



**boston planning &
development agency**

PLAN: East Boston

Workshop Toolkit: Neighborhood Residential Areas

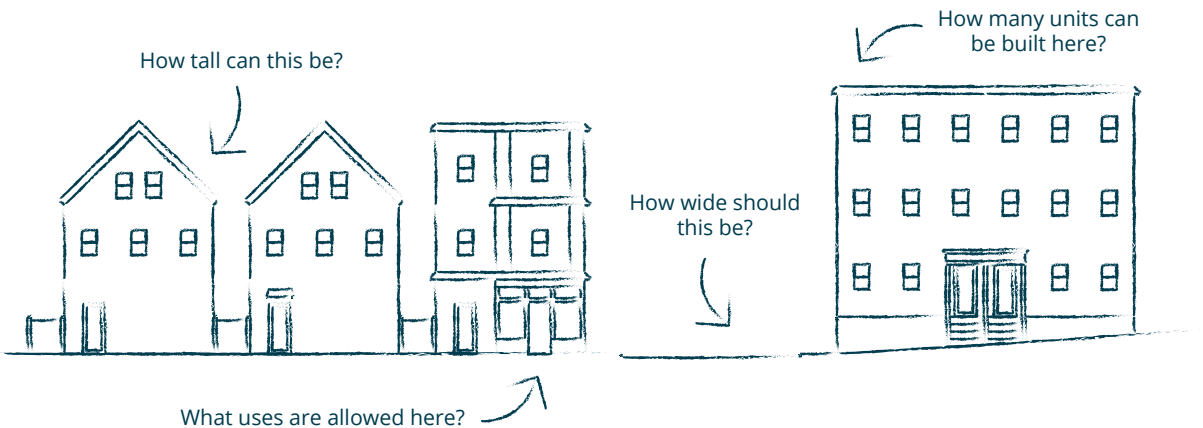


Introduction

Neighborhood Residential Areas

Neighborhood residential areas refer to areas in the neighborhood that are primarily, though not exclusively, used for housing.

East Boston's built environment includes buildings, regulated by Article 53 of the Boston Zoning Code, and streets, informed by Boston Complete Streets guidelines.



In this document we'll explore—

Shaping individual buildings through zoning

Shaping streets through Complete Streets guidelines



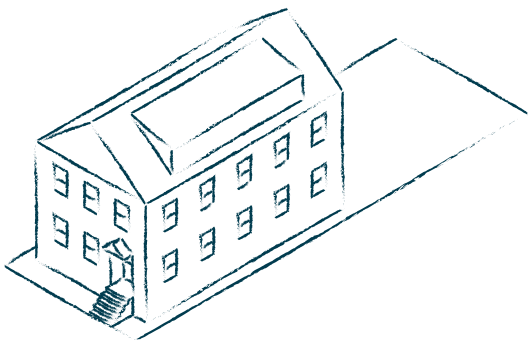
Much of East Boston was built before either zoning or Complete Streets policy were adopted, which means there are many examples of buildings that do not comply with Article 53, and streets that do not comply with Boston Complete Streets guidelines.

Zoning

What is zoning?

Zoning is a legal mechanism that regulates what property owners can and cannot do with their property. Zoning keeps compatible things together—like types of uses or sizes and forms of buildings.

What you see—



What the zoning looks like—

SUBDISTRICT	HEIGHT	FAR	SETBACK
2F-5000	2-½ stories	0.8	5' front

Zoning abstracts features of buildings and groups them by shared characteristics. There are three main parts to zoning:

Geography

Zoning controls how growth and development occur by identifying different areas, or zoning subdistricts, with different use and/or dimensional standards.

Use

Zoning regulates what type of activities, or uses, are allowed in each subdistrict. Some common uses defined by zoning include residential, commercial/retail, civic, and industrial. Zoning in East Boston's neighborhood residential areas further differentiates uses within the residential use category, creating One-Family (1F), Two-Family (2F), Three-Family (3F), and Multi-family (MFR) zoning subdistricts.

Dimensional Standards

Zoning guides the size and shape of buildings. It doesn't say what a building should look like, but it does set up rules about how big a building can be and where it should be located within a given parcel.

Zoning

Land Use

Historically, the primary purpose of zoning was to segregate uses that were thought to be incompatible. Residential zoning subdistricts in East Boston primarily allow residential uses and forbid most other uses.



