



PLAN: DOWNTOWN

DRAFT Amendment to PLAN: Downtown | July 1, 2024

Design Guidelines Historic Context Chapter



DESIGN GUIDELINES

These design guidelines provide direction as to how new projects can respectfully enhance Downtown’s unique and historic urban fabric, effectively activate the area and revitalize the public realm, and achieve sustainability and resiliency goals.

The guidelines are divided into 5 sections to focus on the following key areas:

1. Scale, Massing, & Articulation
2. Active Ground Floors & Loading
3. Public Realm
4. Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development
5. Historic Context

DRAFT Amendment to PLAN: Downtown

How to use:

The guidelines are intended for City staff as well as developers, architects, and community members to help shape and evaluate projects in the area. They will be used and enforced when projects undergo the BPDA and BLC design review process, as outlined in this chapter. During this process projects must demonstrate with a context analysis and supportive materials how the project fulfills the five key sections covered in these design guidelines.

SECTIONS 1-4: General design guidelines that apply across all of Downtown.

SECTION 5: Additional location specific design principles and historic context to guide projects in each Downtown character area.

Context Analysis:

Demonstrating an understanding of a project’s context is key to successfully implementing these design guidelines. Projects should:

- a. Analyze the surrounding built context and public realm, highlighting key historic and cultural assets that the project will impact and enhance.
- b. Examine and refer to existing historic surveys and resources for the site and surrounding buildings, including:
 - Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) data and resources
 - Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) data
 - National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) resources
- c. Create relevant elevations, site and context plans, massing studies, and street views that illustrate the project’s relationship to the surrounding context.



Design Review Process

These design guidelines should be utilized for all types of projects but will be the basis of design review for projects undergoing design review through the Planning Department.

Projects will undergo different types and degrees of review by the Planning Department as well as other City agencies to examine their site plan, massing, and design depending on project scale, location, or project type, such as a change of use, new construction, or addition. Project conditions that often trigger different types of design-related review Downtown include but are not limited to:

- a. If a project requires zoning relief, the project must file an appeal with the [Zoning Board of Appeal \(ZBA\)](#).
 - During the appeals process, Planning Department staff create non-binding recommendations on ZBA applications that consider zoning and planning context (such as PLAN: Downtown). These recommendations are then provided to the ZBA for their consideration.
 - The ZBA may require Planning Department design review as a condition of zoning relief.
- b. The scale or type of project Downtown (as determined by the Boston Zoning Code) often triggers [Planning Department design review as a component of Article 80 review](#):
 - The design components of the review process enforce the Downtown Design Guidelines.
 - Depending on the size of the project (refer to the Boston Zoning Code) other components of the review process include, but are not limited to: the evaluation of transportation impacts, accessibility, resilience and green building, infrastructure systems, and development impacts.
- c. Changes to a Boston-landmarked building requires the prior review and approval of the [Boston Landmarks Commission \(BLC\)](#):
 - BLC staff should be consulted early in the design process to assist in the development of projects that will be approvable by the BLC by assessing the potential impact on historic structures, refining and improving proposed changes, and ensuring that changes align with landmarks' standards.

- The BLC ultimately approves projects through a public hearing process.
 - BLC resources provide the latest information on pending and designated Boston landmarks.
- d. The demolition of existing structures that are not designated Boston Landmarks requires an [Article 85 Demolition Delay](#) application that is reviewed by BLC staff:
 - Boston Zoning Code Article 85 establishes a waiting period to consider alternatives to the demolition of a building of historical, architectural, cultural or urban design value to the City, including how that may impact project design.
 - Depending on the significance of the building, demolition delay provides an opportunity for the public to comment on the demolition of a particular building.
 - Minimizes the number and extent of building demolition where no immediate re-use of the site is planned.
 - Refer to Boston Zoning Code Article 85 for requirements and review process.
 - e. Projects in the [Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District \(CFROD\)](#) Downtown require resilience review through the Article 80 review process.
 - CFROD ensures project compliance with the City's climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines, ensuring projects are designed to be resilient to the risks of future floods under sea level rise
 - f. Projects in the [Groundwater Conservation Overlay District \(GCOD\)](#) Downtown must obtain a Conditional Use Permit through the Boston Zoning Board of Appeals depending on the scale and nature of the project as outlined in Article 32 of the Boston Zoning Code.
 - GCOD helps protect wood pile foundations of buildings from being damaged by lowered groundwater levels.
 - Projects must include a groundwater recharge system and obtain a Certification of No Harm.
 - Refer to the Boston Zoning Code Article 32 for requirements and review process.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Introduction

This chapter provides historic context and additional location-specific design principles for each character area. These more place specific guidelines overlap significantly with the general design guidelines that apply across Downtown, and they should be used together in shaping and evaluating projects.

The historic districts, buildings, and public spaces of Downtown can be understood as an accumulation of layers over time. Nearly every style of American architecture and every decade since the 1700s is represented in its architecture. Taken as whole, Downtown Boston is a district rich in history. At the same time, each neighborhood displays characteristics that make it distinct. These traits might include block structure, street types, parcel size, building heights, architectural styles, historical eras, or building materials.

While this undoubtedly makes it a treasure, it does not make it a museum; it is a city that is very much alive, each generation adding its layers to the tapestry.

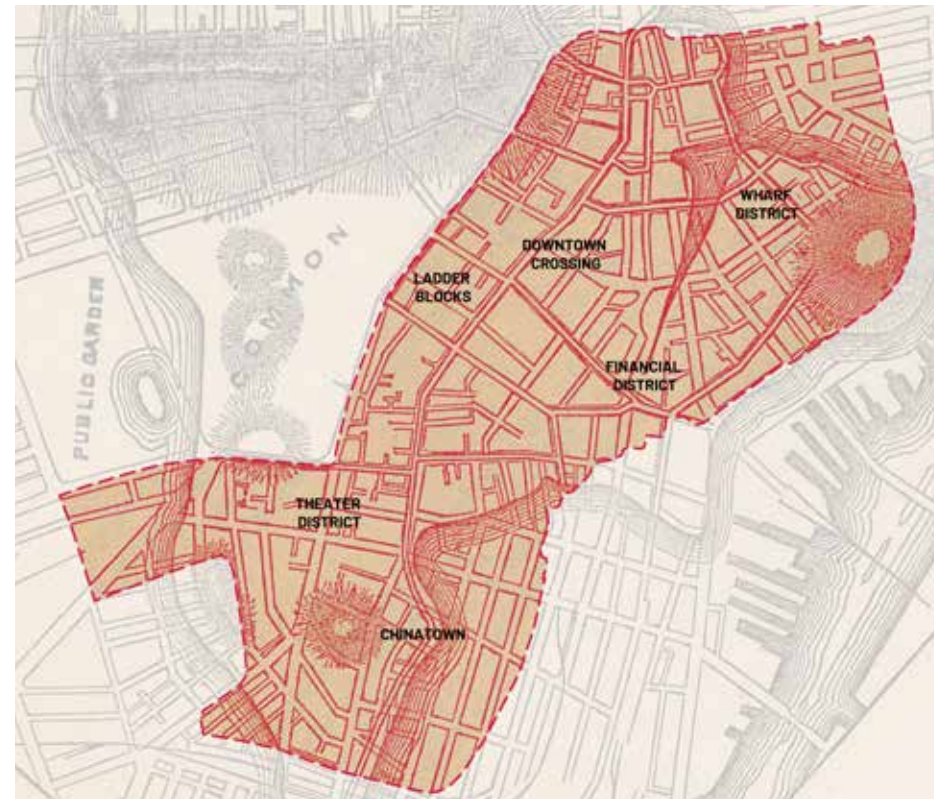
An understanding of this historic context should not be viewed as a ceiling that prevents creative growth but rather as a springboard to thoughtful development, respectful of its context while firmly of its place and time. The desire to protect historic buildings, landmarks, and cultural areas should be regarded not as an impediment but as an intelligent opportunity that can be leveraged to mold a better future.

What is "historic"?

Within the study area, "historic" often refers to formally designated structures and areas, as well as often overlooked older buildings and sites that have architectural, cultural, and historical significance to an era or event. Areas like the Wharf District and the Ladder Blocks have some of Boston's oldest buildings. Alongside

these sites there are also notable collections of modern and post-modern era structures, which, now seventy and thirty years old, respectively, should also be considered historic. In addition to buildings, historic site features such as granite slab sidewalks should be considered in evaluating historic context.

