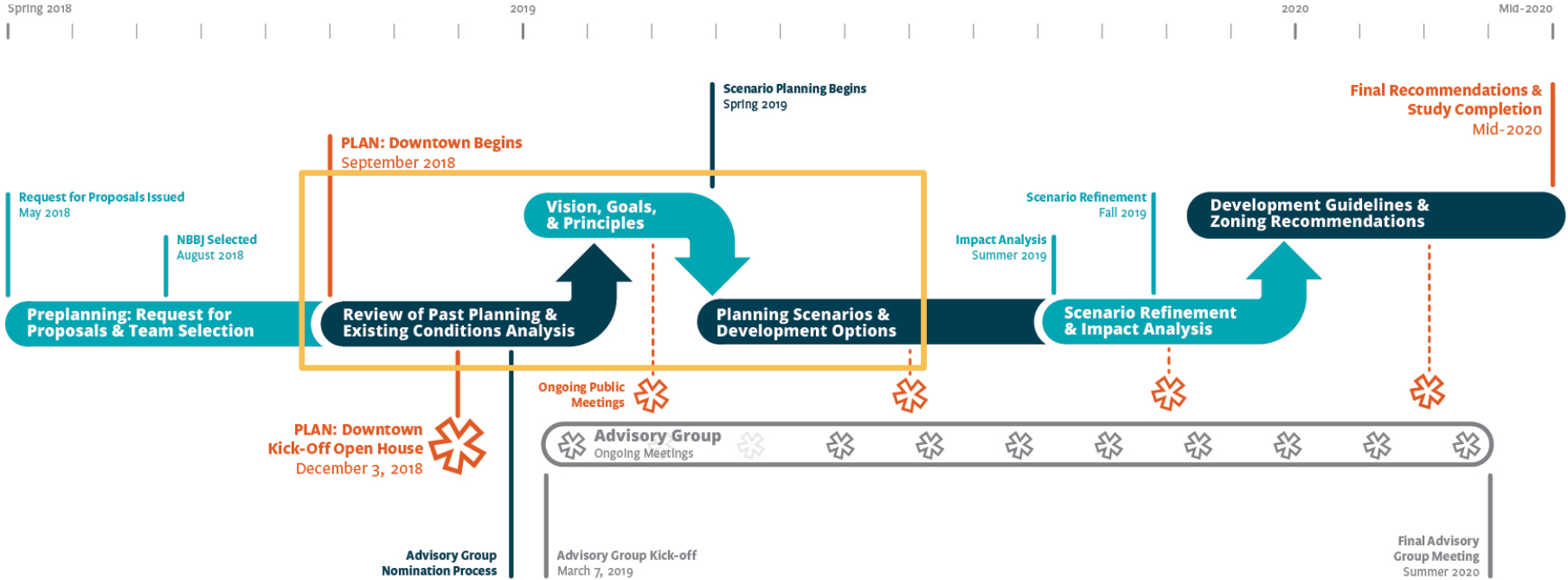
# PLAN: Downtown - Goal

Building on past studies, the primary goal of the study is to develop a new framework for the preservation, enhancement, and growth of the Downtown area of the City of Boston, while balancing the importance of **livability, daylight, walkability, climate change**, access to **open space, affordability**, and a dynamic **mix of uses**, among others.

# Timeline



# Timeline

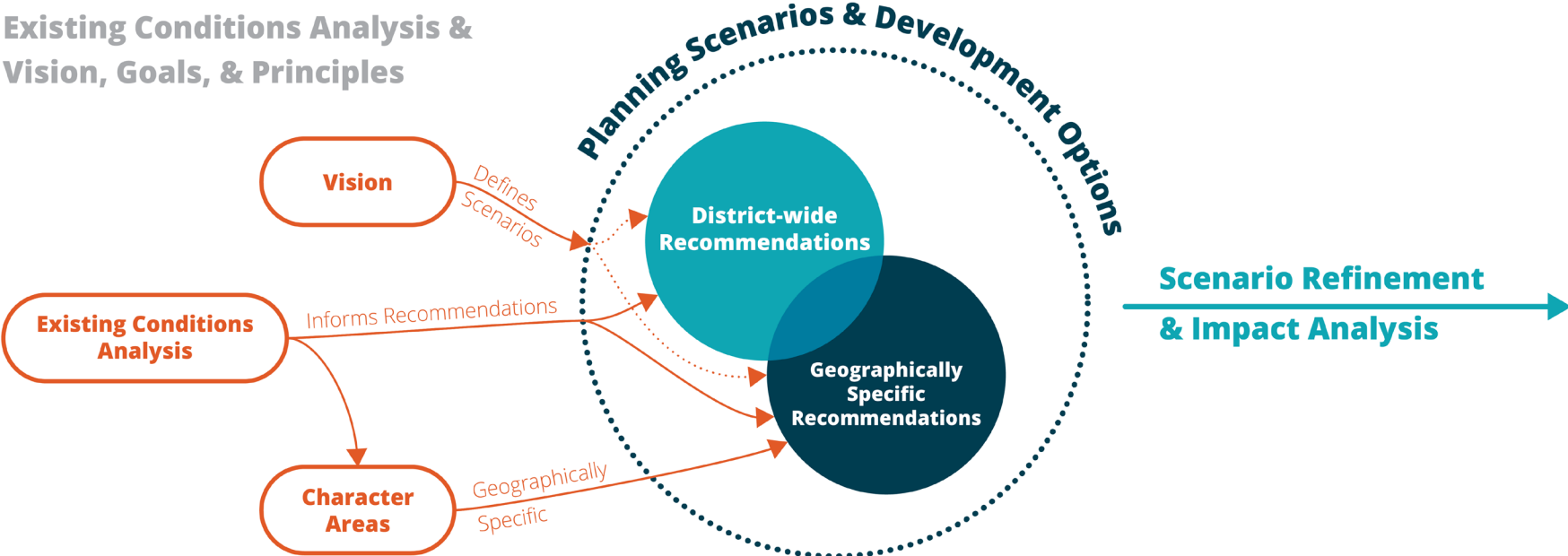




# Timeline Zoom-In

Today's Conversation Goals

Existing Conditions Analysis & Vision, Goals, & Principles





# What Defines “Character”?

What qualities are important to define distinct “urban or neighborhood characters?”



# What Defines “Character”?

*A “character area” is identifiable by its cultural, spatial, social, and economic qualities, including long-held associations with a “place”*

**Historic Context** – Designated and pending historic assets, landmarks, building age

**Urban Grain** – Building footprints, block size

**Public Realm** – Public space, streetscape, street role (typologies)

**Land Uses** – Mix of existing uses

# Questions to Consider

## *Preliminary Character Areas*

- What other factors should we consider when **defining the Character Areas**? Did we miss a Character Area?
- How do you **experience each Character Area**? What are the unique qualities and/or features of each Character Area? What should be enhanced or called out in each Character Area?
- Do the **“preliminary boundaries”** align with your definition of each district? Is there value to having more fluid or ambiguous character area edges?



# Commonly Understood Character Areas of Downtown



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# Preliminary Character Areas

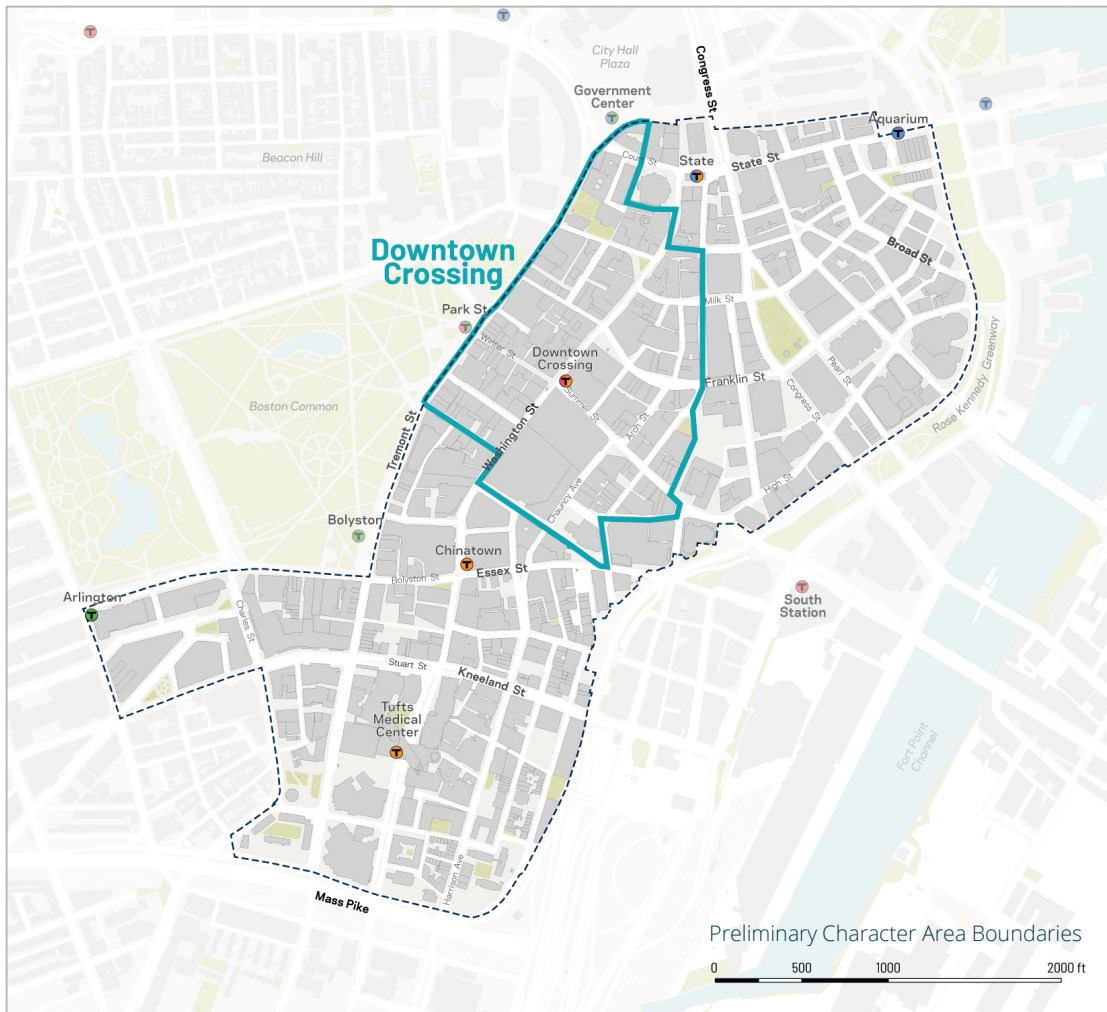
Downtown Crossing

Chinatown

Financial District

Theater District & Park Plaza

Wharf District



# Downtown Crossing

## *Preliminary Character Area*

- Major regional **shopping district**
- **Crossroads** for Greater Boston
- **Vibrant public life** adjacent to the pedestrian zone
- High concentration of **notable historic landmarks**
- Neighborhood supporting **a mix of uses**, including residential







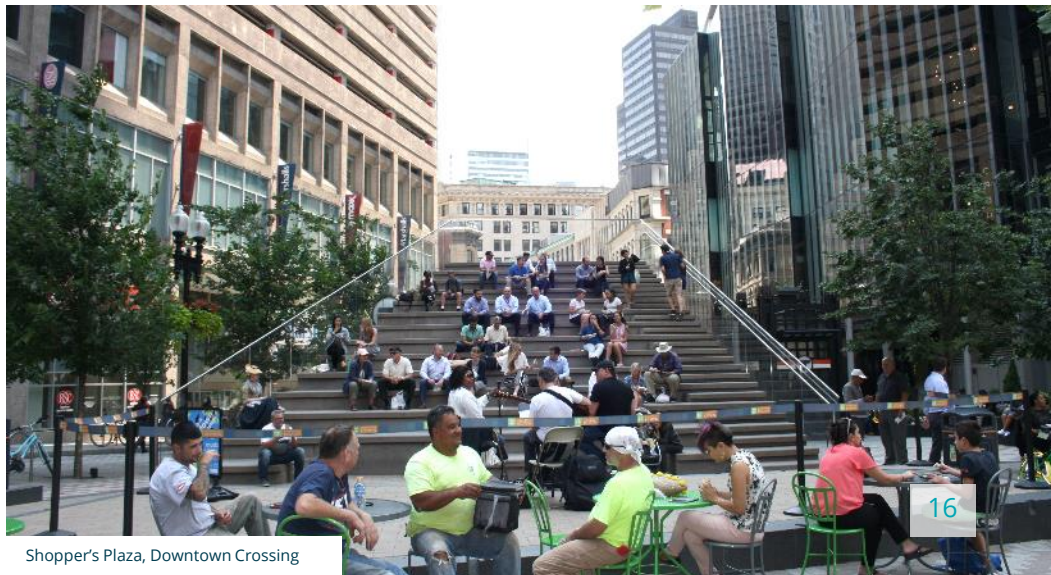
Washington Street, Downtown Crossing



Summer Street @ Washington Street, Downtown Crossing



Franklin Street @ Tontine Crescent, Downtown Crossing



Shopper's Plaza, Downtown Crossing





# Chinatown

## *Preliminary Character Area*

- District representing specific, **cherished cultural heritage** for the region
- **Fine-grained neighborhood** with a wide range of building types
- **Vibrant street life** comprised of many small businesses
- Major **residential neighborhood** in Downtown





Mary Soo Hoo Park, Chinatown



77 Harrison Avenue, Chinatown



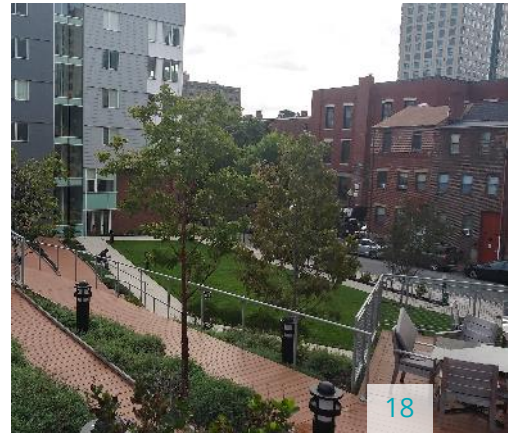
Beach Street @ Chinatown Gate, Chinatown



Chin Park, Chinatown

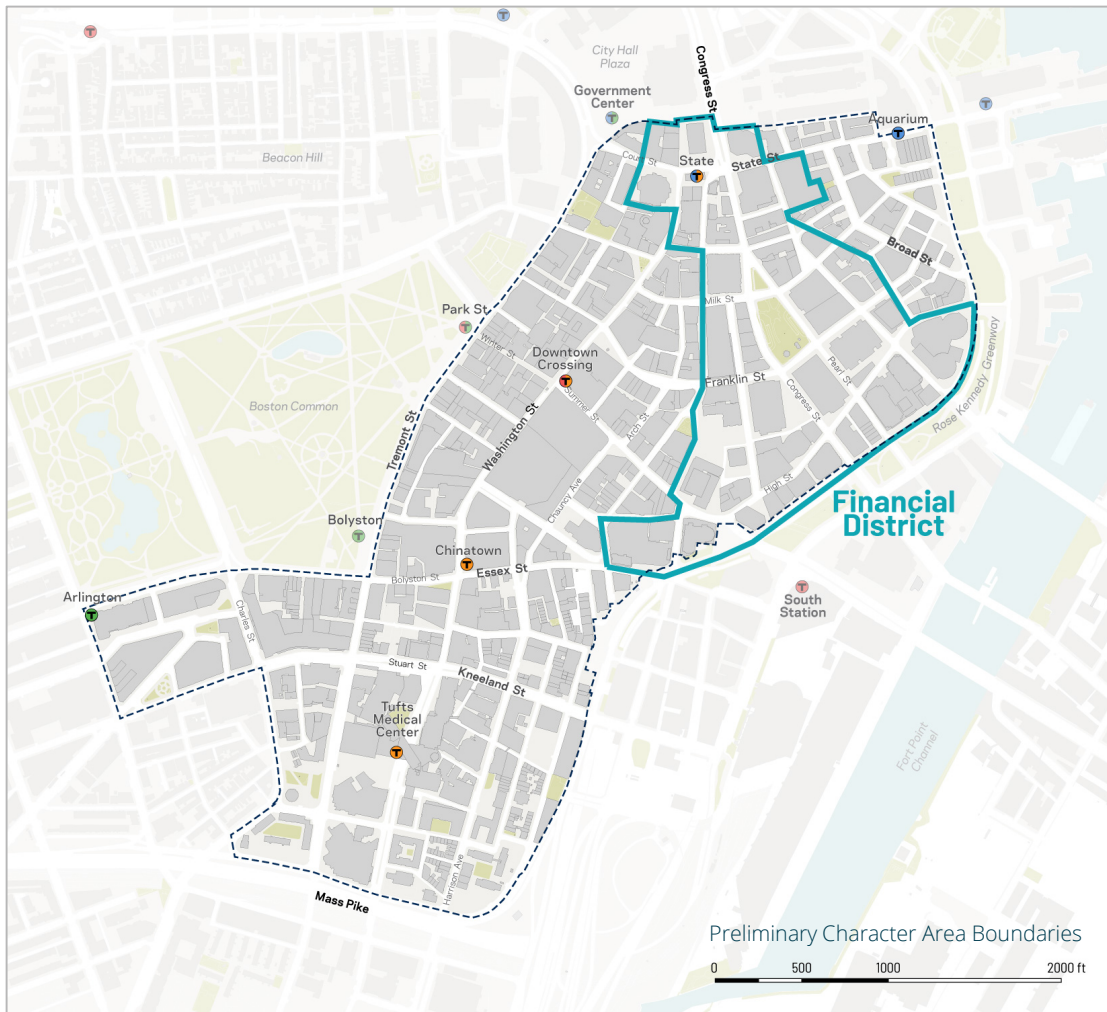


Washington Street @ Tufts, Chinatown



One Greenway Park, Chinatown





# Financial District

## *Preliminary Character Area*

- A business center that conveys the city's history as an **important regional hub of commerce**
- Larger blocks and parcels, with a **limited mix of uses**
- Significantly **quieter at night** than during the day and weekends
- District **balances** the **grand scale** with the **human scale**