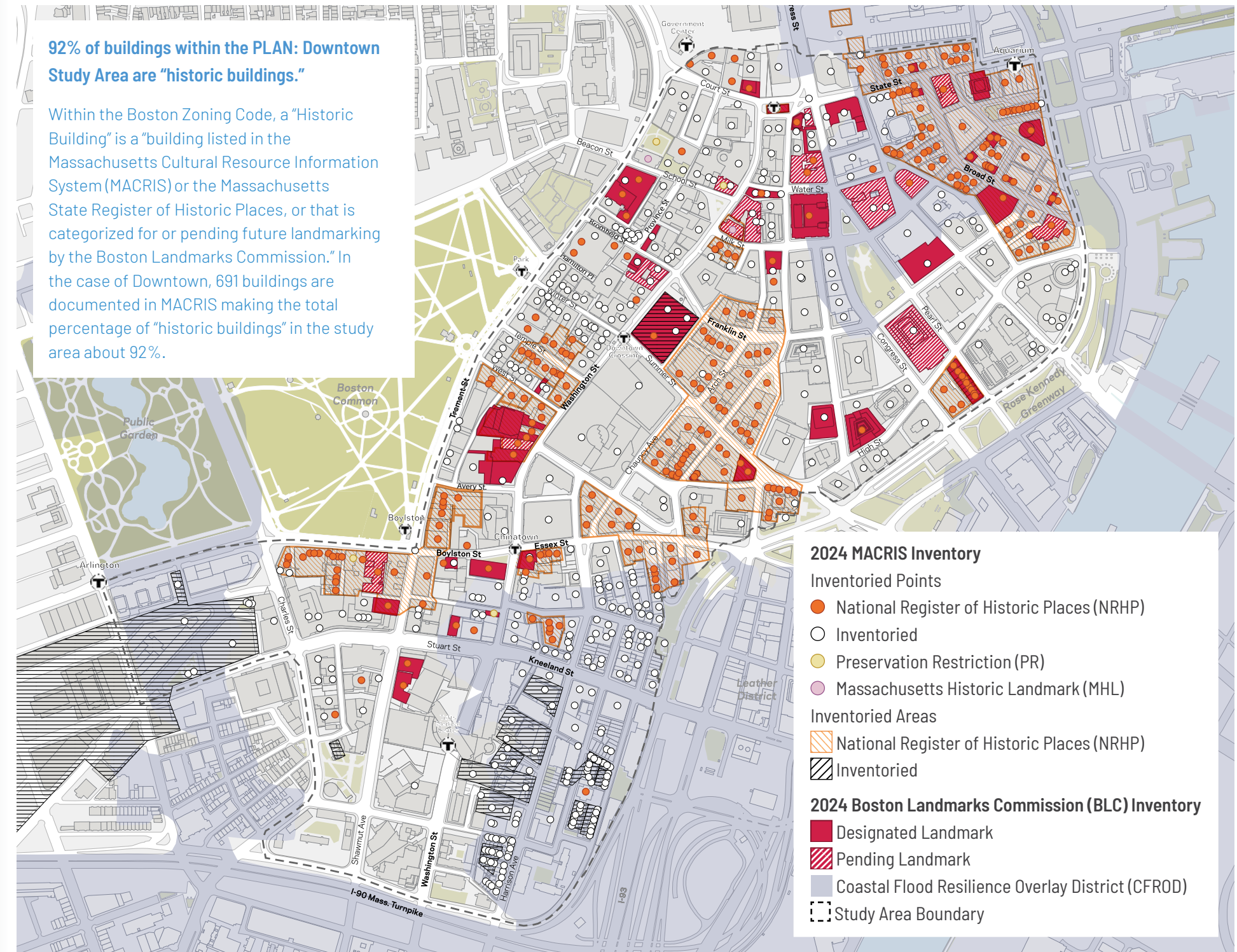
For the most part, the district's historic buildings have been documented; however, work to expand and update surveys are necessary. When evaluating a site's historic significance and conducting site analysis, refer to MACRIS survey information as well as BLC and NRHP resources.



Overlay of PLAN: Downtown study area and Character Areas on historic map of 17th century topography and 19th century streets

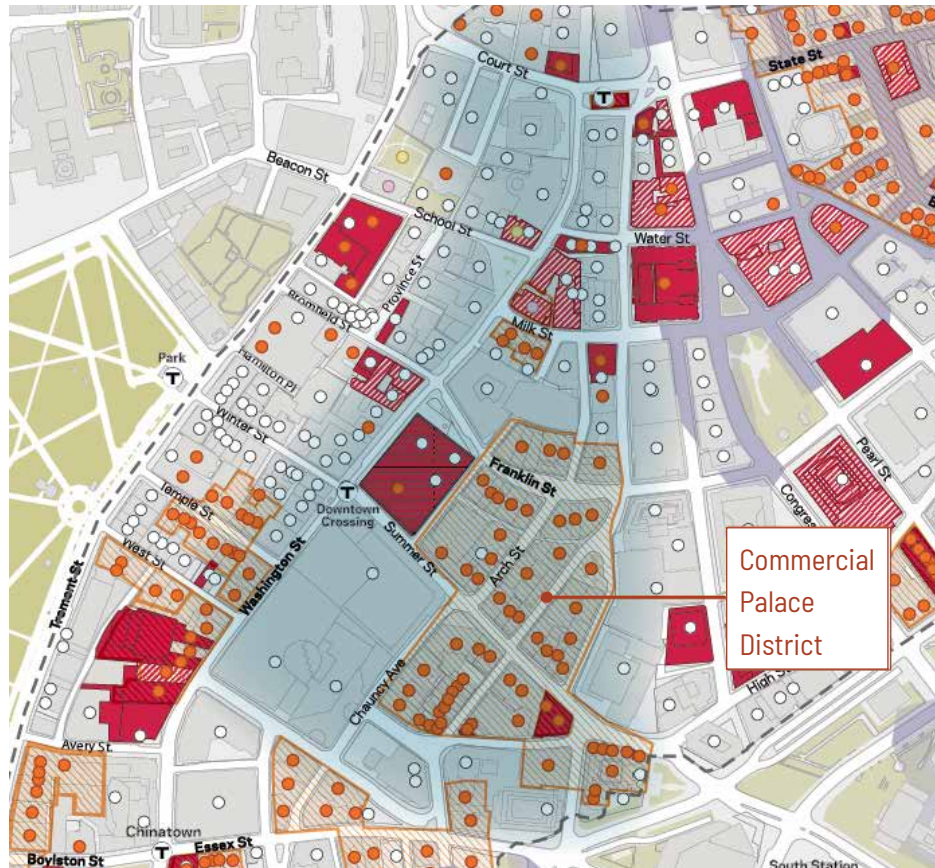
92% of buildings within the PLAN: Downtown Study Area are "historic buildings."

Within the Boston Zoning Code, a "Historic Building" is a "building listed in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) or the Massachusetts State Register of Historic Places, or that is categorized for or pending future landmarking by the Boston Landmarks Commission." In the case of Downtown, 691 buildings are documented in MACRIS making the total percentage of "historic buildings" in the study area about 92%.



- 2024 MACRIS Inventory**
- Inventoried Points
 - National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)
 - Inventoried
 - Preservation Restriction (PR)
 - Massachusetts Historic Landmark (MHL)
 - Inventoried Areas
 - ▨ National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)
 - ▨ Inventoried
- 2024 Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) Inventory**
- Designated Landmark
 - ▨ Pending Landmark
 - Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District (CFROD)
 - Study Area Boundary

Downtown Crossing



- | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 2024 MACRIS Inventory | 2024 BLC Inventory | |
| ● NRHP | ▨ NRHP | ■ Designated |
| ○ Inventoried | ▨ Inventoried | ■ Landmark |
| ● PR | | ▨ Pending |
| ● MHL | | ■ Landmark |
| | | ■ CFROD |
| | | ▭ Study Area |

Projects should enhance Downtown Crossing’s distinctive identity as a vibrant hub where diverse architectural styles, heights, and scales converge, reflecting the area’s dynamic mix of people and historic character.

Historically a residential neighborhood that became a hub of retail activity mixed with institutional uses in the mid nineteenth century, Downtown Crossing stretches east of the Boston Common, with the historic Washington Street spine running through the area from north to south.



Washington Street, the area’s spine, plays an important role as a retail and view corridor framing Reader’s Plaza, the Old South Meeting House and layers of old and new buildings Downtown.

Maintain and enhance Downtown Crossing’s street pattern and network of smaller alleys that create dynamic views of historic sites and building facades.

The area’s unique street layout enhances the visibility of building facades. Its historic street pattern developed along the original topography and shoreline of the Shawmut Peninsula. Downtown Crossing and its natural continuation in the Financial District form a fan-shaped street layout, resulting in several trapezoidal and almost triangular blocks of varying sizes that make building facades more prominently displayed and visible compared to a straight block configuration or standard street grid.

In addition to the major streets, Downtown Crossing features several historic alleys (e.g., Pi Alley, Winthrop Lane, Spring Lane, etc.), which help break up large city blocks and create through block connections. Projects should respect existing alleys and look for opportunities for more mid-block connections.



Washington Street framing historic theaters. Shifts in the street pattern highlight signage and building elements in the distance.



Winthrop Lane, a typical alley in Downtown Crossing

Introduce additional density alongside lower historic buildings using massing changes and setbacks to transition between lower and higher buildings in the area.

Throughout Downtown, the blend of historical and contemporary architecture and range of building heights and scales give Downtown its dynamic and visually engaging character for projects to navigate. This is especially true in Downtown Crossing that boasts, as a central hub of transit and commerce for Downtown and the City, recent examples and future opportunities for increased density and the enhancement and reuse of older structures. One clear example is the juxtaposition of the modern glass facade and tall massing of the Millennium Tower alongside the restored historic facade of the adjacent Filene’s Building. Massing changes and setbacks should be used to both highlight existing historic elements of surrounding buildings and transition between new and existing building heights as demonstrated by the 2015 addition to the historic National Shawmut Bank Building (1906, pending Boston Landmark) at 33 Congress St.



The Congress Square project by Arrowstreet in 2015 adaptively reused existing historic buildings, restored existing facades, and added a modern addition above the existing historic structures.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Downtown Crossing

Complement Downtown Crossing's mix of architectural styles and landmarked buildings.

Individual landmarks are scattered throughout the Downtown Crossing area. About half of the historic buildings in Downtown Crossing were constructed during the period from 1850-1900. A notable building from that period is the Old City Hall, constructed in 1862 to designs by Bryant & Gilman in the Second Empire style. The north end of the area features several significant buildings built before the 1800s in Georgian style, including the three National Historic Landmarks: Old State House (1712), the Old South Meeting House (1729), and King's Chapel (1750), along with the Old Corner Bookstore (1728, also known as Thomas Creese House), a pending Boston Landmark and Downtown Boston's oldest commercial building. These 18th and 19th-century landmarks are interspersed with a significant inventory of 20th-century buildings, highlighting the potential in Downtown Crossing for projects that both complement and contrast with its historic fabric.



The Old South Meeting House (1729)



The Old State House (1712)



The Old Corner Bookstore (1728), Boston's oldest commercial building



King's Chapel (1750)

Find opportunities for adaptive reuse and avoid demolition, especially in cohesive areas of smaller historic building fabric like the NRHP Commercial Palace Historic District and Textile District.

Within Downtown Crossing's historic street pattern lie pockets of smaller historic fabric that should be maintained. One such pocket is a cluster of buildings with smaller footprints located between the large-scale buildings along the east side of Washington Street and the Financial District. Particularly noteworthy is the Commercial Palace District, bounded east by Devonshire Street and west by Chauncey and Hawley Streets. As the largest surviving portion of Boston's late 19th-century commercial district, this cluster of smaller and lower buildings represents a key area to preserve through adaptive reuse projects, offering a chance to revitalize the area while avoiding demolition. This area holds a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) status for the National Register of Historic Places, signifying its qualification as a National Historic District.



Portion of Franklin Street within the Commercial Palace District

Frame and enhance key view corridors and urban spaces that showcase Downtown Crossing's mix of new and old.

Downtown Crossing's dynamic mix of 18th to 20th-century buildings helps frame some of the most active urban spaces Downtown. Washington Street, the area's spine, is punctuated by a series of open spaces. These occur largely because of breaks in the street grid or moments when buildings are set back from the property line, allowing for a small to medium-scaled opportunity for respite along the street wall.

Most significant of these is Reader's Park, a small but active space that is bounded by the concrete colonnade and glass facade of 309 Washington Street, a 1972 addition by Kallmann and McKinnell to the Five Cents Savings Bank Building, and the brick facades of the Old South Meeting House and the Thomas Creese House. Taller, more contemporary buildings surrounding the square provide a modern backdrop to the historic sites circling the park and demonstrate the layers of built history Downtown.



Reader's Park, bounded by 309 Washington Street (left, 1972) and row of historic buildings on the right.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Downtown Crossing

Other noteworthy spaces in the area include Shoppers Plaza and Tontine Crescent. Shopper's Plaza contains a recently designed triangular viewing platform along Washington Street that is flanked by two contemporary buildings and the historic Burnham Building (Daniel Burnham, 1912, originally known as Filene's), a designated Boston Landmark. Tontine Crescent, Charles Bullfinch's 1793 response to the curvilinear buildings of Bath, demolished by the city in 1858 and replaced by five-story stone commercial structures destroyed by fire in 1872, is now a four-hundred-foot curved building wall that forms the elegant backdrop to a contemporary public space.

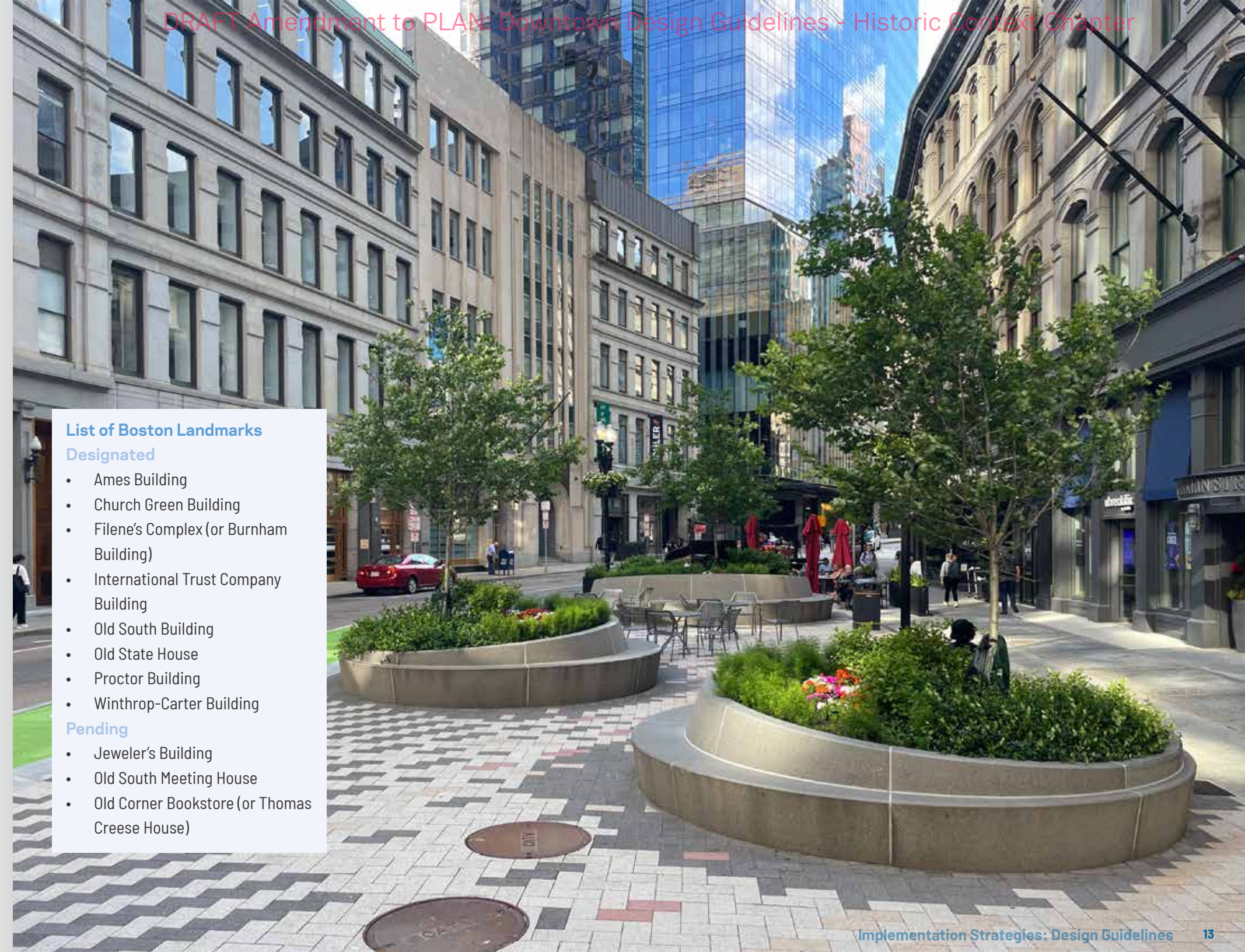
These spaces embody Downtown Crossing's vibrant mix of historic and new buildings, framing views to significant landmarks while creating vital and vibrant social gathering areas in the middle of Downtown.



Historic street wall along Washington Street; view from the Shopper's Plaza amphitheater
Right: Contemporary public space at Tontine Crescent, with curved street wall

Downtown Crossing Design Priorities

- Maintain and enhance Downtown Crossing's street pattern and network of smaller alleys that create dynamic views of historic sites and building facades.
- Introduce additional density alongside lower historic buildings using massing changes and setbacks to transition between lower and higher buildings in the area.
- Complement Downtown Crossing's mix of architectural styles and landmarked buildings.
- Frame and enhance key view corridors and urban spaces. Expand the public realm and locate active uses and setbacks along these areas as much as possible. Key view corridors and urban spaces include:
 - The iconic pedestrian-zone view along Washington St to Old South Meeting House
 - The active shopping, commuting, and event hub that is Washington and Summer St intersection
 - Reader's Park, lined with historic assets
 - The urban gateway and gathering space of Shopper's Plaza
 - The historic Tontine Plaza facades and modern plaza space.
- Find opportunities for adaptive reuse and avoid demolition, especially in cohesive areas of smaller historic building fabric like the NRHP Commercial Palace Historic District and Textile District.