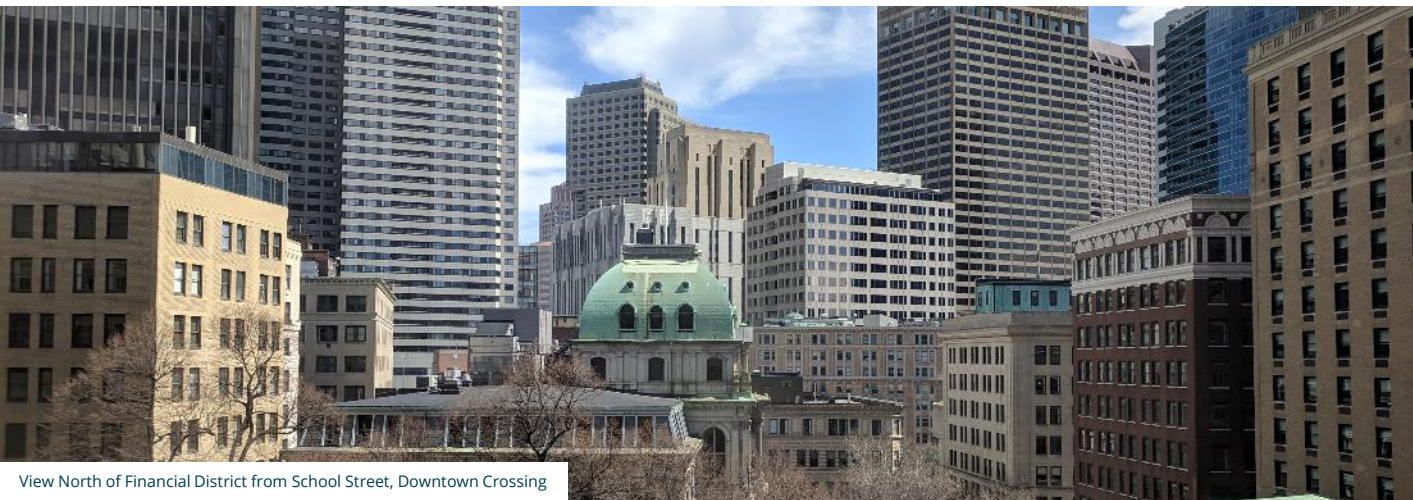
Old State House, Financial District



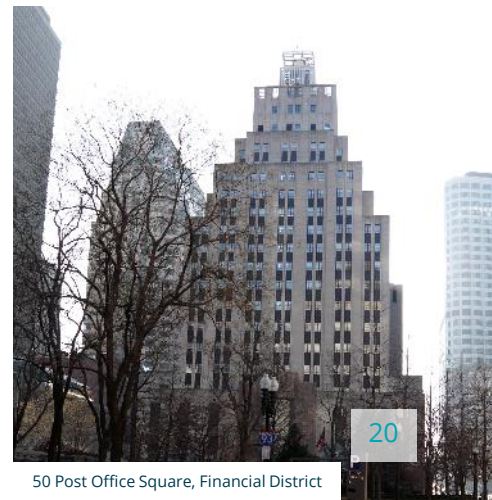
Post Office Square, Financial District



Kingston & Bedford Streets, Financial District

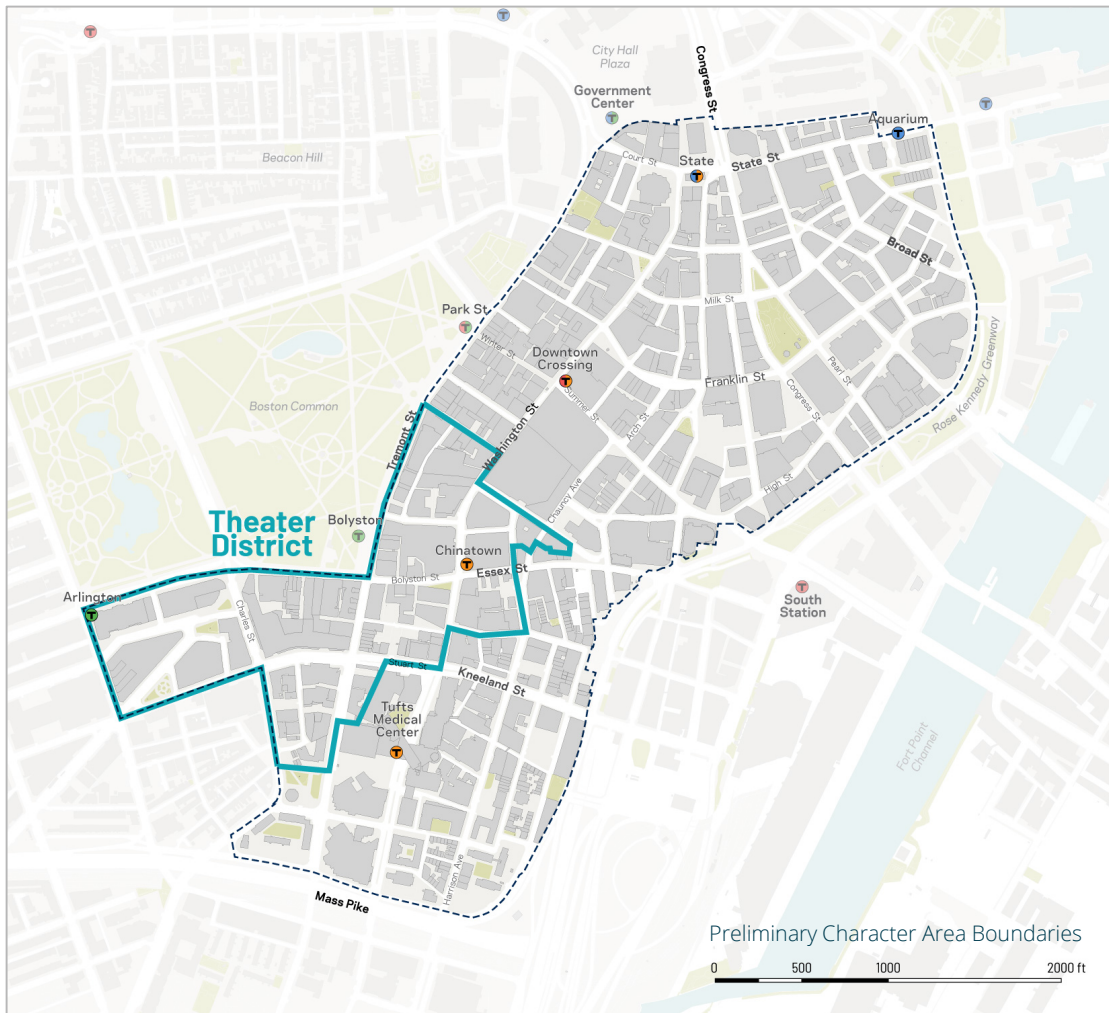


View North of Financial District from School Street, Downtown Crossing



50 Post Office Square, Financial District





# Theater District & Park Plaza

*Preliminary Character Area*

- The **performing arts center** of Downtown and the entire region
- Home to many **cultural, institutional, and educational uses**
- More **lively on nights and weekends** than many other places Downtown
- **Established college student population**
- Contains multiple **major thoroughfares**





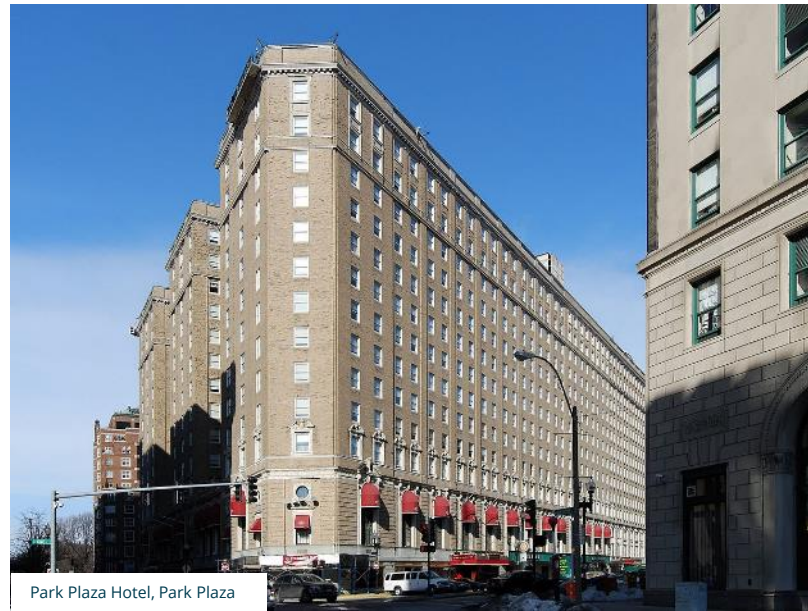
Boston Opera House, Theater District



Boch Center, Theater District



Boston Common

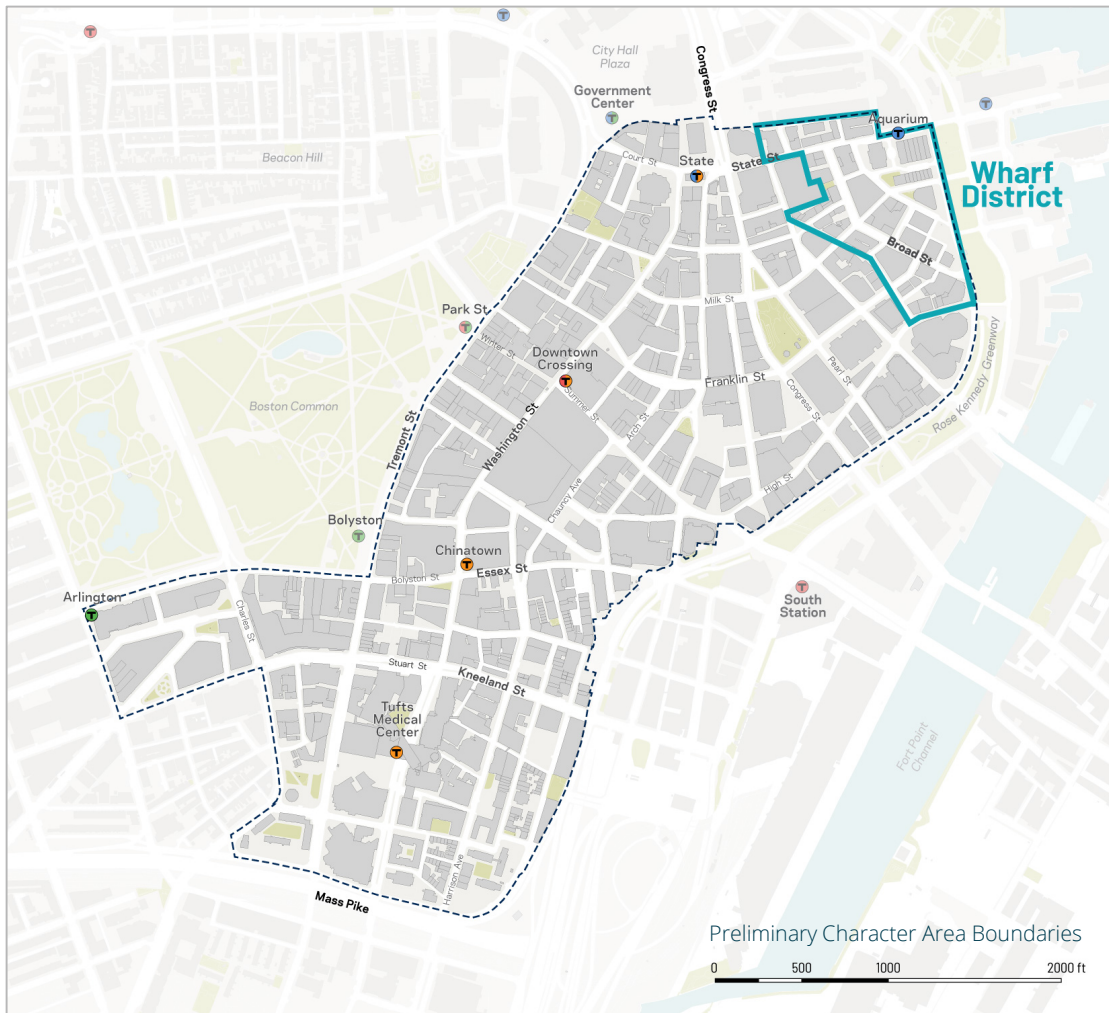


Park Plaza Hotel, Park Plaza



Washington Street @ West Street, Theater District





# Wharf District

## *Preliminary Character Area*

- Key link to the Greenway and the Waterfront
- Home to some of the **oldest and most traditional built form** in the Downtown
- **Quieter** than many other areas Downtown, in spite of a diverse set of users
- Neighborhood supports **living, working and playing**