List of Boston Landmarks

Designated

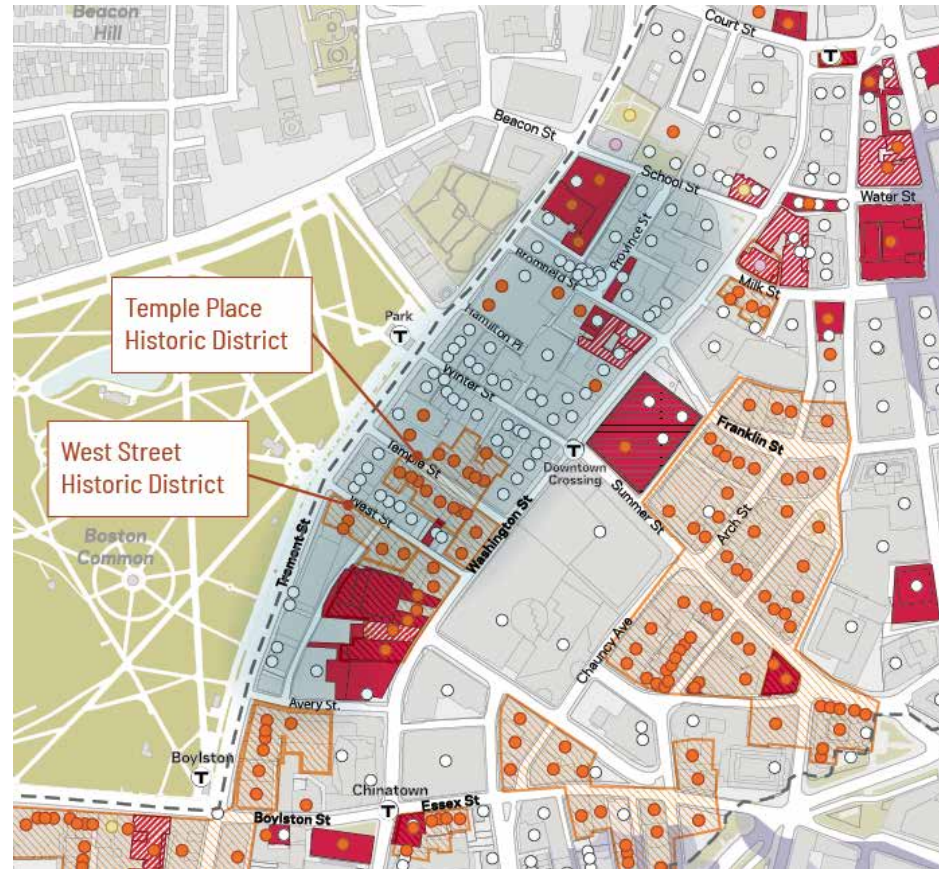
- Ames Building
- Church Green Building
- Filene's Complex (or Burnham Building)
- International Trust Company Building
- Old South Building
- Old State House
- Proctor Building
- Winthrop-Carter Building

Pending

- Jeweler's Building
- Old South Meeting House
- Old Corner Bookstore (or Thomas Creese House)

Design Guidelines
5. Historic Context | Ladder Blocks

Ladder Blocks



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|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 2024 MACRIS Inventory | 2024 BLC Inventory | |
| ● NRHP | ▨ NRHP | ■ Designated |
| ○ Inventoried | ▩ Inventoried | ■ Landmark |
| ● PR | | ▨ Pending |
| ● MHL | | ■ Landmark |
| | | ■ CFROD |
| | | ▭ Study Area |

Projects should enhance and respect the Ladder Block's cohesive pattern and scale of smaller parcels, storefronts, and historic facades.

The Ladder Blocks area comprises the series of blocks between the eastern edge of the Boston Common and Washington Street. A series of parallel through-streets connect Tremont and Washington Streets, forming a ladder pattern, while shorter tertiary lanes and alleys break up the scale of blocks.



1934 view up Bromfield St from Washington St



1934 view up Bromfield St from Washington St today

Maintain the small-grained scale of building frontages, parcels, public alleys, and streets.

The small fine grain of historic parcels and building footprints gives the Ladder Blocks area its small and cohesive character. Most buildings in the Ladder Blocks have a footprint of less than 20,000 square feet.

Create ground floors that respond to the scale and pattern of existing historic ground floor frontages.

Small building footprints in the area result in a mix of narrow and varied ground floor spaces that add a human scale and visual interest to the eye level experience that should be maintained in new projects.



Cluster of historic buildings along Temple Place that frame a glimpse of Boston Common

Find opportunities for the restoration of historic facades and the adaptive reuse of buildings to avoid demolition in the area.

As in other clusters of smaller historic building fabric Downtown, the small building footprints in the Ladder Blocks lend themselves to adaptive reuse, especially to residential or hotel uses. A notable example is the Godfrey Hotel which restored two historic buildings, the Blake Building and the Amory Building into a 243 room hotel along Washington St.



Godfrey Hotel conversion of vacant office buildings to hotel and ground floor retail.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Ladder Blocks

Complement historic architectural styles and facade articulation while finding alternatives to directly mimicking historic ornamentation.

Within its small area the Ladder Blocks features a concentrated mix of 19th century, Second Empire-style and Classical Revival-style buildings constructed mostly during the first half of the 20th century. New projects should refer to and complement the cohesive character of neighboring these while providing contrast and avoiding direct mimicry.

Key site and clusters of notable historic buildings include:

- Intersection of Bromfield St and Province St: Includes designated Boston Landmarks like the Hutchinson Building (Ralph Harrington Doane, 1924), an early 20th century, Classical Revival-style commercial building, and 20-30 Bromfield Street (1870), a rare surviving example of a mid-19th century commercial row building in the Egyptian Revival style; and,
- Along Temple Place and West streets: the Peabody Bookstore (1820-1830, designated Boston landmark), a Federal-style rowhouse, which served as a residence and bookshop for 19th century publisher Elizabeth Peabody, and the Provident Institution for Savings at 37 Temple Street, originally the home of China Trade merchant Thomas Handysyd Perkins in 1833, but acquired by the insurance company in 1854.



Historic corner of Bromfield and Province Streets



Historic facades of 37 Temple Street

Frame and enhance key view corridors that connect Washington Street and the Boston Common and alleys that contribute to the areas smaller scale.

The combination of narrow one-way through-streets and alleys shape the public realm of the Ladder Blocks. Through-streets like Bromfield Street serve as view corridors to Downtown Crossing and beyond, while others like Winter Street are also important high pedestrian traffic connectors between the Common and Washington Street.

Historic alleys provide mid-block connections or access to building service areas. Some of these key remaining historic alleys include:

- The narrow alley of Winter Place, long the home of one of the city's oldest restaurants, Locke-Ober, connecting Winter Street and Temple Place through a private passageway.
- Bosworth Street, begins at Tremont Street and concludes with a series of 17th century granite steps, historically known as Province House steps, leading down to Province Street. The steps are the only remnant of the 1679 Province House, home of the royal governors in the 18th century, demolished in 1922

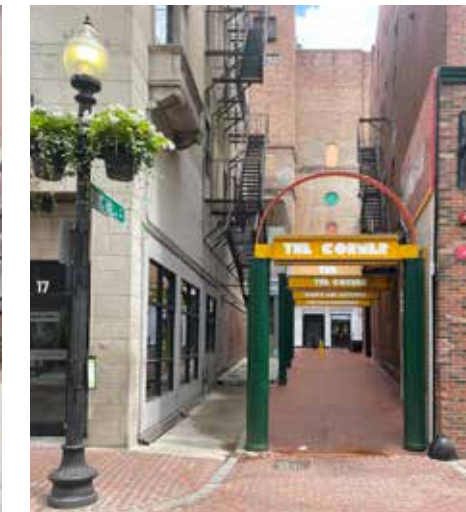
Coupled with smaller footprint buildings and blocks, this tight-knit collection of cross streets and alleys creates a unique and historically rich urban fabric that defines the character of the small-scale, pedestrian-oriented Ladder Blocks.



Winter Street connects the Common and Washington Street



Winter Place Alley



Music Hall Place, a short alley in the Ladder Blocks

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Ladder Blocks

List of Boston Landmarks

Designated

- Bromfield Street, 20-30
- Hutchinson Building
- Parker House
- Peabody Bookstore (former)
- Tremont Temple

Pending

- Jeweler's Building

Ladder Blocks Design Priorities

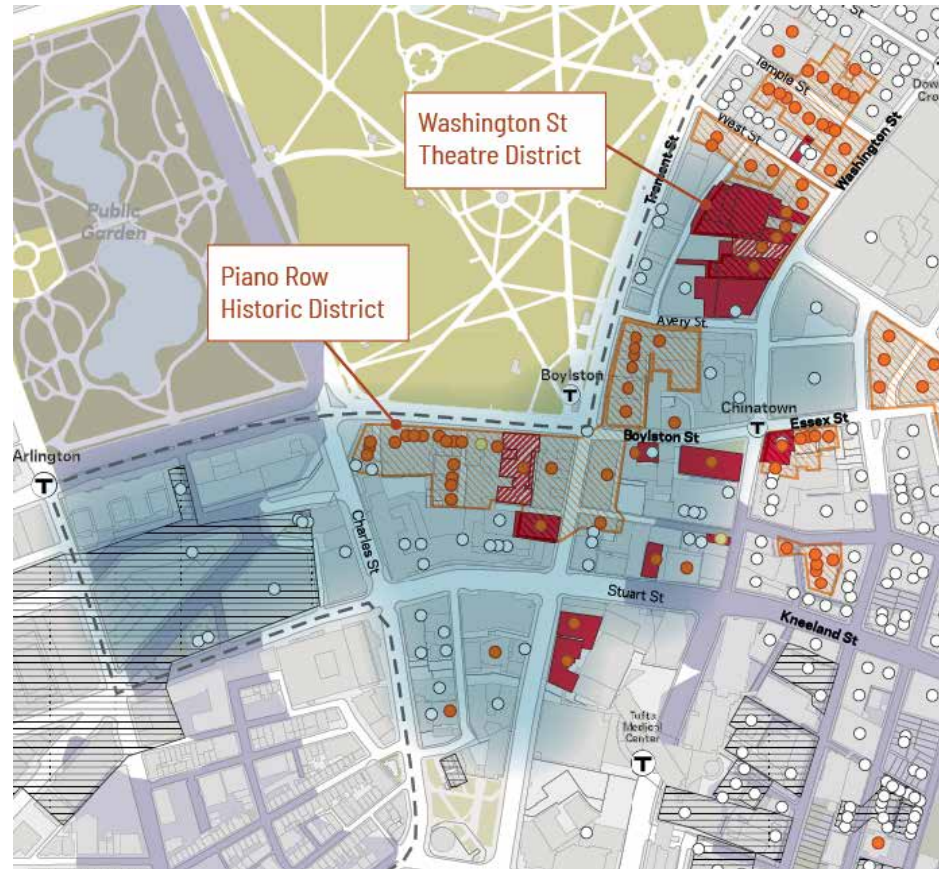
- Maintain the small-grained scale of building frontages, parcels, public alleys, and streets.
- Create ground floors that respond to the scale and pattern of existing historic ground floor frontages.
- Find opportunities for the restoration of historic facades and the adaptive reuse of buildings to avoid demolition in the area. Key areas include the NRHP Temple Place Historic District, West Street Historic District, and Washington Street Theatre District.
- Complement historic architectural styles and facade articulation while finding alternatives to directly mimicking historic ornamentation.
- Frame and enhance key view corridors that connect Washington Street and the Boston Common and alleys that contribute to the areas smaller scale.

Fine grain ground floors along West Street



Design Guidelines
5. Historic Context | Theater District

Theater District



- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2024 MACRIS Inventory | 2024 BLC Inventory |
| ● NRHP | ■ Designated |
| ○ Inventoried | ■ Landmark |
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| ● MHL | ■ Landmark |
| ■ NRHP | ■ CFROD |
| ■ Inventoried | ■ Study Area |

Projects should enhance the Theater District's identity as a cultural and entertainment hub, characterized by its historic theaters, nightlife, and diverse architectural styles.

The Theater District developed as Boston's center for performing arts from the late 1800s until the Depression. The character area extends from the southeastern side of the Boston Common to the Park Plaza area, between Bay Village and the Public Garden.



Boylston Street cuts through the Theater District



Boylston Place alley at Emerson College

Ensure the project massings and footprints respond to the Theater District's various street patterns and block scales.

The Theater District is at the intersection of several street grids. The block structure along the Common is a continuation of the historic Ladder Blocks, with wide through-streets like Tremont and Boylston, and internal alleys, such as Boylston Place by Emerson College. The Park Plaza area follows a very different street pattern that attempts to stitch together the surrounding neighborhoods. Much of this area is on man-made land created in the 19th century by filling the tidal flats surrounding the Shawmut Peninsula. The current state of the Park Plaza area is the result of redevelopment efforts in the 1920s, 1960s, and 1970s of a former rail yard site for the Boston-Providence railroad.

The distinction between the two sub-areas of the Theater District is even more evident at the parcel and building scale. The sub-area closer to the Common preserves much of the finer-grain 19th century fabric, mixed with early 20th century historic theater buildings, while the Park Plaza sub-area features buildings with large footprints (more than 20,000 square feet), which occupy entire blocks.

As these street and block patterns come together they create opportunities to strategically locate entrances and frame and showcase different elements of a buildings massing and facade.



View of "Piano Row" and Emerson College forming the corner of Tremont St and Boylston St

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Theater District

Compliment and maintain the visual prominence of historic theaters and facades and iconic street walls in the Theater District.

The Theater District includes a wide range of historic structures. The number of historic buildings constructed from 1850 to 1900 and from 1900 to 1950 is split equally. As in most other Downtown neighborhoods, the most common historic style is Classical Revival, but unlike Ladder Blocks, Downtown Crossing, and the Financial District, the use of brick is more common here.

A key historic cluster in the Theater District is the sequence of theaters along Washington St, creating a cohesive historic street wall from the Modern Theater (Clarence Blackall, 1914), to the Opera House (or Savoy Theater, Thomas Lamb, 1928), to Paramount Theater (Arthur Bowditch, 1932), all designated Boston Landmarks. Other notable theaters and landmarks are near the intersection of



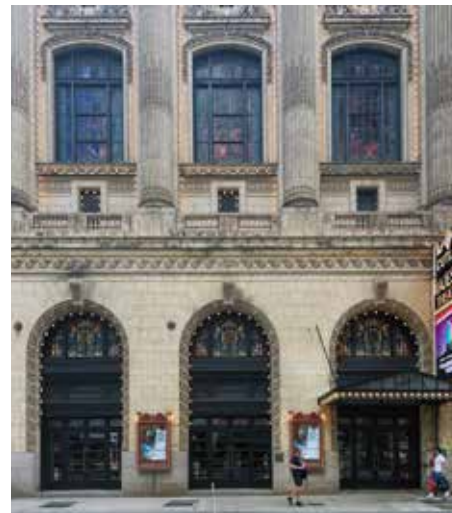
View of Opera House (1928) and Paramount Theater (1932) looking down Washington Street

Tremont and Stuart streets, including the Emerson Majestic Theater (or Saxon Theater, John Galen Howard, 1901), the Wilbur Theater (Clarence Blackall, 1913), and the Wang Theater (Blackall, Clapp & Whittemore, 1923).

The Theater District also features significant historic commercial buildings, such as the Boylston Building (Carl Fehmer, 1887, designated Boston Landmark) at the intersection of Washington and Boylston streets, an early example of a skeleton-framed building in Boston, and the Steinert Building (Winslow & Wetherell, 1896), once the headquarters of the piano distributor Steinert and Co., whose success attracted other piano businesses to the area, known as “Piano Row.” The Piano Row district, at the intersection of Boylston and Tremont streets, is a prominent edge to the Common, characterized by a historic mix of late 19th-century and early 20th-century commercial buildings, which range in height (four to twelve stories), street frontage width, and primary materials.



Street wall of the Wang (1923) and Wilbur Theaters (1913)



Facade of the Emerson Majestic Theater (1901)

Enhance and frame key urban spaces and the connections between them.

The Theater District features a collection of small, but historic plaza spaces. In front of the Boylston Building lies Liberty Tree Plaza, the only open space within the dense historic fabric of the Theater District. The plaza is located opposite the Liberty Tree Block (1849), a designated Boston Landmark, which is significant as an example of a 19th century brick commercial building, and a corner building that is the focal point at the end of Boylston Street. Liberty Tree Plaza is not part of the Liberty Tree Block landmark designation, but includes a memorial that marks the location of a historic tree that served as the rallying point for the colonists who protested the Stamp Act of 1765.

The Park Plaza sub-area features a few larger open spaces that result from the diagonal cut-through of Columbus Ave, including Statler Park (Arthur Shurcliff, 1925), and Lincoln Square. These spaces are framed by early 20th century buildings like the Park Plaza Hotel building (George B. Post, 1925) and the Motor Mart Garage (George Harrington Doane, 1926-29). The Park Plaza area also includes two triangular spaces formed at the intersection of Charles and Boylston streets, one of which is Edgar Allan Poe Square, a small plaza dedicated to the writer (and featuring his statue), whose house once stood nearby.