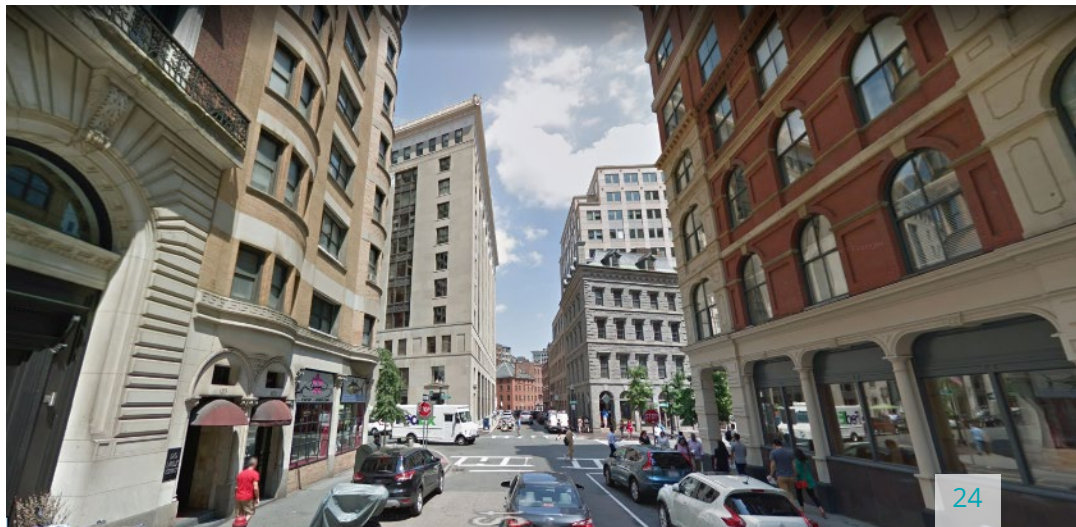




Broad @ Battery March Street, Wharf District

View from Boston Harbor, Wharf District

Liberty Square, Wharf District



Milk Street @ Broad Street, Wharf District

R.F.K. Greenway looking North

# Analysis of Existing Characteristics



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# *Historic Context*

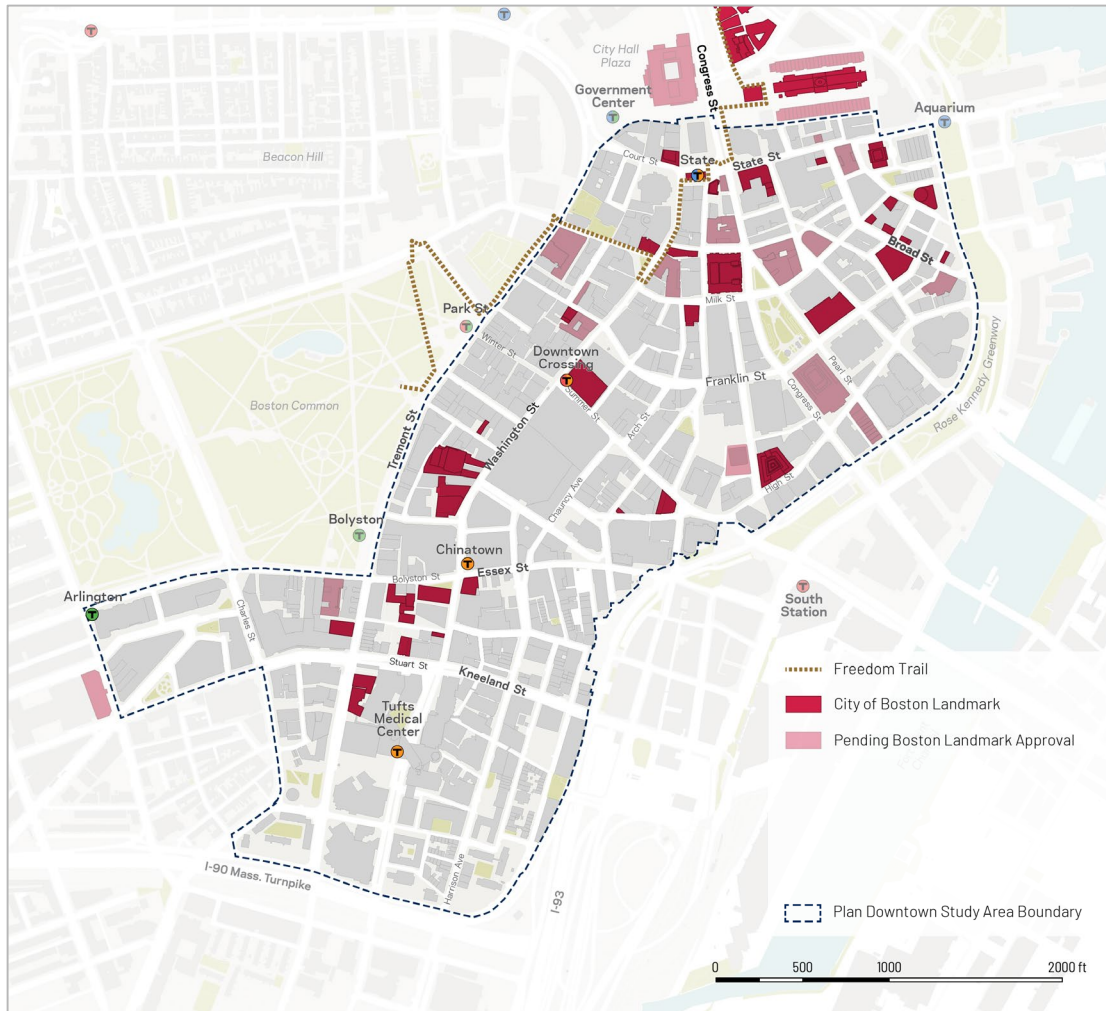




# Historic Assets

## *Historic Context*

- Historical Landmarks are distributed somewhat evenly - **most are along corridors**; there are very few in Chinatown

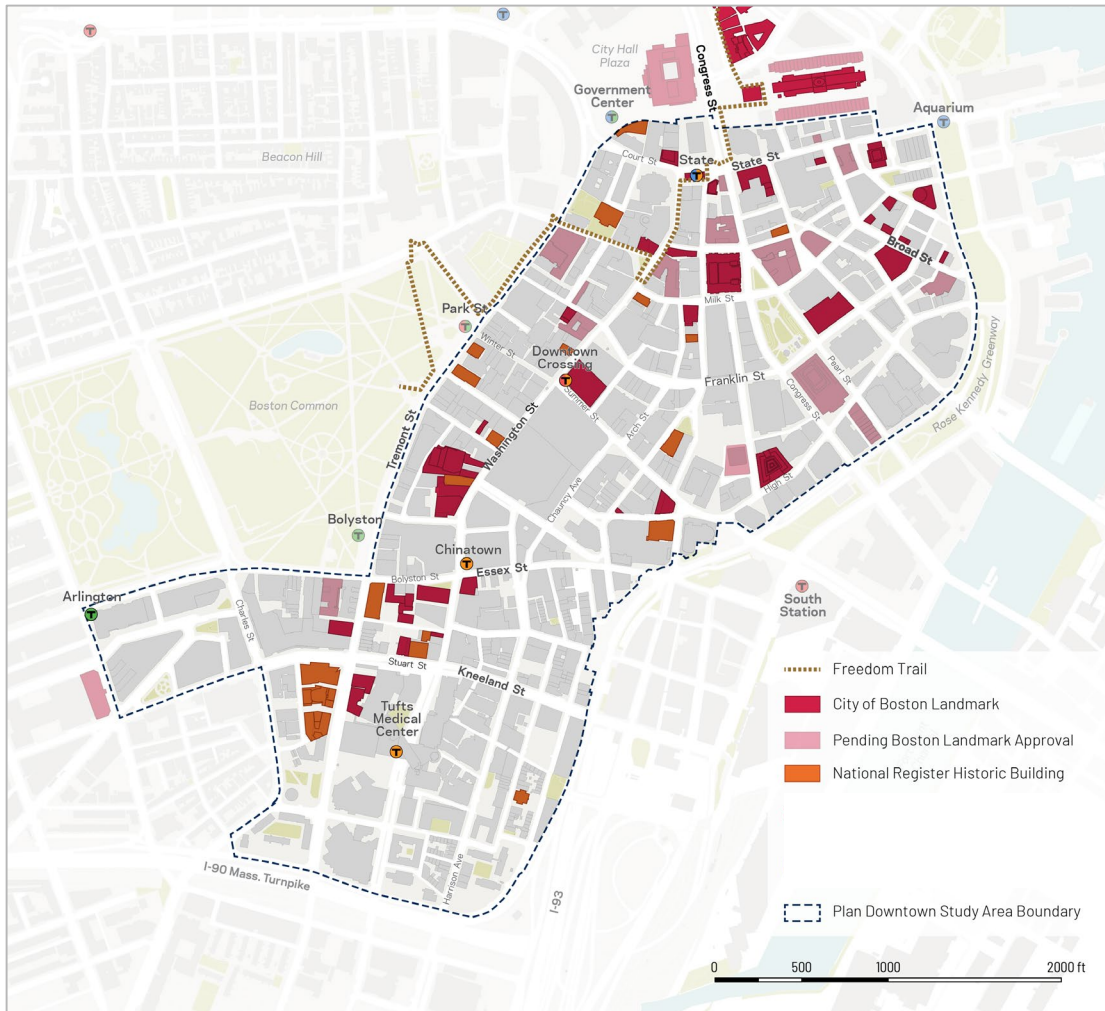




# Historic Assets

## *Historic Context*

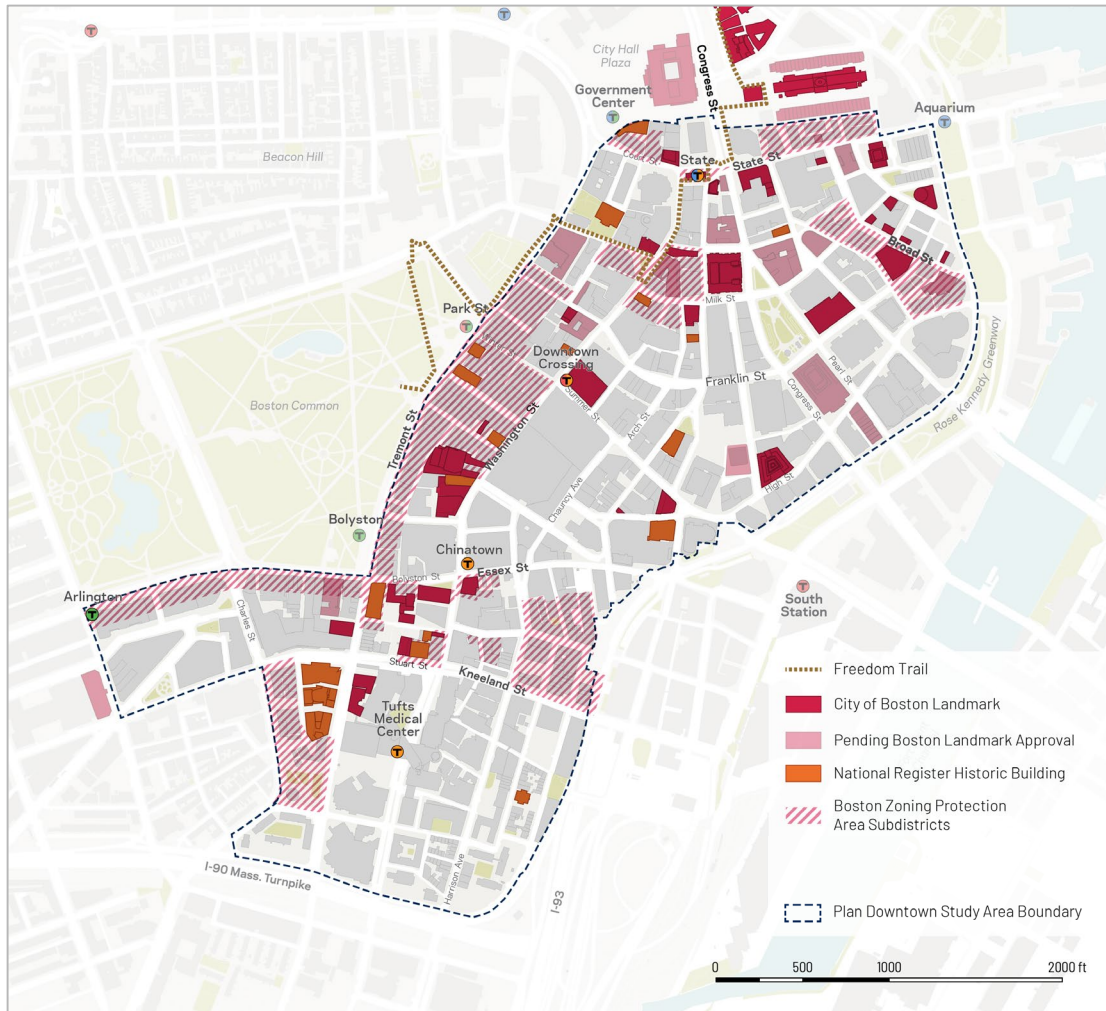
- **National Register-listed buildings are most common in the Theater District and Downtown Crossing**



# Historic Assets

## *Historic Context*

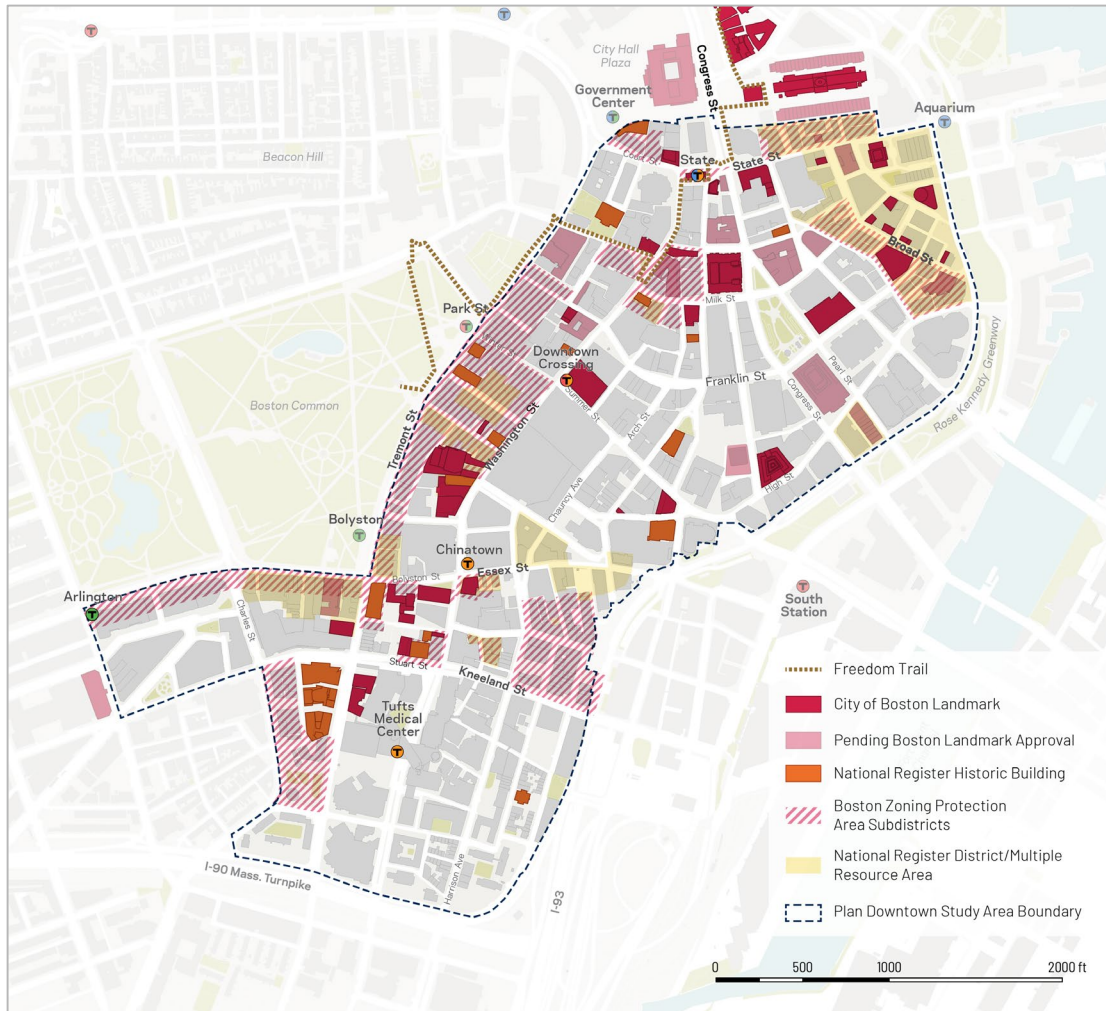
- **Zoning Protection Areas** – intended to protect cherished open spaces and culturally significant districts – can be found across Downtown, in **Downtown Crossing**, the **Theater District** and Park Plaza, **Chinatown**, an the **Wharf District**



# Historic Assets

## Historic Context

- The **largest National Register Districts** are located in the **Theater District** and in the **Wharf District**
- Historical Landmarks are distributed somewhat evenly - **most are along corridors**; there are very few in Chinatown
- Landmarks are **often not adjacent to open spaces** – which may make them difficult to appreciate







Brattle Book Shop, Downtown Crossing



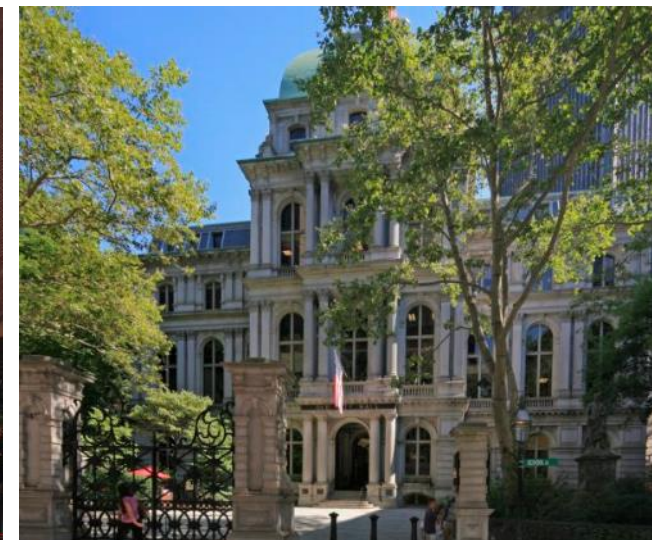
Readers' Park, Downtown Crossing



Boston shoreline composite, Map Works, Inc., 1999.



Summer Street @ Washington Street, Downtown Crossing



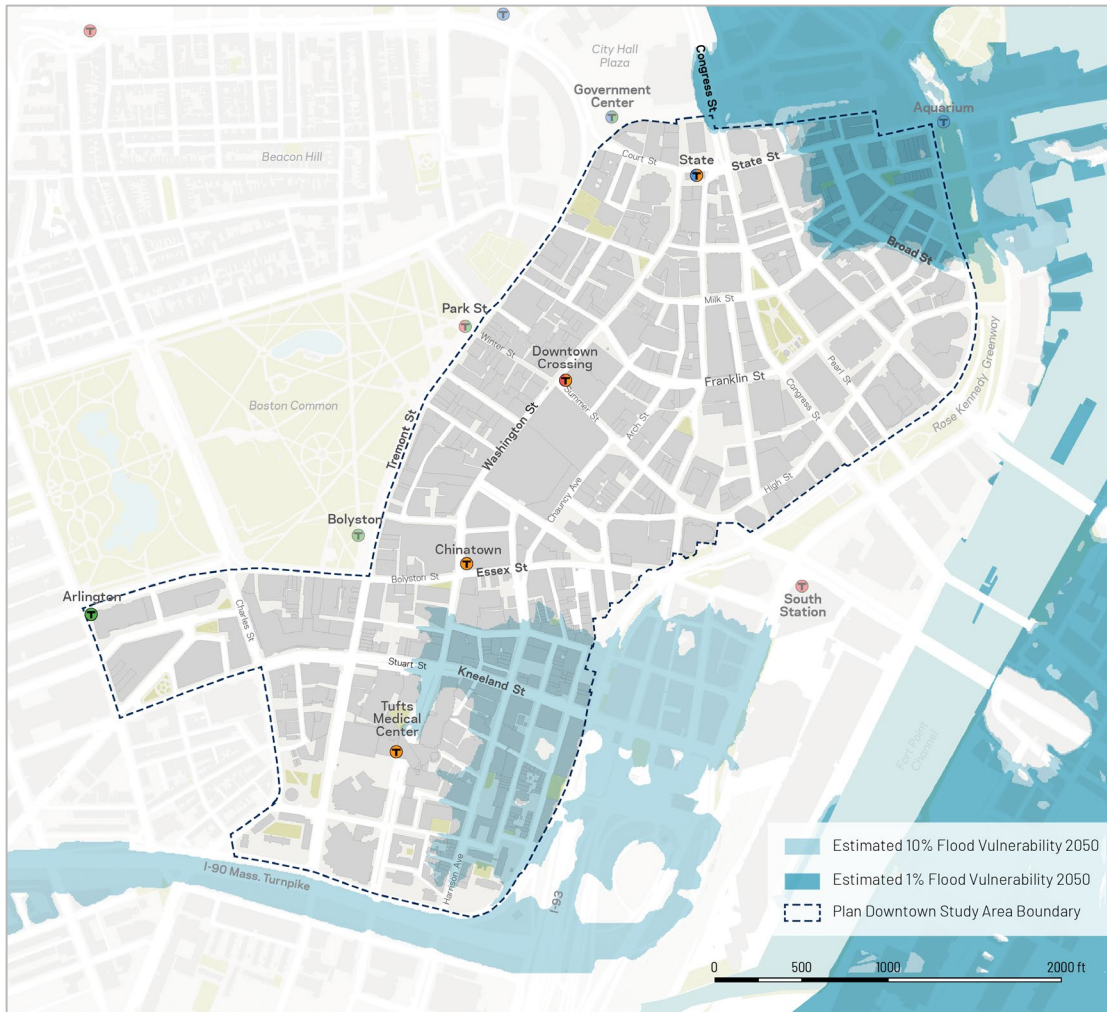
Old City Hall, Downtown Crossing



31

King's Chapel Burying Ground, Downtown Crossing





# Estimated Flood Vulnerability

## *Historic Context*

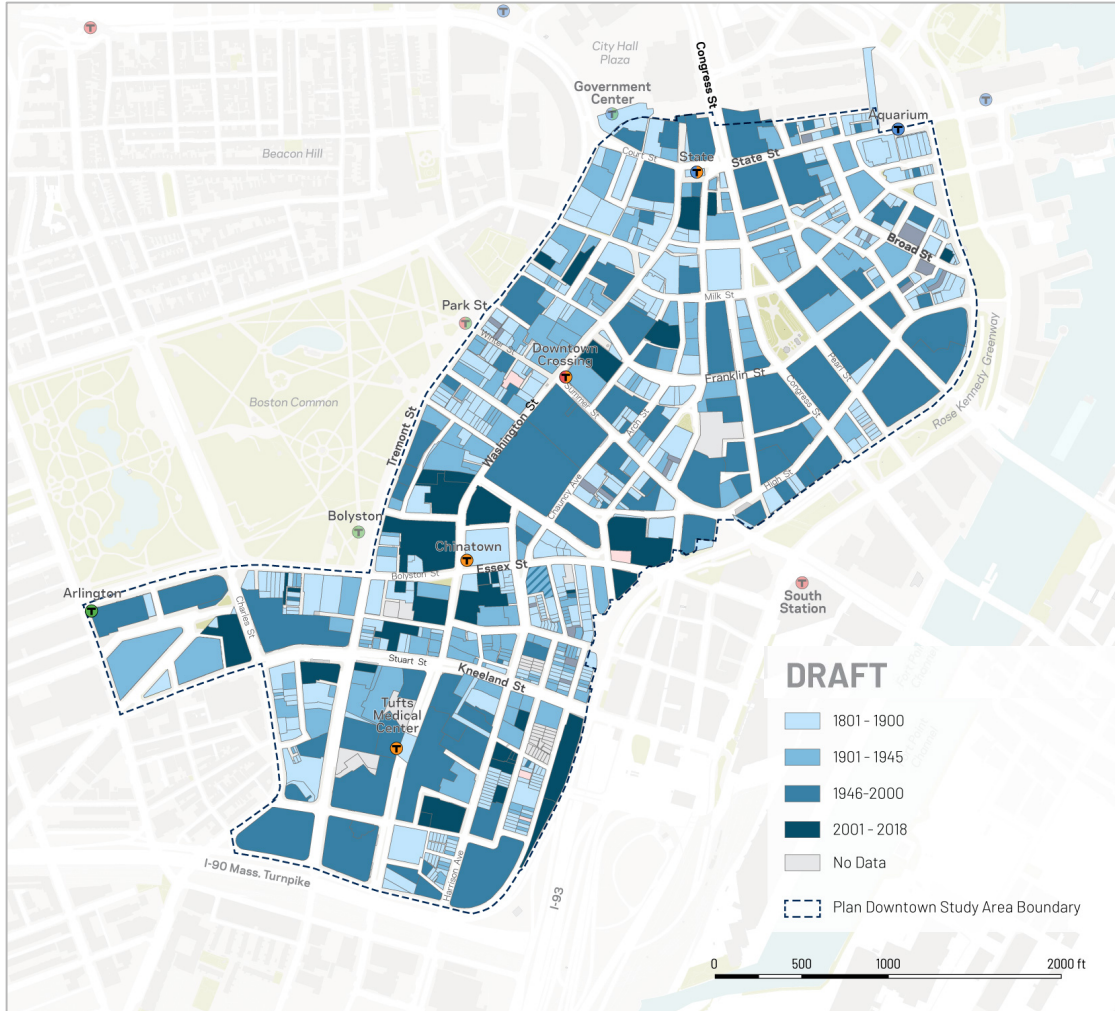
- About **10% of the study area** would be **vulnerable to flooding** by the year **2050**.
- The **Wharf District** will be the **most susceptible** area
- **Chinatown** is the **second most susceptible** to flooding.



# Year Built

## Historic Context

- There are concentrations of **new buildings along Washington St**
- The **oldest buildings** are in the **Wharf District**
- **Newer buildings** tend to have **larger footprints** than older buildings
- The highest concentration of **20<sup>th</sup> century buildings** is in the **Financial District**



Source: City of Boston

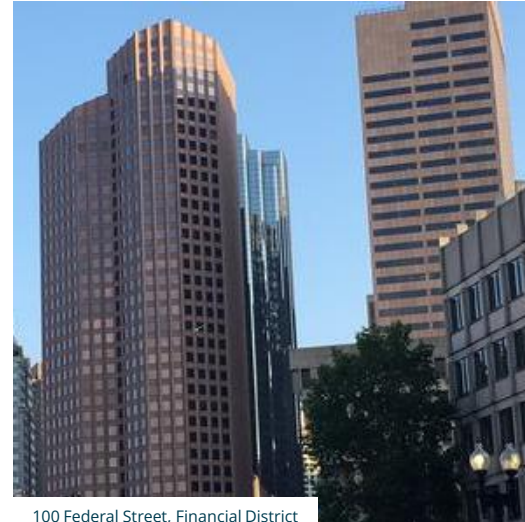




125 Summer Street, Financial District



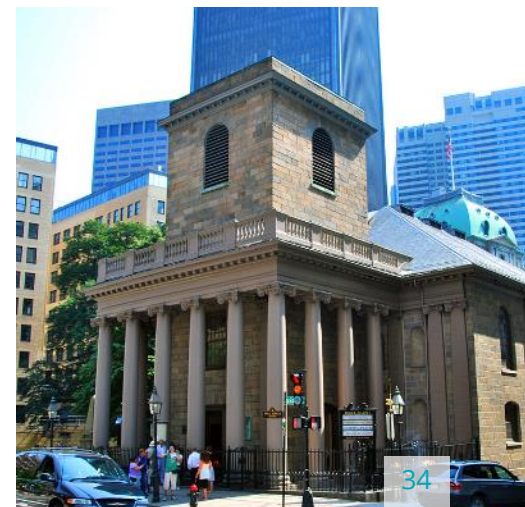
View west across the Financial District & Downtown Crossing



100 Federal Street, Financial District



21 School Street, Downtown Crossing



King's Chapel, Downtown Crossing



# Composite

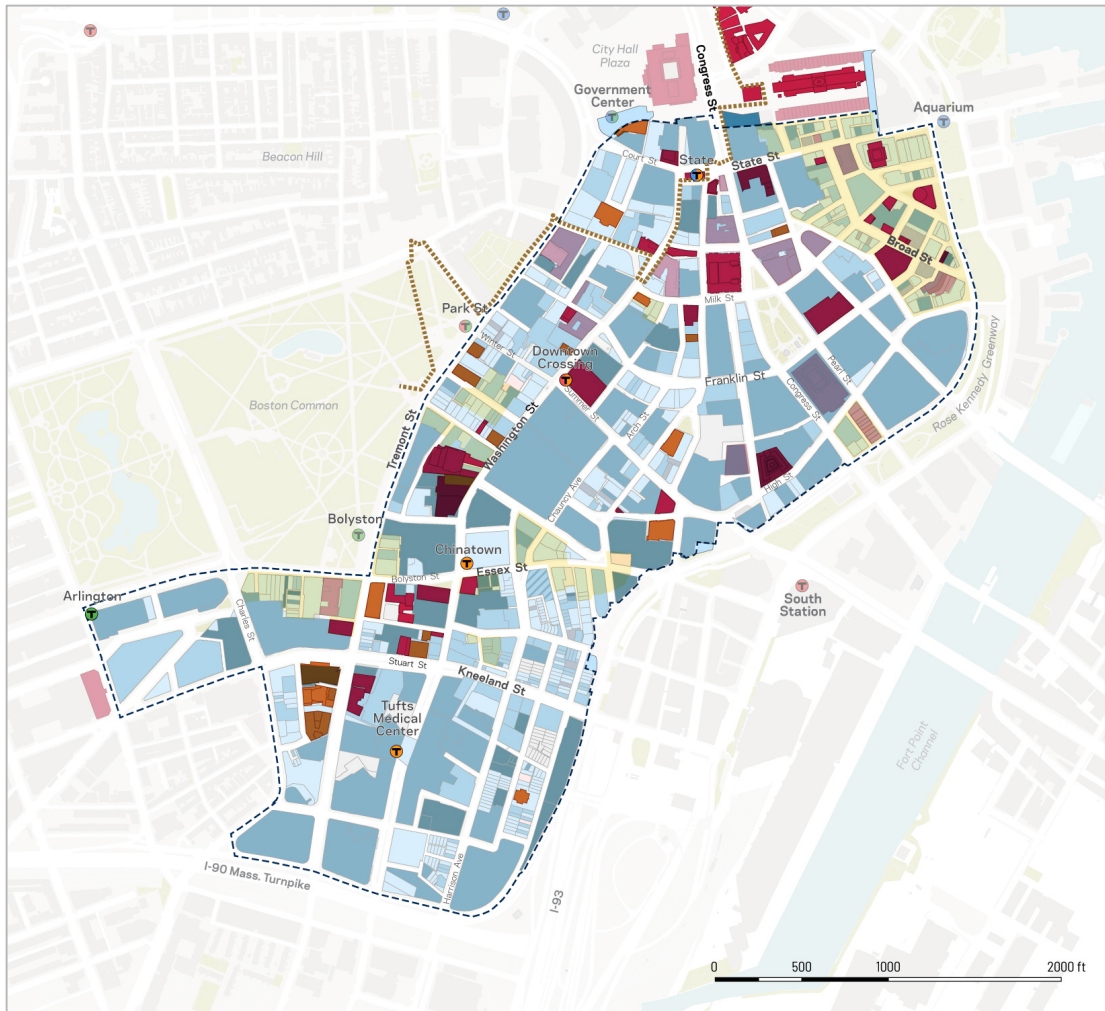
## Historic Context

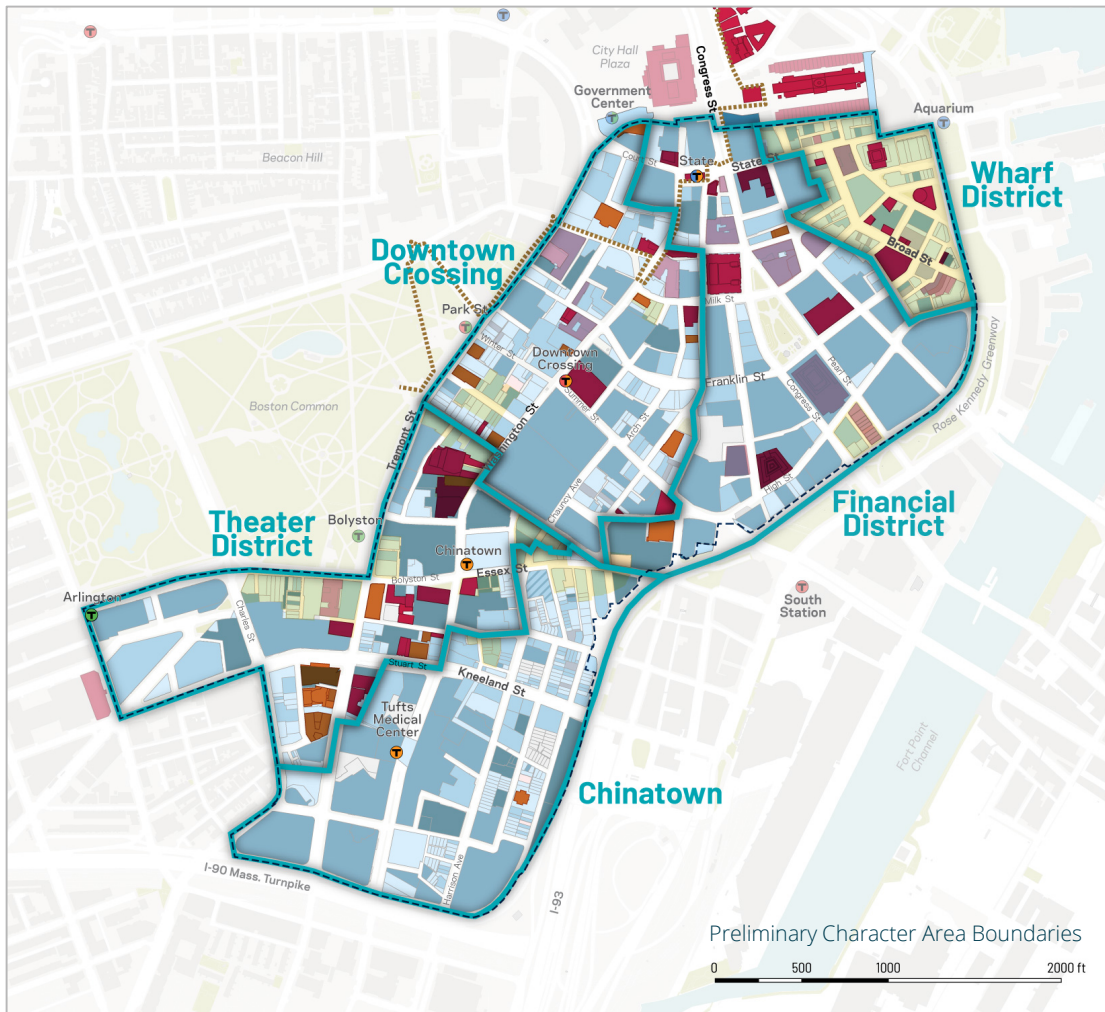
### Historic Assets

- Freedom Trail
- National Register District/Multiple Resource Area
- Boston Zoning Protection Area Subdistricts
- National Register Historic Building
- City of Boston Landmark
- Pending Boston Landmark Approval