This collection of small plazas creates a vital patchwork of public spaces. Future development should focus on enhancing these spaces, improving connectivity between them, and preserving their historical significance while adapting to contemporary urban needs.



“Piano Row”, a prominent edge to the Common



The Steinert Building (1896)



The Liberty Tree Plaza, framed by the Liberty Tree Block (1849)



Edgar Allan Poe Square, with the poet's statue and views to the Common.



Statler Park, framed by the Park Plaza Hotel (left, 1925) and the Motor Mart Garage (right, 1926-1929)

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Theater District

List of Boston Landmarks Designated

- Boston Young Men's Christian Union Building
- Boylston Building
- Hayden Building
- Jacob Wirth's Restaurant
- Keith Memorial/Opera House
- Liberty Tree Block
- Modern Theater
- Paramount Theater
- Saxon Theater/Emerson Majestic
- Wang Theater
- Wilbur Theater

Pending

- Bijou Theater/Amusement Center
- Colonial Theater

Theater District Design Priorities

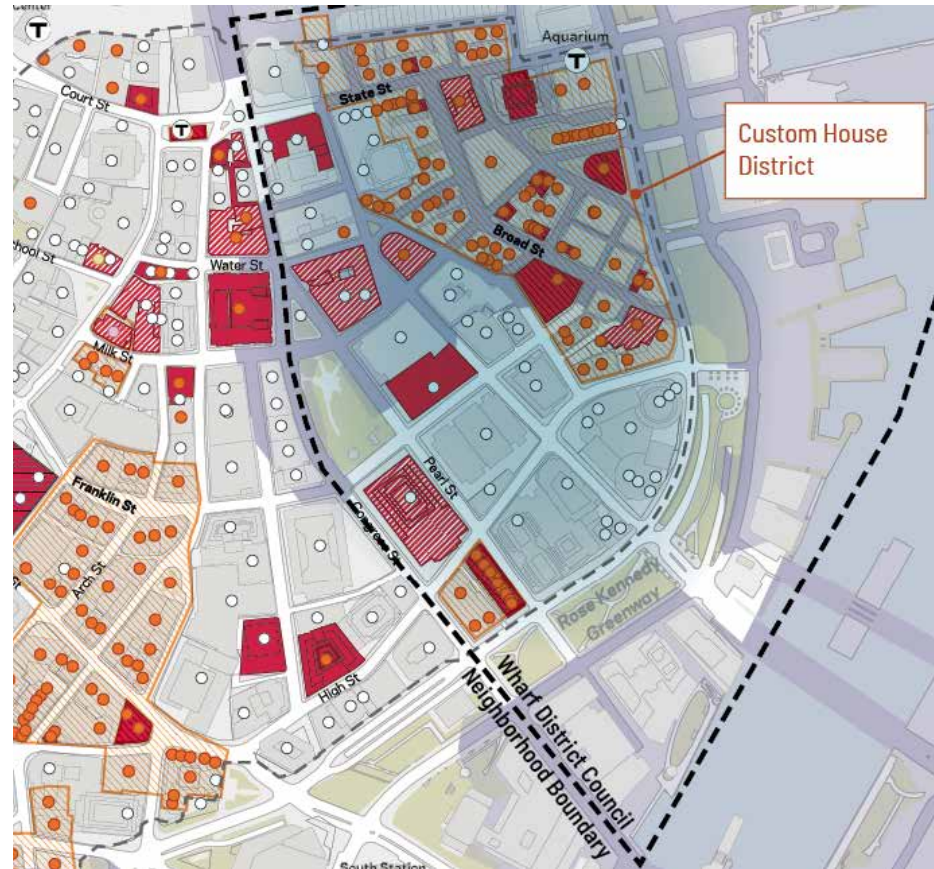
- Ensure the project massings and footprints respond to the Theater District's various street patterns and block scales.
- Compliment and maintain the visual prominence of historic theaters and facades and iconic street walls in the Theater District.
- Enhance and frame key urban spaces and the connections between them:
 - The view south along Tremont St to Stuart St showcasing theater marquees.
 - The iconic theaters and facades in the NRHP Washington Street Theatre District
 - The vibrant entertainment, dining, and student hub at the intersection of Tremont St and Boylston St.
- Find opportunities for adaptive reuse to avoid demolition. Key areas include the NRHP Washington Street Theatre District and Piano Row Historic District.
- Sites within the Coastal Flood Resilience Zoning Overlay District must follow the City's climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines.

Right: Continuous street wall of historic theaters; Opera House (1928) and Paramount Theater (1932)



Design Guidelines
5. Historic Context | Wharf District

Wharf District (within the PLAN: Downtown study area)



Projects should enhance and maintain the Wharf District’s smaller-scale parcels and historic fabric, shaped by warehouses and other maritime commerce structures that helped give the district its name.

The portion of the Wharf District neighborhood that is within the PLAN: Downtown study area developed incrementally through a series of expansions of the Shawmut peninsula to construct wharves, warehouses, and other structures for maritime commerce along the Boston harbor. The area of the Wharf District east of Battery March Street features a series of small historic blocks that are a result of this process.



Cohesive scale of warehouse buildings along Broad Street

Maintain the Wharf District’s fine grained street pattern connecting Downtown to the Rose Kennedy Greenway and waterfront.

As an expansion to the Shawmut peninsula, the Wharf District continued Downtown’s original street patterns, aligning with wharves and warehouses that led to the water’s edge. Today this street pattern of trapezoidal blocks gets smaller as it moves from the large blocks of the Financial District to the Rose Kennedy Greenway and the Wharf District neighborhood on the east side of the Greenway.

The blocks between India and Broad Sts were part of the India Wharf development designed by Charles Bulfinch in 1803. East of India Street, between Central and Milk Sts is part of the original Central Wharf development constructed in 1817. The 1840 U.S. Custom House sits between Central and State streets. Another landfill site for warehouses, built in 1858, sits across from the Custom House, between the then Central and Commercial wharves.

Within this street pattern, projects should consider how street walls align with existing facades and frame either existing buildings, small open spaces, or the Greenway and waterfronts at the street’s terminus.

Transition and stepdown project massings between taller and lower areas and maintain clusters of smaller parcels, especially within the Custom House District.

The Custom House area between Battery March St and the Greenway is characterized by a mixture of historic warehouse buildings with small footprints (under 10,000 square feet) and maritime commerce services buildings with larger footprints (between 10,000 and 40,000 square feet). Buildings in the area range in scale, overall transitioning both in height and parcel size from the taller large block towers of the Financial District to the lower and smaller block structures scattered closer to the Greenway. Projects should continue to step down building massings to respond to the surrounding context and look for opportunities for the adaptive reuse, especially of smaller footprint buildings that preserve the fine-grained scale of the area and lend themselves to residential or hotel uses.



Maritime commerce services buildings; the U.S. Custom House (left, 1890) and the Board of Trade Building (background, 1908)

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Wharf District

Complement the building eras and architectural styles and their overall facade articulation that help define the street walls of the Wharf District.

Most historic buildings in the Wharf District were built during the second half of the 19th century. However, about one-fifth was constructed earlier, from 1800 to 1850 and the Wharf District features many notable buildings from these two eras. Prominent building eras include:

- Early 19th-century buildings in the area include the Bulfinch-designed or Bulfinch-attributed, four to five-story, red brick warehouses at 25-27 India Street, 64- 68 Broad Street, 72 Broad Street, 102 Broad Street (1805, designated Boston Landmarks), and at Central Wharf (1816), which add a small-scale character along Broad, India, Milk, and Central streets. It also includes the U.S. Custom House (1837-1847, designated Boston Landmark), a stark contrast to the smaller warehouse buildings as a large-scale granite structure with a 1915 tower addition, which stood prominent as Boston’s tallest building for several decades.
- Post-1850 examples include the James Bowdoin Building at 50-52 Broad St (Charles E. Parker, 1853, designated Boston Landmark), a small-scale warehouse and one of the few surviving examples of the granite construction prevalent in mid-19th century Boston, and the Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge (H.H. Richardson’s firm successors)-designed Chamber of Commerce Building (1890, designated Boston Landmark), a Richardsonian Romanesque structure constructed on a triangular block with rounded corners that give it a distinct character at the ground level.

- The area also includes a considerable number of early 20th-century buildings, including the Board of Trade Building (Winslow and Bigelow, 1908), the Batterymarch Building (Harold Field Kellogg, 1918, currently the Dagny Hotel), and the Insurance Exchange Building (Coolidge & Shattuck, 1923), which occupies entire blocks and is a mid- to high-rise building.



Central Wharf warehouses (1816)



Historic cluster at the Intersection of Milk and India Streets



Relationship of the Batterymarch Building facade (1918) to the frontage of Broad Street

Enhance and frame key open spaces and their connections, as well as view corridors leading to and from the waterfront and Rose Kennedy Greenway.