### Year Built

- 1801 - 1900
- 1901 - 1945
- 1946 - 2000
- 2001 - 2018
- No Data
- Plan Downtown Study Area Boundary





# Character Areas

## *Historic Context — Conclusions*

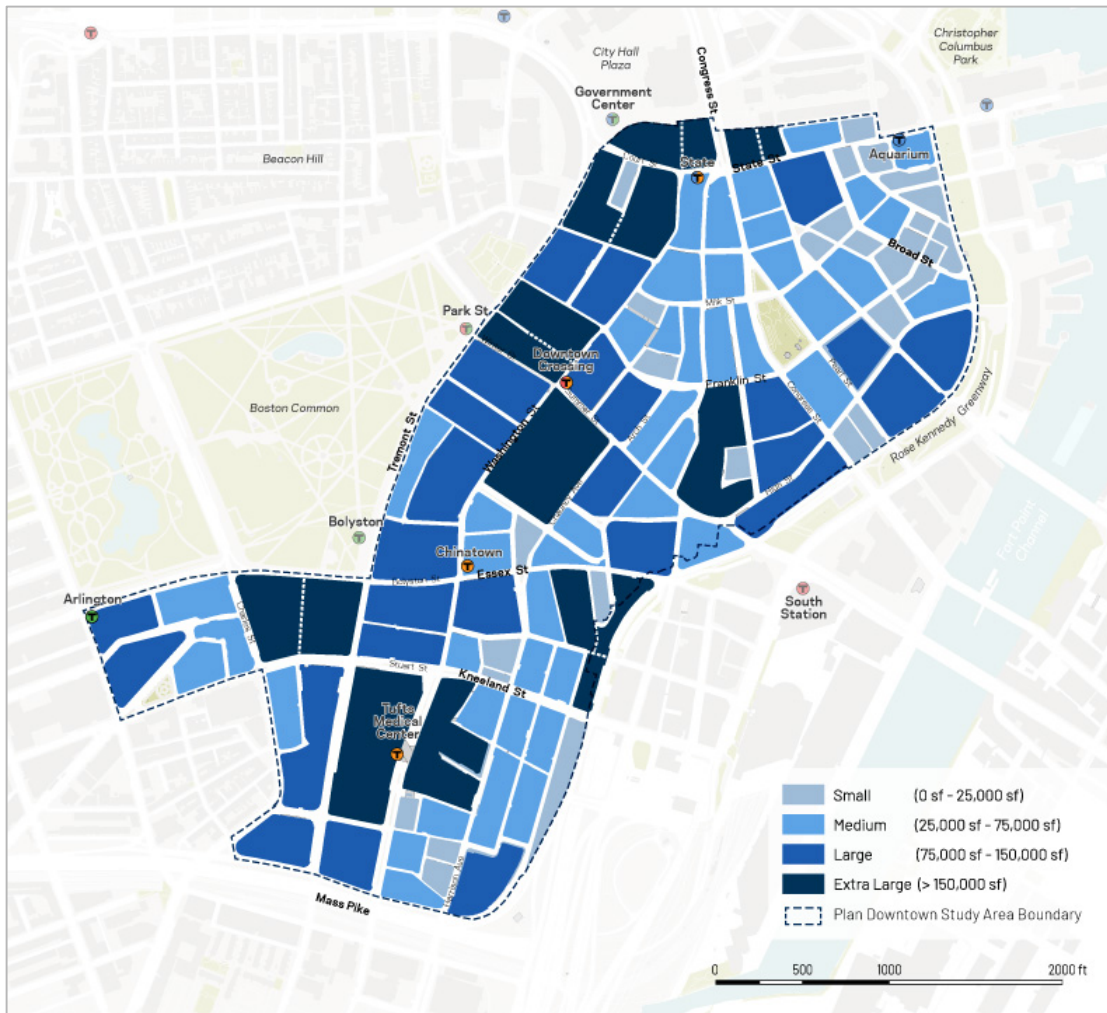
- There are **few designated historic assets in Chinatown**
- Designated **historic assets** have **smaller footprints** than surrounding buildings
- The largest concentration of **older buildings** is in **Downtown Crossing**
- Generally, there is an **intermingling of new and old buildings** across Downtown



# *Urban Grain*



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# Block Size

## Urban Grain

- Some larger blocks have **small alleys or interior passages** that are not immediately obvious
- **Smaller blocks** tend to be clustered in the **Wharf District**
- **Larger blocks** tend to be adjacent to large open spaces or associated with institutional uses.
- **Chinatown** and **Downtown Crossing** both have some of the largest blocks, often disrupting a smaller grain





City Hall Avenue, Downtown Crossing



Music Hall Place, Downtown Crossing



State Street @ Congress Street, Financial District



Chapman Place, Downtown Crossing



33 Broad Street, Wharf District



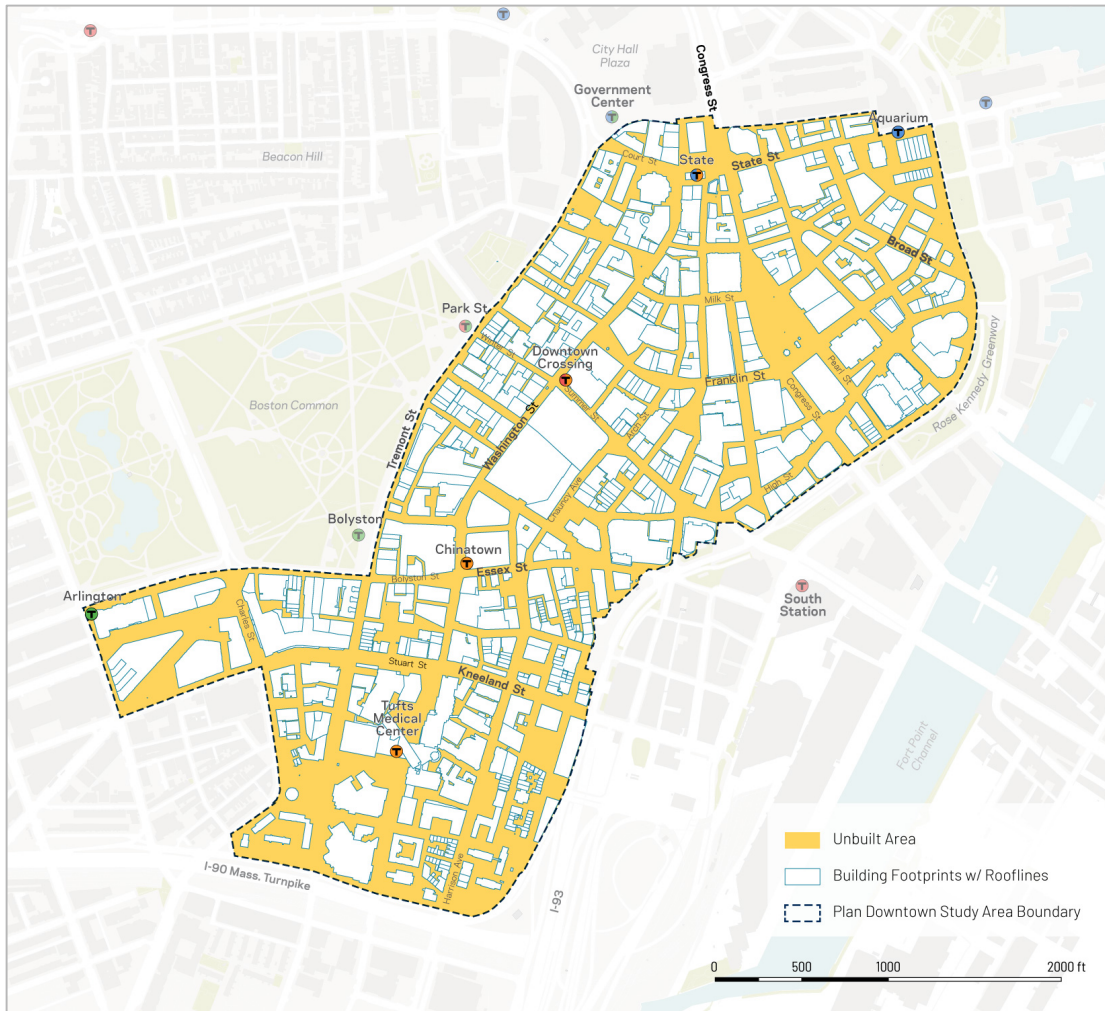
Burnham Building, Downtown Crossing



# Building Footprints

## Urban Grain

- More **permeable blocks** in **Chinatown** and in the Ladder District
- Larger **gaps between buildings** in **Chinatown**
- **Larger buildings** frame Post Office Square in the **Financial District**
- **Smallest footprints** in **Downtown Crossing** and **Chinatown**







Source: Mapjunction.com



Jacob Wirth Building, Theater District



Massachusetts Transportation Building, Park Plaza

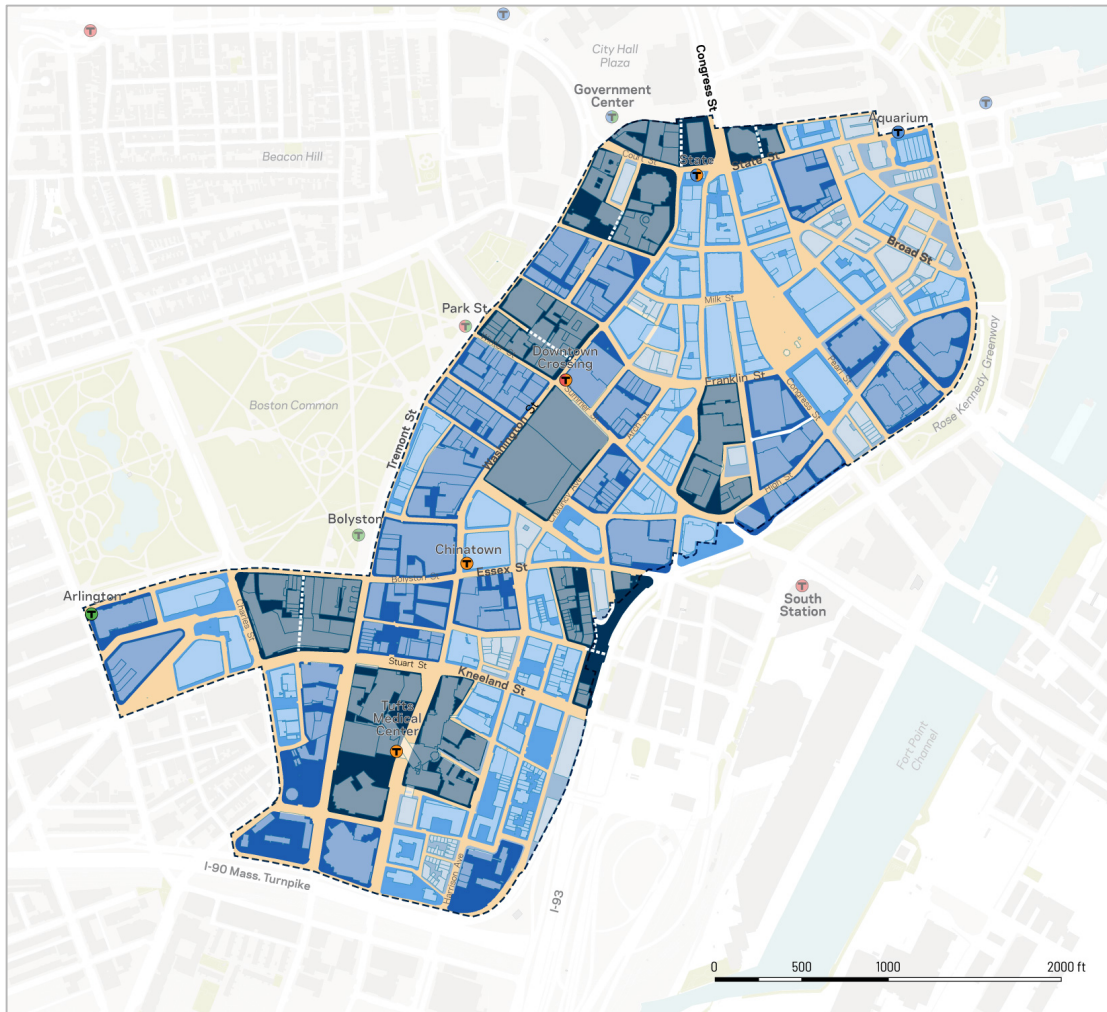


Congress Street @ Post Office Square, Financial District



Pi Alley Garage, Downtown Crossing

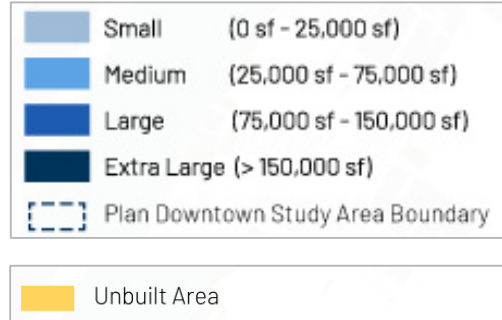


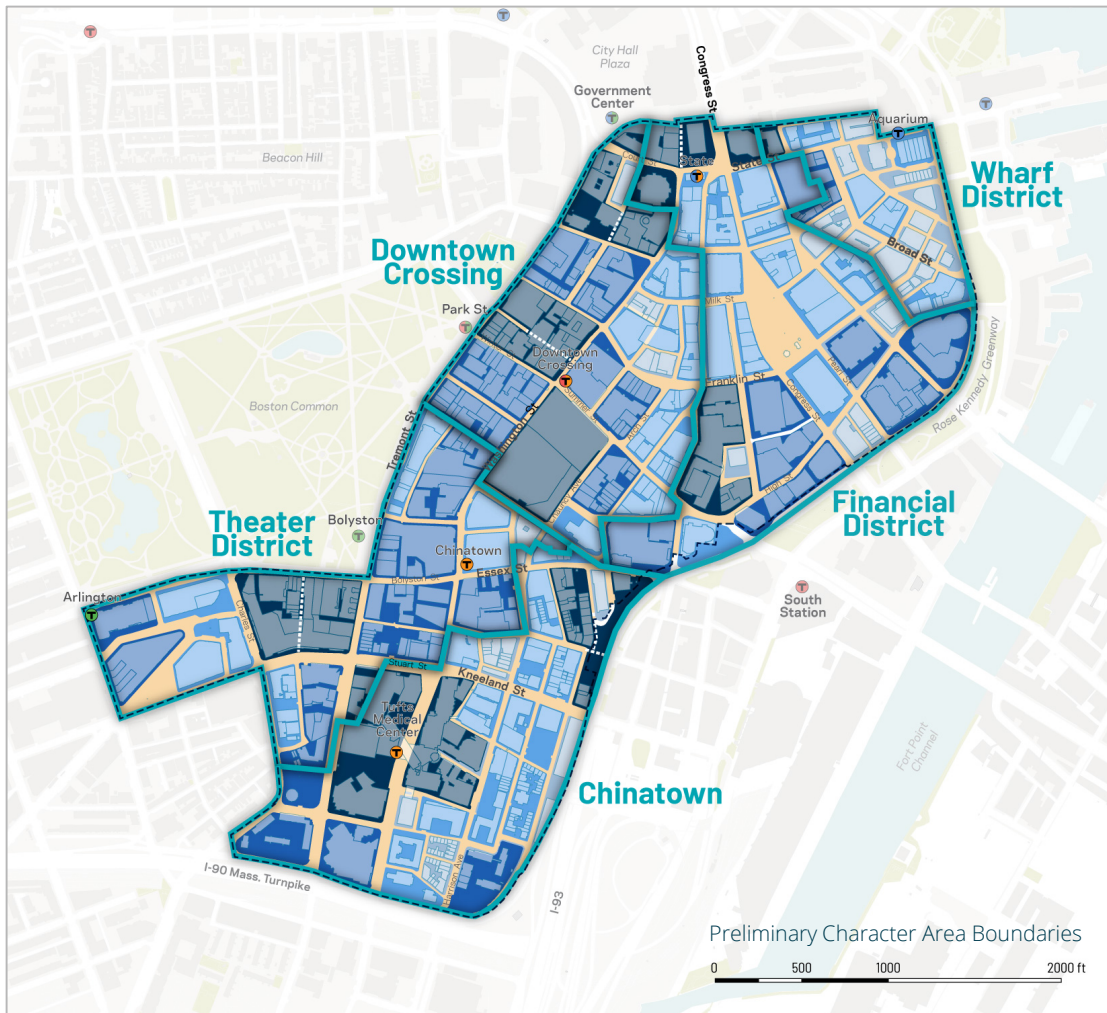


# Composite

## Urban Grain

### Block Size





# Character Areas

## *Urban Grain—Conclusions*

- The **Financial District** has some of the **largest building footprints** and **least permeable blocks**
- **Downtown Crossing** has a wide range of building and block sizes, but a **high concentration of finer grain** – small building footprints
- **Chinatown** has **small buildings** but **within large blocks**