The Wharf District has a few open spaces and cultural landscapes, mostly located in the area east of India Street, framed by a setting of significant historic buildings. These small spaces provide essential pockets of public space while creating urban spaces to showcase surrounding historic buildings. Open spaces in the Wharf District include McKinley Square, a linear space between the State Street Block (Gridley J. F. Bryant, 1858) and the Custom House (Ammi B. Young, 1837-1847, with tower added by Peabody & Stearns, 1915), the Jenney Plaza in front of the Central Wharf block, and the triangle plaza in front of the Chamber of Commerce building.

Key street connectors and view corridors help stitch Downtown with the Greenway, the greater Wharf District neighborhood, and the waterfront to the east. This most notably includes State St with its dynamic view from Old State House to the Custom House and the waterfront and connectors like Milk St, Franklin St, and Broad St. Projects should look for opportunities to enhance and expand the public realm along these connections and ensure they continue to help enhance view corridors both to and from the waterfront.



Projects should consider how they are viewed both within neighborhood streets and from the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Wharf District

List of Boston Landmarks

Designated

- Battery March Building
- Broad Street, 5-7
- Broad Street, 9
- Broad Street, 50-52
- Broad Street, 64
- Broad Street, 66
- Broad Street, 68
- Broad Street, 72
- Broad Street, 102
- Broad Street, 109-113
- Broad Street, 115-119
- Broad Street, 123-125
- Broad Street, 127-133
- Flour & Grain Exchange
- India Street, 25-27
- Richards Building
- U.S. Custom House

Pending

- Board of Trade Building

Wharf District Design Priorities

- Maintain the Wharf District's fine grained street pattern connecting Downtown to the Rose Kennedy Greenway and waterfront.
- Transition and stepdown project massings between taller and lower areas and maintain clusters of smaller parcels, especially within the Custom House District.
- Complement the building eras and architectural styles and their overall facade articulation that help define the street walls of the Wharf District.
- Enhance and frame key open spaces and their connections, as well as view corridors leading to and from the waterfront and Rose Kennedy Greenway, including:
 - Direct view corridors towards the Rose-Kennedy Greenway, such as along State St.
 - McKinley Square in front of the Custom House
 - Jenney Plaza in front of the Central Wharf block
 - India and Milk St plaza
- Adhere to the Greenway District Design Guidelines for projects along the Rose Kennedy Greenway.
- Sites within the Coastal Flood Resilience Zoning Overlay District must follow the City's climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines.

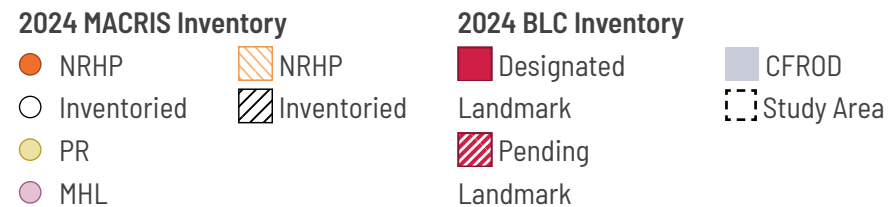
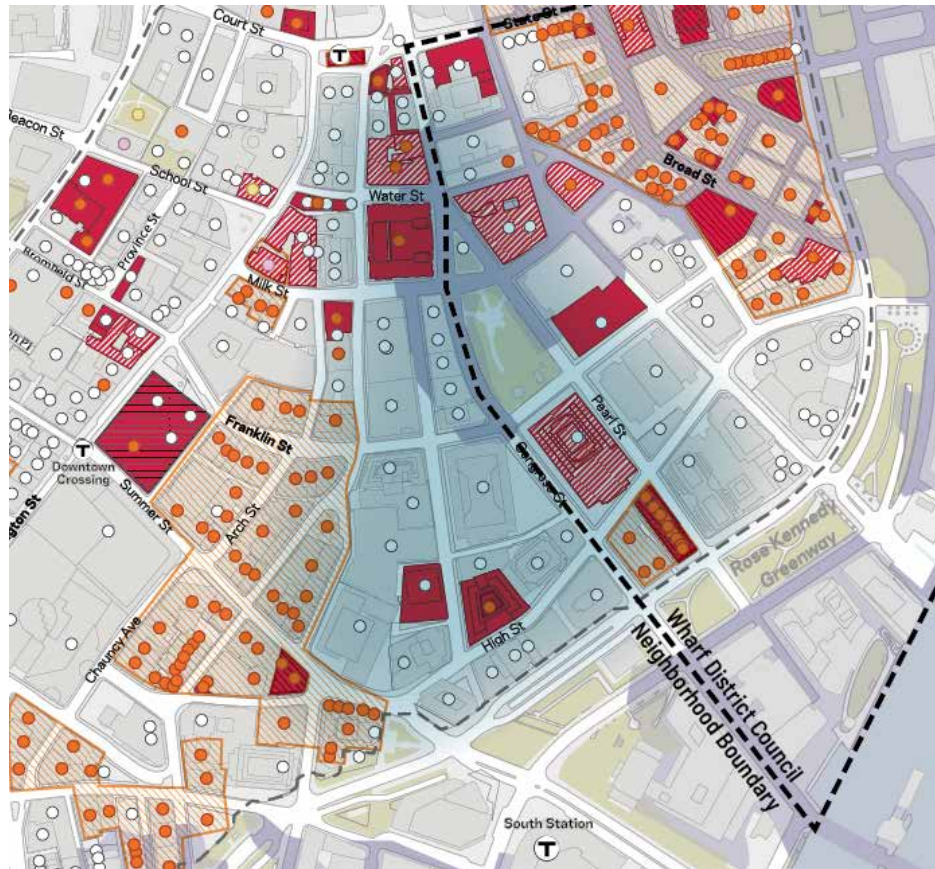
Right: Liberty Square



Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Financial District

Financial District



Projects should enhance and break down the large commercial blocks of the Financial District, highlighting its blend of historically significant structures from different eras and its key public spaces.

The Financial District became the core of Downtown Boston's financial activity during the second half of the 20th century. This area is often viewed as overlapping with the Wharf District Council Neighborhood boundary and is roughly defined as the large commercial blocks between Devonshire St and Oliver St.



Large-scale commercial buildings in the Financial District

Enhance the pedestrian experience by breaking up large blocks by expanding the public realm and introducing mid-block connections whenever possible and breaking up long facades with active uses, lobbies, windows, and artwork to create a more engaging streetscape.

Similar to Downtown Crossing, the Financial District has preserved much of the original street pattern, following the topography of the Shawmut Peninsula in a fan shape with blocks of varying sizes and trapezoidal or triangular shapes. Over time many of the original blocks in the district were consolidated to accommodate large office building footprints, resulting in fewer historic alleys in this part of Downtown. Due to this, the Financial District is characterized by buildings with large footprints, more than 40,000 square feet. The large block sizes inhibit the area's walkability and make it challenging to activate ground floors and the public realm. Projects should find opportunities to break up large blocks with public connections and by making active dynamic street edges, avoiding long blank facades.



Large-scale commercial blocks were created to accommodate large office building footprints and massings.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Financial District



The Quaker Lane block features contemporary additions within a historic setting



Small and large-scale historic buildings along Water Street



Hawes Street Alley, flanked by the State Mutual Insurance Company Building (left, 1902) and the Codman Building (right, 1874)



Historic street wall along Congress Street



Sequence of commercial row buildings at the Richardson Block (1873-1876)

Maintain the small-grained scale and enhance the public realm of smaller parcel clusters in the district.

There are key exceptions to the larger blocks of the Financial District, where the assemblage of the smaller parcels should be avoided. These include:

- At the triangular block between Devonshire, Water, and Congress Sts, across from the historic Stock Exchange Building (Peabody & Stearns, 1889, with tower addition, WZMH, 1981-84, designated Boston Landmark), and south of the intersection of State and Congress Sts, Boston's historic financial center.
- The Quaker Lane historic alley (pending Boston Landmark) breaks down the scale of the triangular block, featuring multiple smaller, six to ten-story, late 19th and early 20th century buildings. A couple of contemporary additions can be found here, including the Hyatt Centric Hotel at 54 Devonshire St (2018).
- West of Liberty Square, at the block between Water St and Exchange Place. The block is split by the historic Hawes St alley. Facing Exchange Place is the ten-story Classical Revival-style State Mutual Insurance Company Building (1902). South of Hawes St alley are two long and narrow, six-story buildings; the steel frame and stone Hornblower & Weeks Building (1908), and the red brick Codman Building (1874, Sturgis and Brigham).
- West of Post Office Square, along Congress St, where a series of seven to ten-story historic buildings form a historic street wall.
- Between Pearl St and Gridley St alley, a collection of nine, four-story, marble and brick commercial row buildings (except for 115-117 Pearl St, a five-story, red brick building), in what is historically known as the Richardson Block (1873-1876, designated Boston Landmark).