# *Public Realm*



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# Green Spaces & Tree Canopy

## Public Realm

- **Few** public spaces cater to **year-round** or **multigenerational** use
- **Post Office Square**, represents a **significant public space** in the **Financial District**
- **Smaller public spaces** are rare, with higher provision in **Chinatown**
- **Street tree canopy** is not **consistent across Downtown**



# Pedestrian & Temporary Plazas

## Public Realm

- Large **pedestrianized** areas in **Downtown Crossing** and **Chinatown** (Chin Park & Mary Soo Hoo Park)
- **Limited temporary** interventions to date
- **Essex, Franklin, Summer, and State** connect to the most **pedestrian hardscape/plazas** and **temporary interventions**



Source: City of Boston





Eliot Norton Park, Theater District



Boston Common



One Greenway Park, Chinatown



Tontine Crescent Tactical Plaza, Downtown Crossing

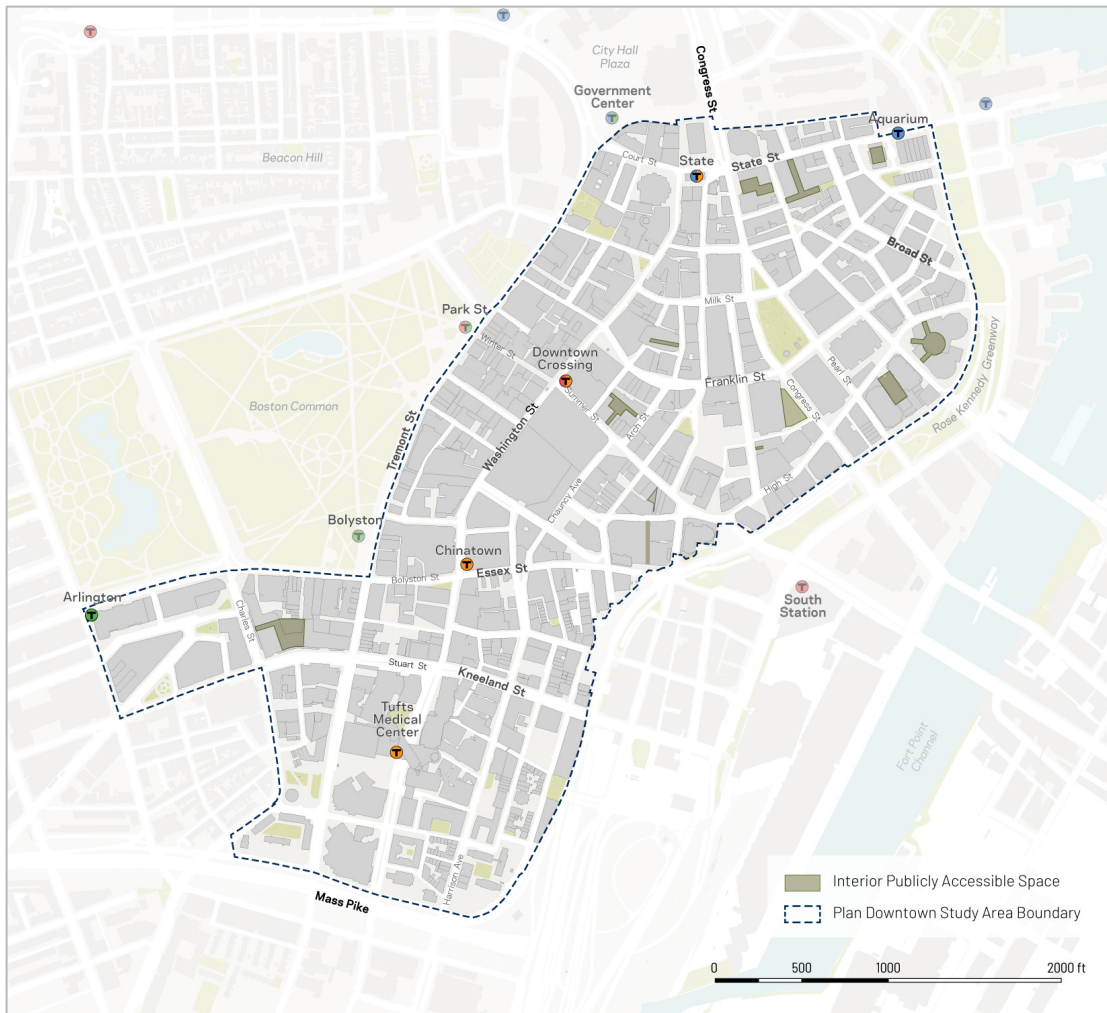


Mary Soo Hoo Park, Chinatown



Post Office Square, Financial District





# Publicly Accessible Interior Spaces

## *Public Realm*

- Increasingly lobbies are being opened to the public, especially in the **Financial District**
- Interior routes and spaces are usually poorly indicated
- There are generally **few publicly accessible spaces**



100 Federal Street, Financial District



Massachusetts Transportation Building, Park Plaza



One International Place, Financial District



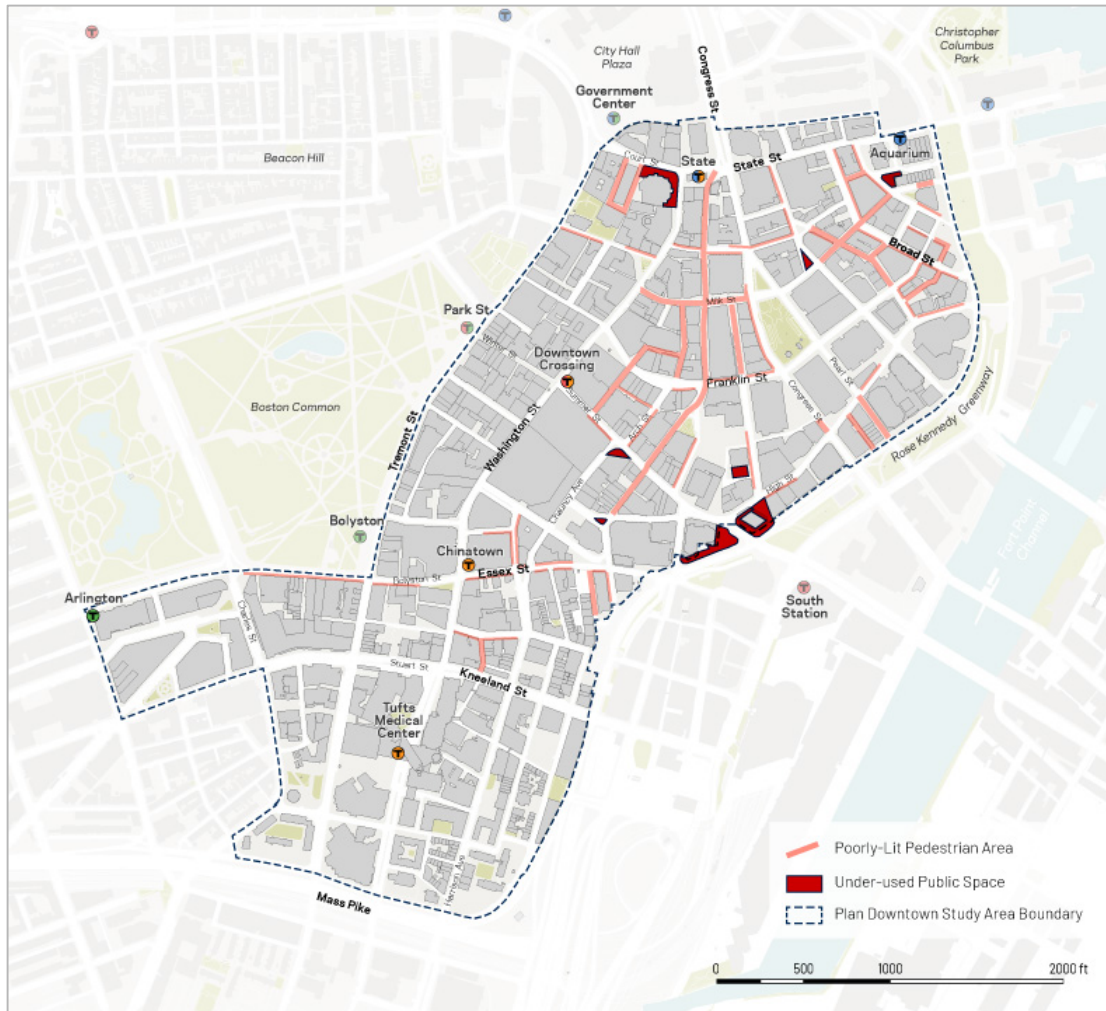
75 State Street, Financial District



# Lighting & Underused Spaces

## Public Realm

- **Lighting is poor along some streets** that host key landmarks – e.g. Milk, Hawley, Batterymarch, Devonshire Streets
- The **Financial** and **Wharf Districts** are the most **poorly lit**
- **Under-used public spaces** include traffic islands & privately owned plazas





Kilby Street @ Milk Street, Financial District



125 Summer Street Plaza, Downtown Crossing



88 Hudson Street, Chinatown



Milk Street @ Washington Street, Downtown Crossing



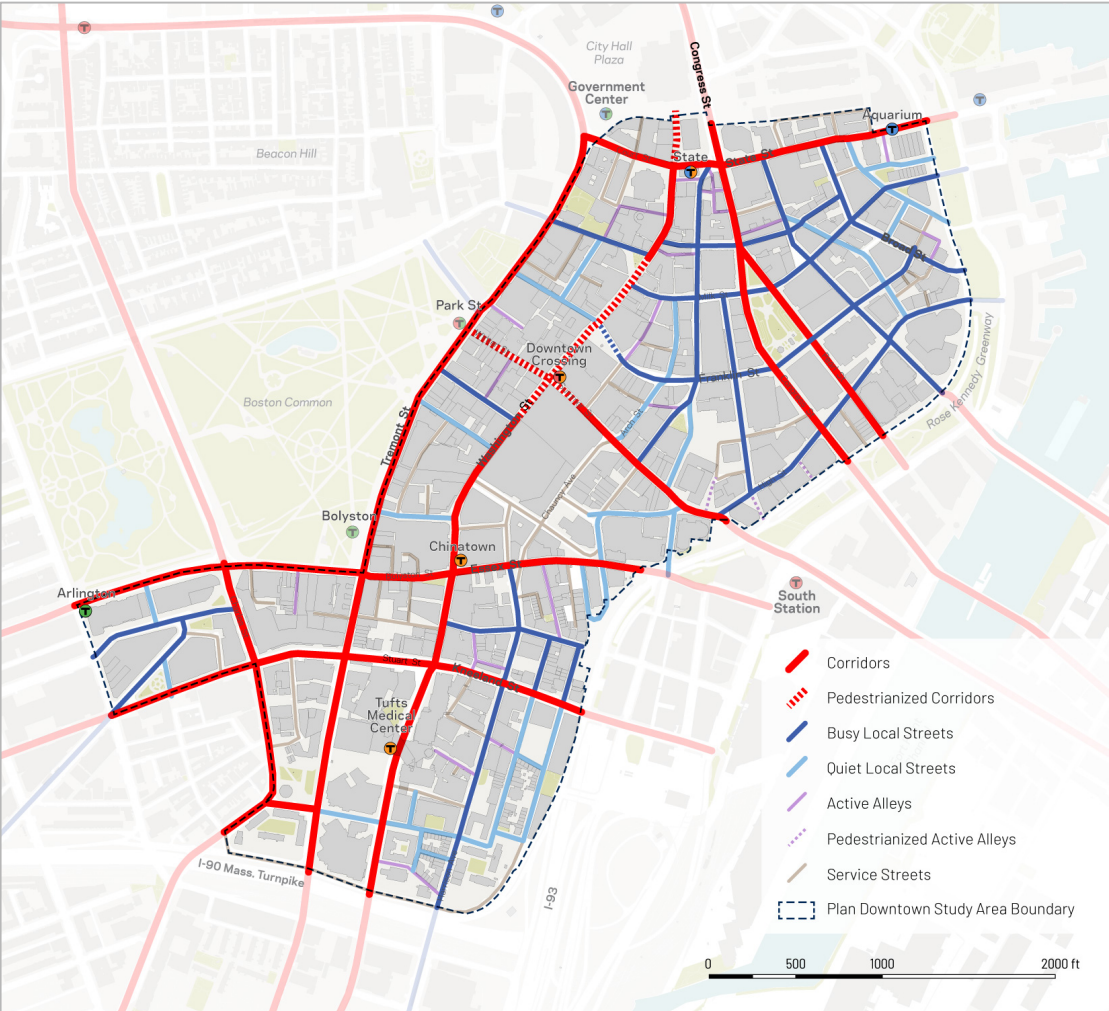
133 Federal Street Plaza, Financial District



# Street Typologies

## Public Realm

- Corridors:** Major thoroughfares (ped/vehicular) through the study area, high multi-modal activity
- Busy Local Streets:** Significant flows within study area, small-scale retail, high pedestrian comfort
- Quiet Local Streets:** Lower flows, limited retail/activity
- Active Alleys:** Unwelcoming to vehicles, accessible to pedestrians, hyperlocal connections, some retail
- Service Streets:** Building operations, parking, loading



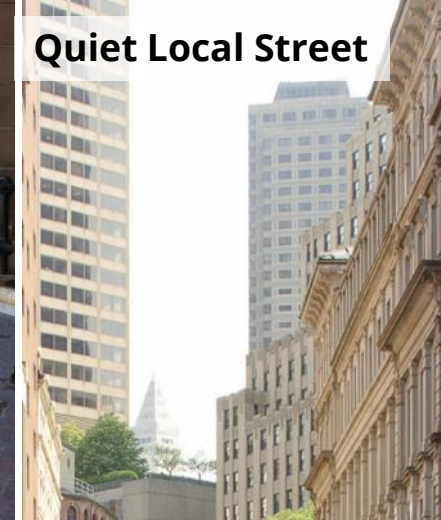




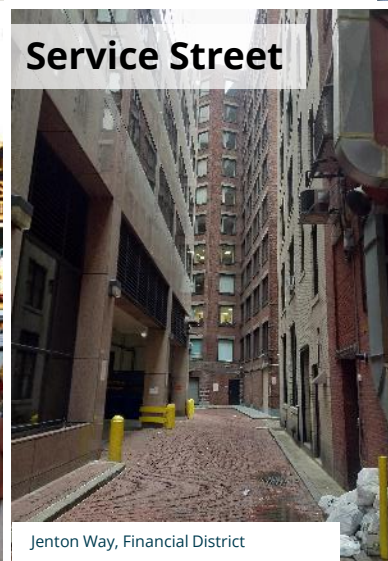
Summer Street @ Washington Street, Downtown Crossing



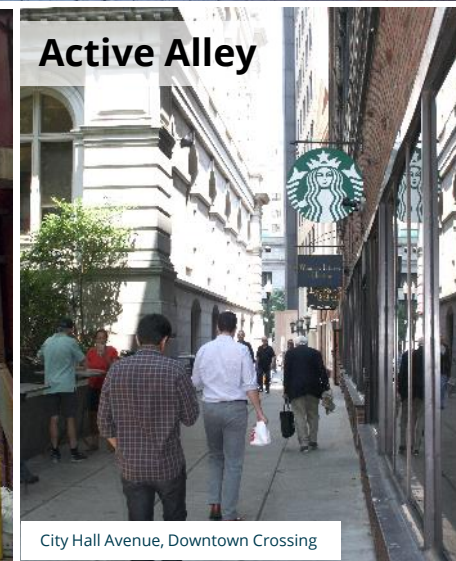
Broad Street @ Water Street, Wharf District



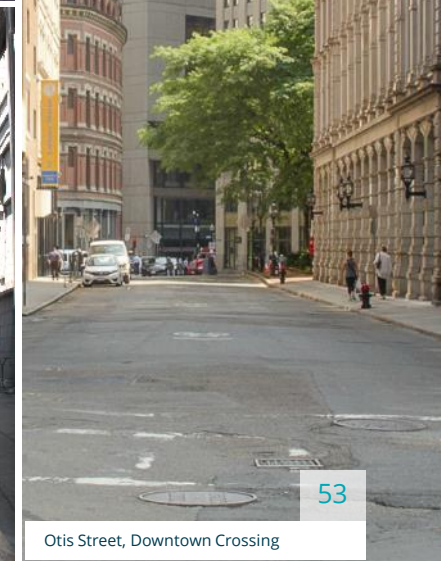
Tremont Street @ Boylston Street, Theater District



Jenton Way, Financial District



City Hall Avenue, Downtown Crossing

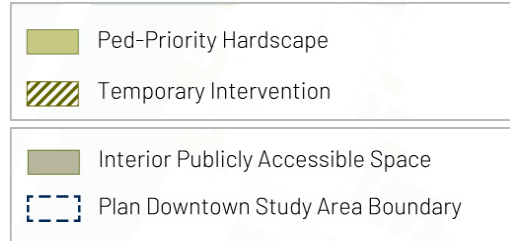


Otis Street, Downtown Crossing



# Composite

## Public Realm







# Character Areas

## *Public Realm—Conclusions*

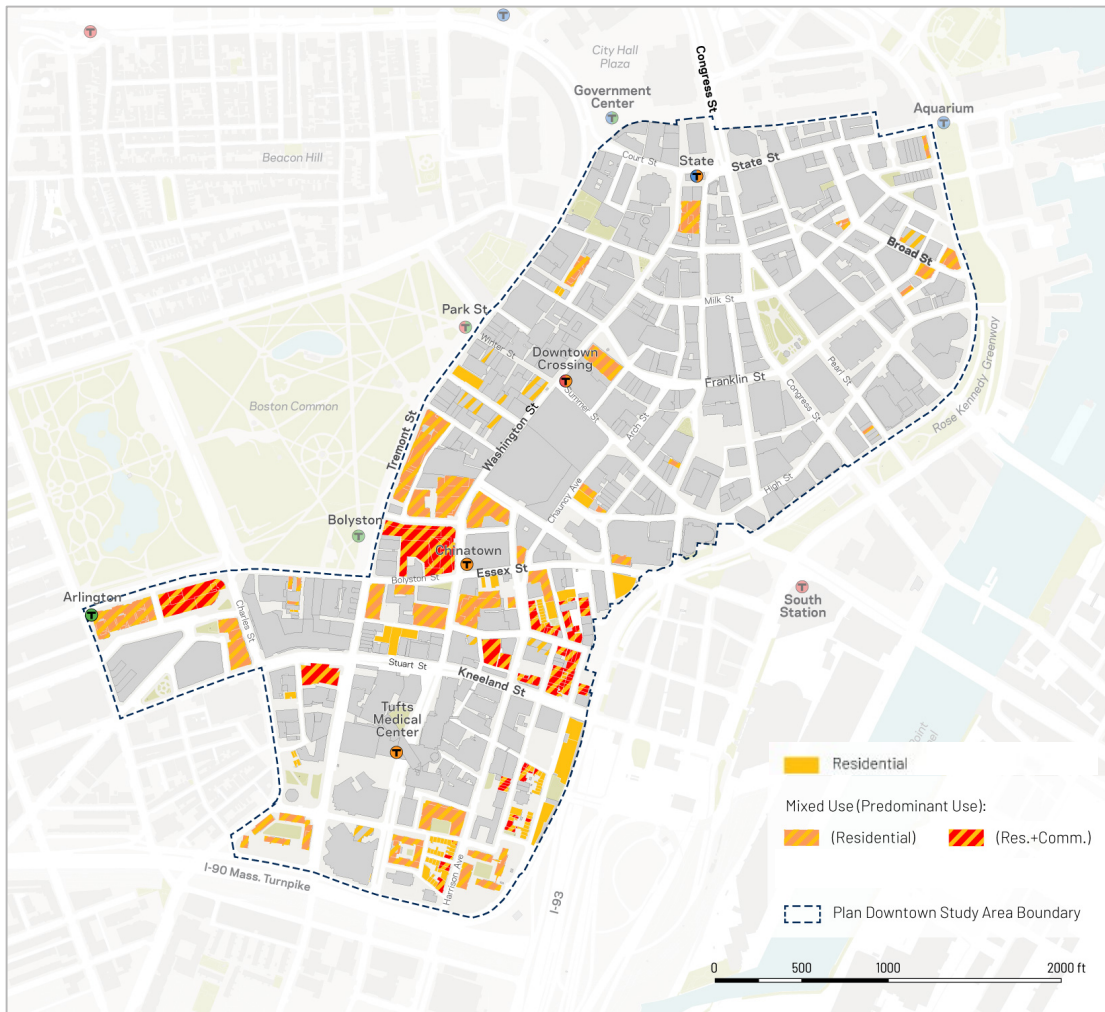
- Each **Character Area** is defined by a **different type of open space**, from pocket parks to central parks to ped-zones
- There are **unwelcoming conditions** in some of the most **historic or single-use areas**
- There is generally a **lack of green infrastructure** - enormous swaths of Downtown do not have any tree canopy





# *Land Use*





Source: City of Boston Assessor's Data

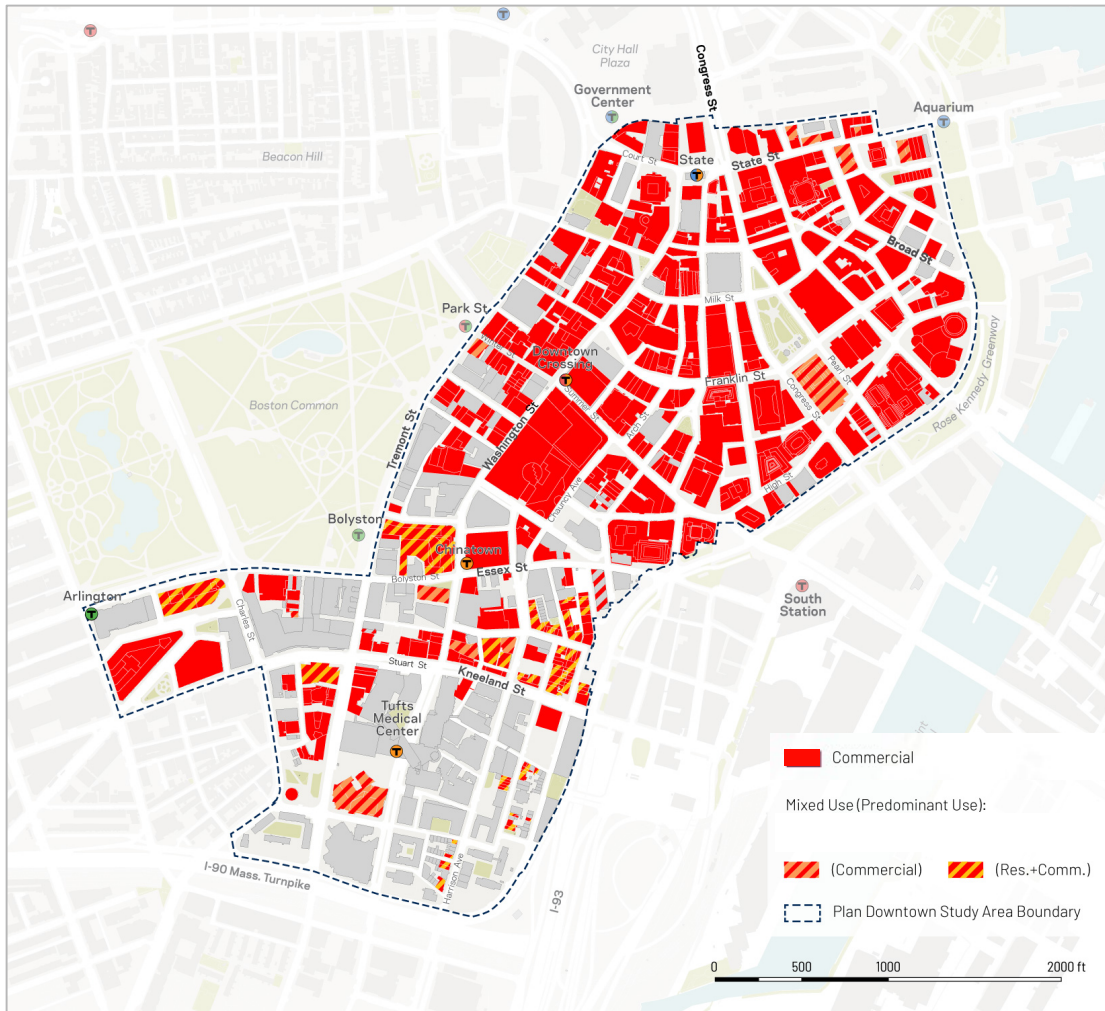
# Residential

## *Predominant Land Use*

- **Some residential is scattered throughout** most of Downtown
- **Chinatown** has the highest concentration of residential
- The **Park Plaza** area also has a relatively high concentration of residential

*Residential includes: single family, multi-family, two/three family, apartment, condominium*





# Commercial

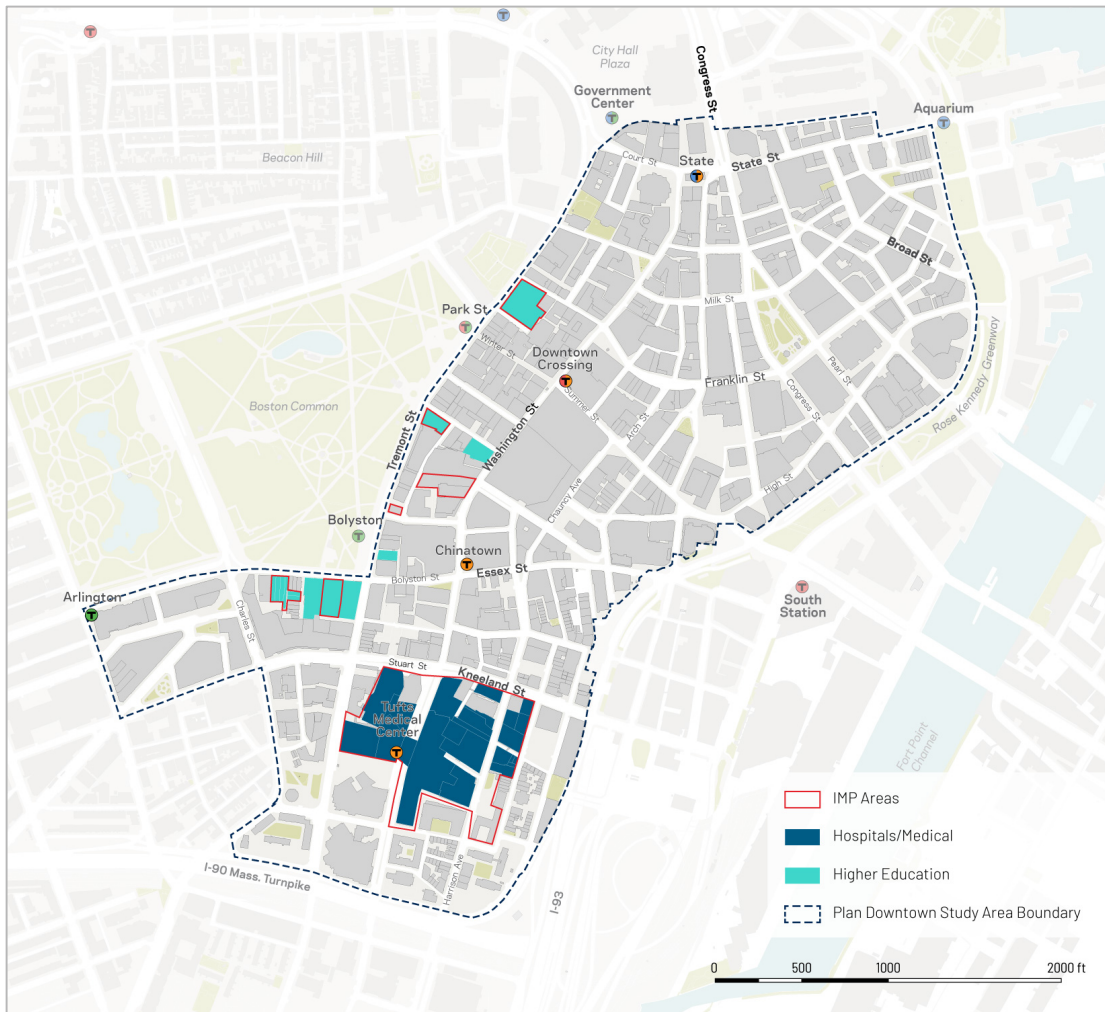
## *Predominant Land Use*

- Commercial uses in **Downtown Crossing** tend to be predominantly **retail and F&B**
- The **Financial District** has the highest concentration of **office** use
- There are **limited office uses scattered throughout** the study area

*Commercial includes: office, retail, restaurant*







# Institutional

*Uses Subject to IMP Process*

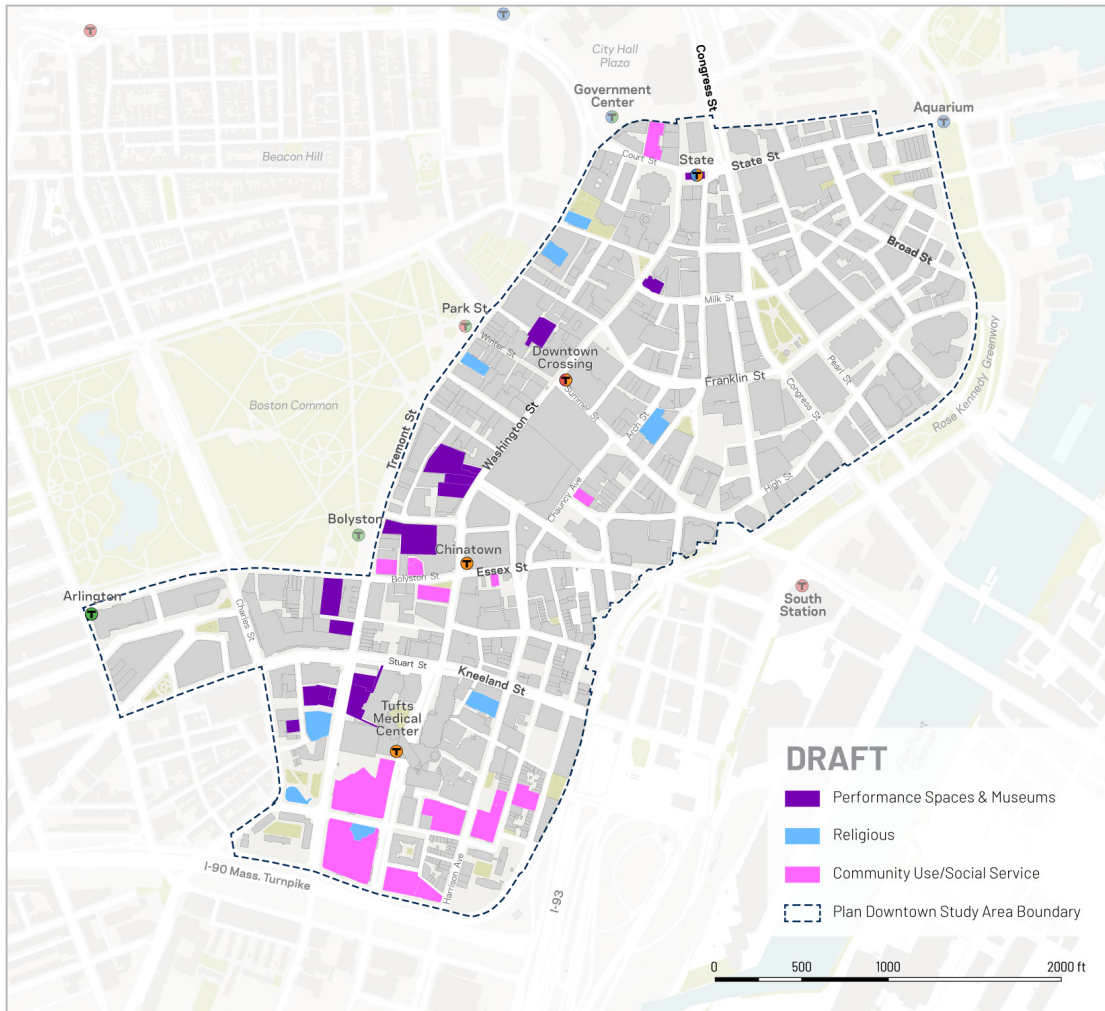
- Educational uses are mostly represented by 3 major institutions: **Suffolk, Emerson, Tufts**
- **Institutions primarily clustered** around the southeast corner of the Common in the **Theater District**
- The **largest institutional use** (Tufts Medical Ctr.) is surrounded largely by the residential of **Chinatown**