Frame and enhance key open spaces, large and small, that showcase the Financial Districts range of buildings and eras.

The Financial District features a few historic open spaces that occurred organically in the triangular shapes formed by the street pattern. The edges of these spaces showcase the area's mix of historic and modern buildings. These include:

- Angell Memorial Sq (built in 1912 to designs by Peabody & Stearns; remodeled by Flansburgh & Associates, 1982), flanked by two buildings from the 1920s, the Art Deco granite and limestone skyscraper, Ten Post Office Sq (1924, pending Boston Landmark), and the Federal Courthouse building (designated Boston Landmark, Cram & Ferguson, 1929-31).
- Winthrop Sq, framed by the One Winthrop Sq (Emerson & Fehmer, 1873) commercial block and the contemporary Winthrop Center Tower
- Despite sharing a similar form, Post Office Sq did not occur by chance but was instead formally developed as an open space beginning in the 1980s. Burying an above ground parking garage that occupied the location allowed for the creation of the much-needed substantial green space, the Norman B. Leventhal Park (Ellenzweig Associates, 1990-91). Surrounded by a number of significant buildings from different eras of the twentieth century, from the Renaissance Revival Langham Hotel (R. Clipston Sturgis, 1921), to the Federal New England Telephone and Telegraph Building (Cram & Ferguson, 1947), to the late modern 100 Federal Street (Campbell, Aldrich & Nulty, 1971), the park provides a center to the district.

These spaces are vital gathering areas and breaks in the large blocks of the Financial District that projects should continue to help enhance and showcase.



Winthrop Square, framed by old and new buildings



Liberty Square, among historic brick and stone buildings



Post Office Square, an essential green space among the mid- and high-rise buildings of the district

Post Office Square, an essential green space among the mid- and high-rise buildings of the district

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Financial District

Find opportunities for density that build on the range of styles within the Financial District and respond to the neighboring context through stepbacks and massing changes.

Most historic buildings in the Financial District were built in the first half of the 20th century in the Classical Revival style. The area is distinct from other character areas in that almost a quarter of its historic buildings were constructed after 1950, creating a true blend of historically significant structures from different eras that create new opportunities for growth. Contemporary projects like Winthrop Center Tower (Handel Architects, 2023) demonstrate how projects can reference neighboring structures and styles while breaking down large blocks with mid-block connections, becoming significant mixed-use icons for Downtown.

List of Boston Landmarks

Designated

- Federal Reserve Bank
- McCormack Federal Bldg/Post Office/Courthouse
- Richardson Block
- Second Brazer Building
- Stock Exchange Building

Pending

- National Shawmut Bank Building
- New England Telephone and Telegraph Building
- Post Office Square, 10
- Samuel Appleton Building
- Worthington Building
- Quaker Lane

Financial District Design Priorities

- Enhance the pedestrian experience by breaking up large blocks by expanding the public realm and introducing mid-block connections whenever possible and breaking up long facades with active uses, lobbies, windows, and artwork to create a more engaging streetscape.
- Maintain the small-grained scale and enhance the public realm of smaller parcel clusters in the district.
- Frame and enhance key open spaces, large and small, that showcase the Financial District's range of buildings and eras.
- Find opportunities for density that build on the range of styles within the Financial District and respond to the neighboring context through stepbacks and massing changes.
- Adhere to the Greenway District Design Guidelines for projects along the Rose Kennedy Greenway.
- Sites within the Coastal Flood Resilience Zoning Overlay District must follow the City's climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines.

Right: Angell Memorial Square, flanked by Ten Post Office Square (1924) and the Federal Courthouse building (1929-1931)



Case Studies

The following case studies showcase project designs that effectively respond to their historical context. These projects range from restoring historic facades and landmarks, adaptively reusing or adding to historic buildings, or undertaking new construction that continues the area's long history of growth and density in the heart of Downtown. Each case study highlights key design considerations made during the process. While these projects may not exemplify all the design guidelines outlined in this document, they demonstrate various ways in which projects can enhance and celebrate Downtown's rich architectural and cultural history.

Godfrey Hotel

Adaptive Reuse, Historic Facade Preservation | Ladder Blocks

The 2016 Godfrey Hotel project renovated and restored two historic buildings, the Blake Building and the Amory Building into a 243 room hotel along Washington St.

- **Historic Preservation:** Utilizing federal and state Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, restored the Blake and Amory Buildings, which date back to the early 20th century, preserving original architectural details, including terracotta facades, decorative cornices, and historic window designs.
- **Adaptive Reuse:** Vacant office buildings were re-purposed to a hotel and ground floor retail spaces, that alongside a restored historic lobby, helped activate the surrounding area.
- **Modern Addition:** Modern ground-level storefronts provide some contrast to the historic context and the building's original historic features above.



Finegold Alexander Architects

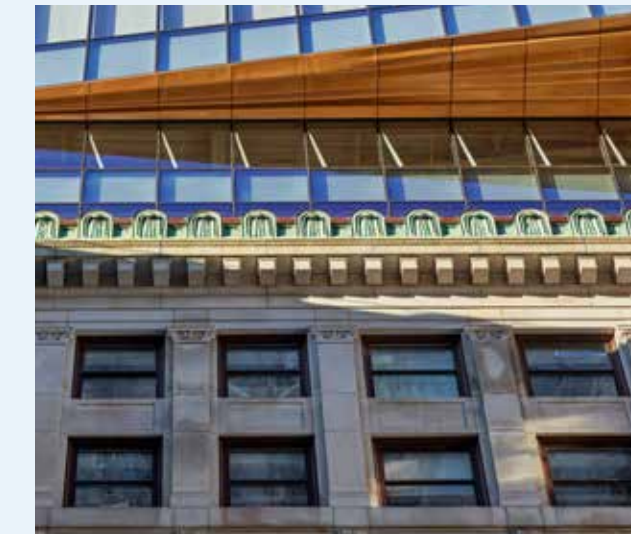
Congress Square

Adaptive Reuse, New Addition, Historic Facade Preservation | Downtown Crossing

This 2019 project involved the renovation of five historic buildings and the addition of a new modern mixed-use tower. It included approximately 600,000 square feet of office space, 20,000 square feet of retail space, and a 200-room hotel.

- **Historic preservation:** Carefully restored five existing historic buildings, which date back to the early 20th century, including windows and ornamental details of their facades.
- **Adaptive reuse and sustainability:** Combined and adapted five existing office historic structures into hotel, retail, and office spaces. Advanced City sustainability goals and policies through both the reuse of the existing buildings and sustainability and energy efficiency upgrades to building systems.
- **Maintained urban fabric:** Maintained mid-block alleys, streets, and facade elements such as entries, fenestration, historic bluestone paving slabs and architectural ornamentation that help break up the large block.

- **Contrast between old and new:** Created a dynamic contrast between the masonry and intricate details of the existing historic buildings and the new 350,000 square feet modern glass addition constructed above.
- **Coordination with BLC:** BLC reviewed massing, materiality, and coloration of the project, especially for the addition to the National Shawmut Bank Building (a pending landmark).



Arrowstreet



Arrowstreet

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Case Studies

80 Broad St - Folio

New construction, Preservation | Wharf District

The 2006 80 Broad St. project infilled a block in the Wharf District with a residential building and ground floor retail, replacing a former parking lot while preserving and incorporating a 1807 historic structure on the site.

- Historic preservation: Preserves and incorporates a 4,000-square-foot structure designed in 1807 by architect Charles Bulfinch.
- Ground floor transparency and activation: Retail spaces with large windows and granite details wrap around three sides, providing maximum street exposure and defining the property's edge.
- Massing breakdown and setbacks: Building massing is divided into two distinct masses that step down and setback to create terraced and reduce its overall scale in keeping with its surroundings and the lower four-story Bulfinch building at its base.



CBT

Modern Theatre

New Addition, Facade Preservation | Theater District

The 2011 Modern Theatre Cultural and Residential Project restored the historic facade of the Modern Theatre and created a 197-unit student residence hall, studio theater, and art gallery.

- Historic Preservation: Utilizing federal and state Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, restored the early 20th century Blake and Amory Buildings preserving original architectural details, including terracotta facades, decorative cornices, and historic window designs.
- Adaptive Reuse: Vacant office buildings were re-purposed to a hotel and ground floor retail spaces, that alongside a restored historic lobby, helped activate the surrounding area.



CBT

Winthrop Center

New Construction | Financial District

The 2024 Winthrop Center is the tallest tower Downtown and largest Passive House office project in the world, with a program that includes office, residential project, and a through-block public space.

- Modern Addition: Modern ground-level storefronts provide some contrast to the historic context and the building's original historic features above.



CBT

- Mid-block connection: Introduced an interior through-block connection, breaking up an otherwise long block and creating a connection to the public space of Winthrop Square.
- Contextual setback: Upper-story setbacks align with neighboring buildings.



Handel Architects



Handel Architects