*Institutional includes: higher education, hospital/medical*



# Cultural & Community

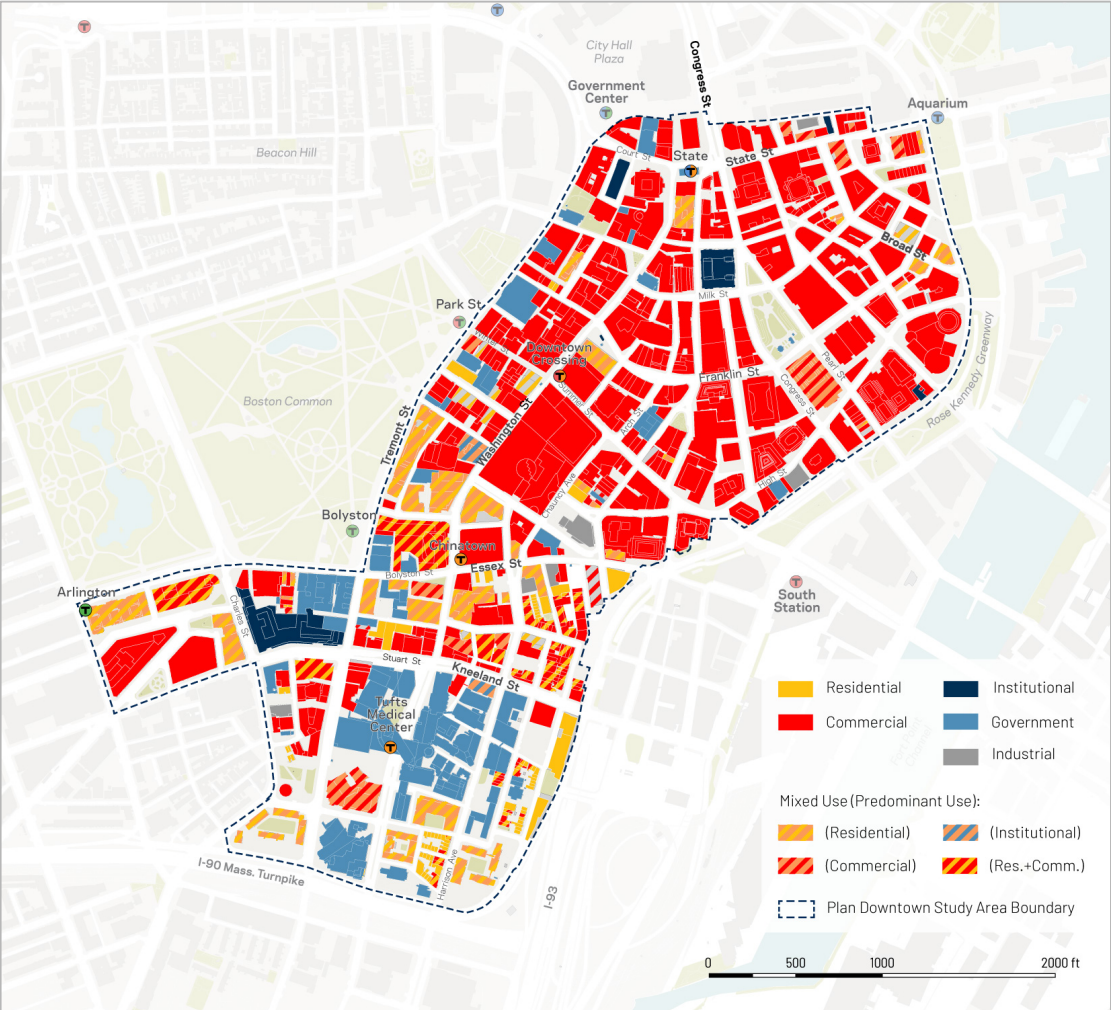
*Predominant or Accessory Use*



- **Theaters, museums and community uses** are clustered in the **Theater District**, around the Common and in **Chinatown**
- There are very **few primary cultural or community uses east of Chauncy/Harrison**
- Public art tends to take the form of **standalone sculptures**
- Downtown's only **public school** is in **Chinatown** (and a temporary library)

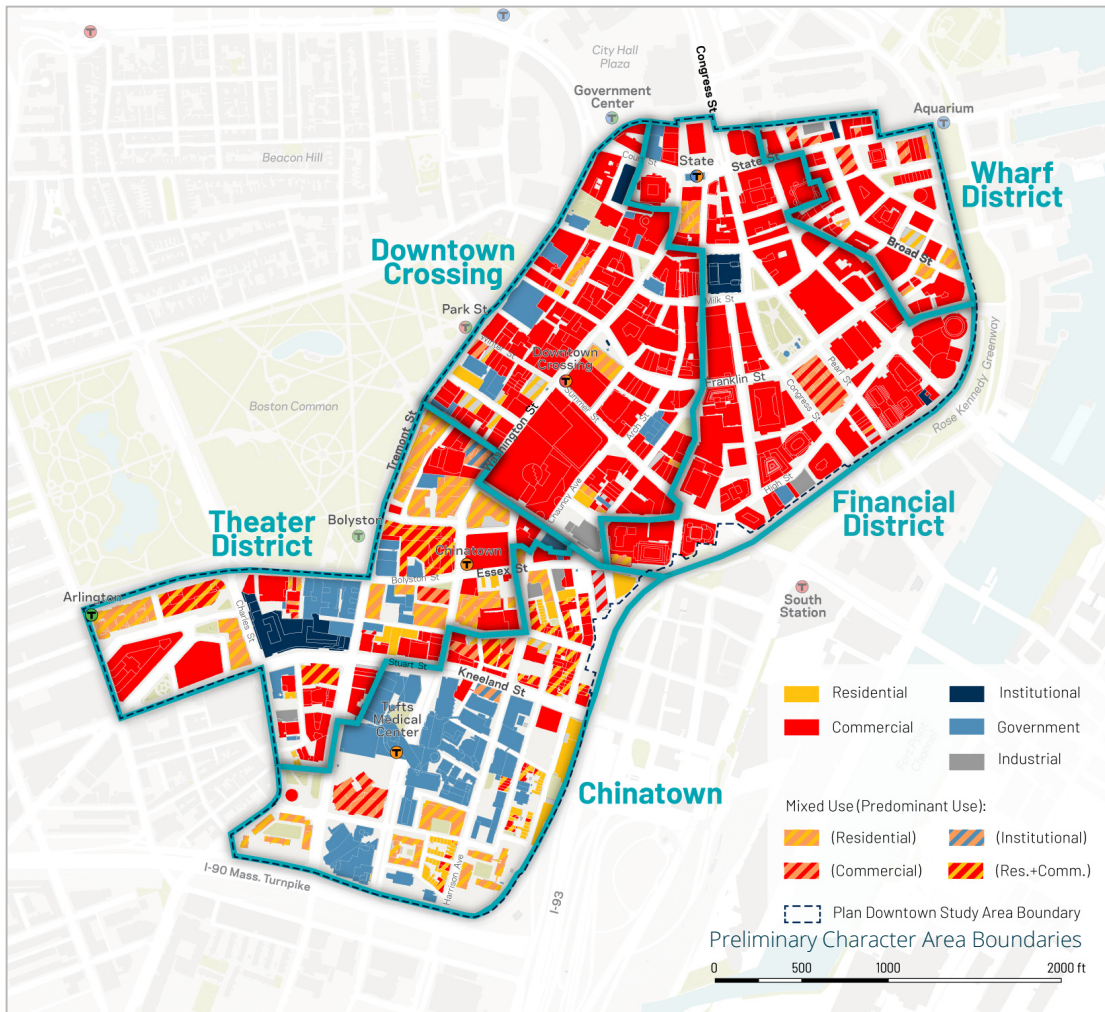


# Predominant Land Use



Source: City of Boston Assessor's Data





# Character Areas

## *Predominant Land Use— Conclusions*

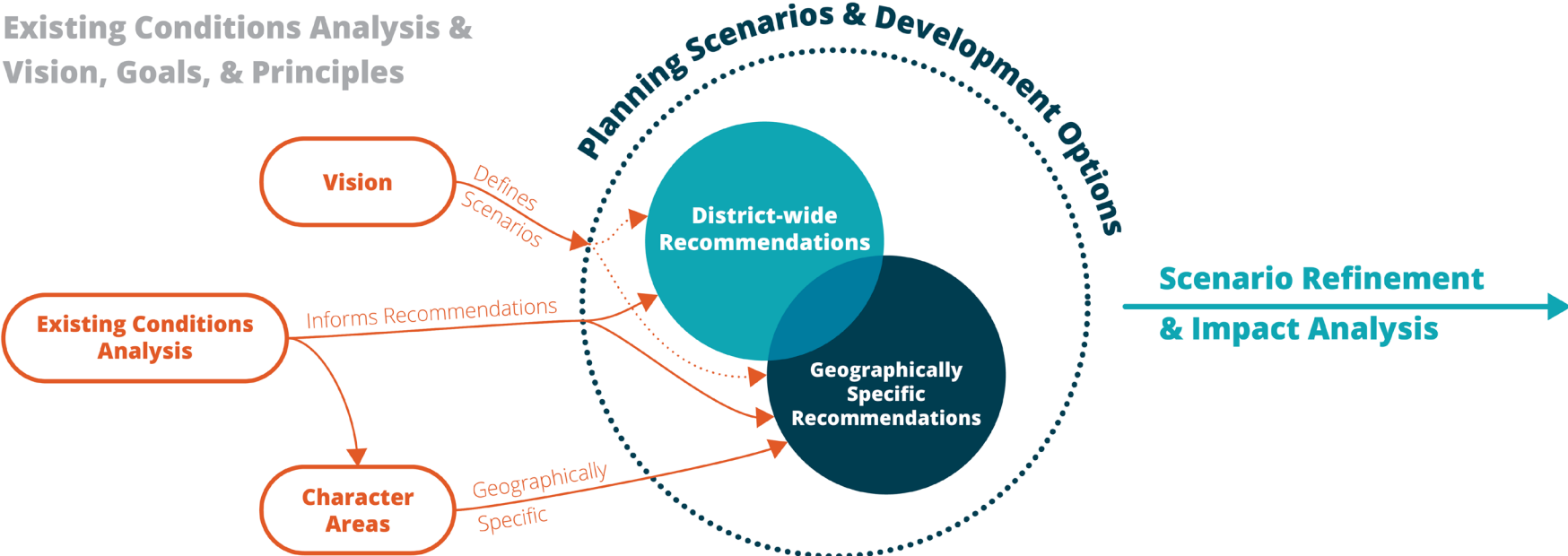
- The **Financial District** is overwhelmingly an **office district**
- **Downtown Crossing** has a broad **mix of uses**
- **Chinatown** contains the highest **concentrations of residential**
- The **Theater District** is home to most **cultural uses associated with performing arts**
- The **Wharf District** has a **mix of uses**, but is trending toward **residential**



# Timeline Zoom-In

Today's Conversation Goals

Existing Conditions Analysis & Vision, Goals, & Principles



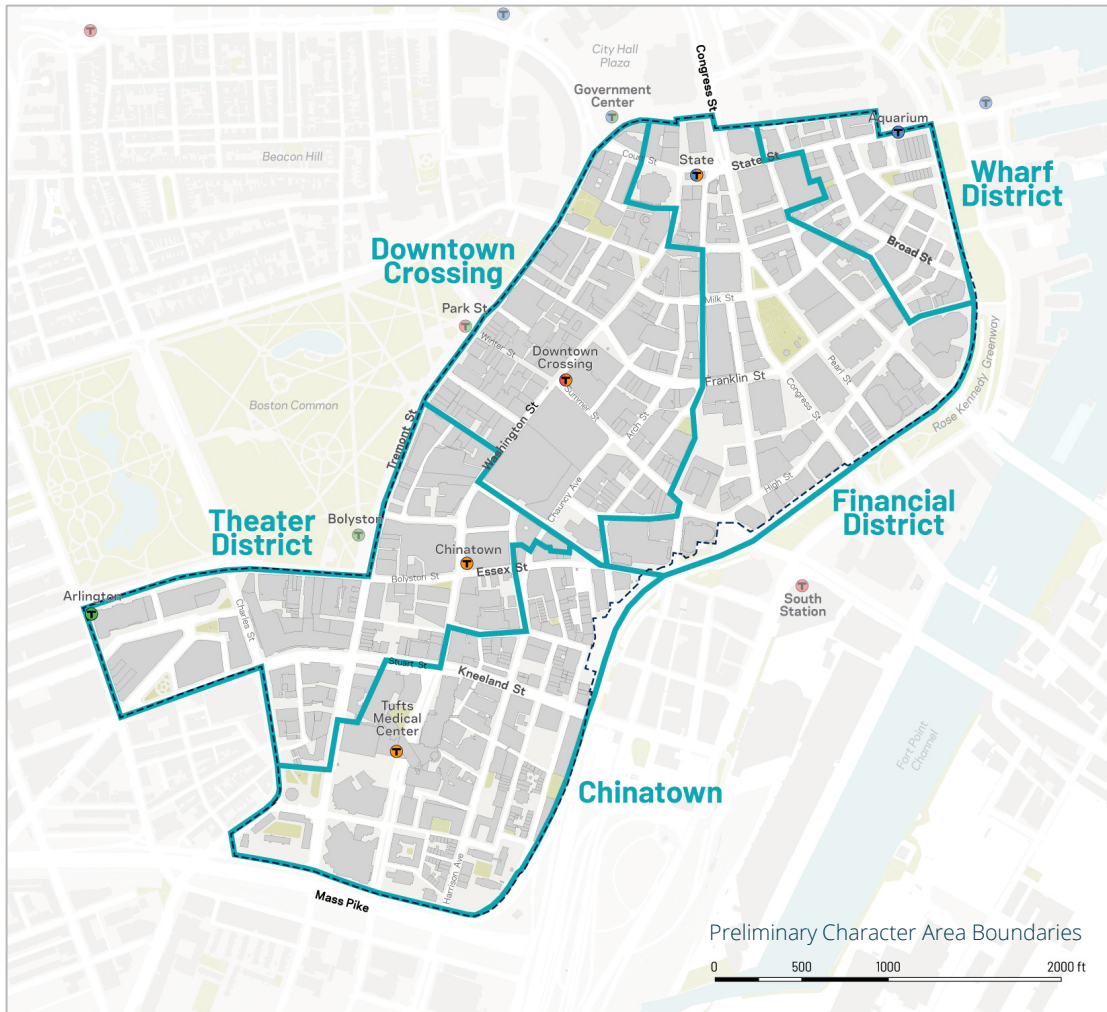
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## *Preliminary Character Areas*

- What other factors should we consider when **defining the Character Areas**? Did we miss a Character Area?
- How do you **experience each Character Area**? What are the unique qualities and/or features of each Character Area? What should be enhanced or called out in each Character Area?
- Do the **“preliminary boundaries”** align with your definition of each district? Is there value to having more fluid or ambiguous character area edges?







# Preliminary Character Areas

Downtown Crossing

Chinatown

Financial District

Theater District & Park Plaza

Wharf District