Forbidden Uses

Small retail uses like coffee shops, service uses like laundromats, and community uses like daycares, provide important neighborhood amenities but are currently forbidden by zoning.

USE	1F	2F	3F	MFR	MFR/LS
Daycare	C	C	C	C	C
Bakery	F	F	F	F	C
Local Retail	F	F	F	F	A
Dry Cleaning	F	F	F	F	C

Article 53 - Table A

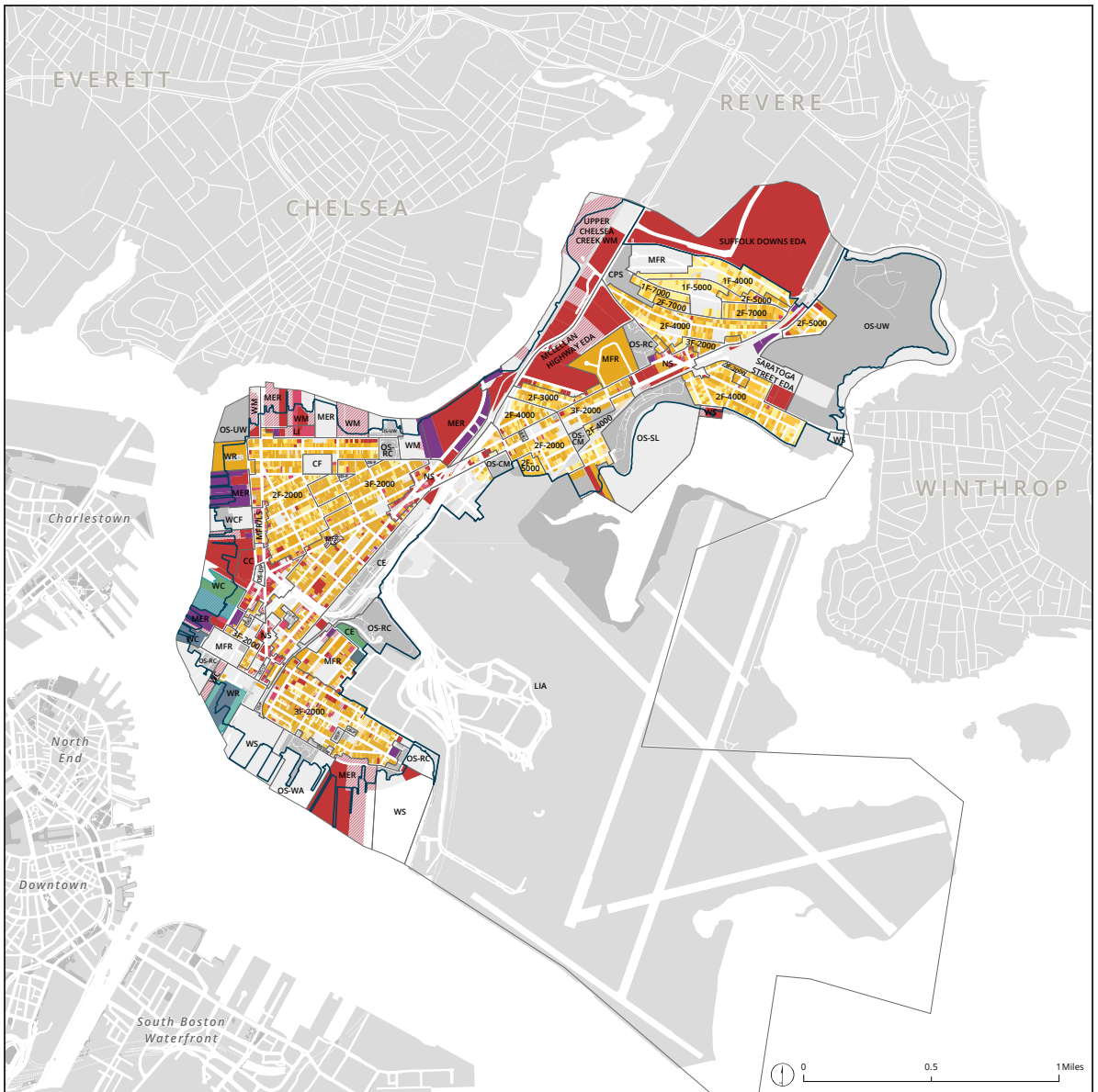
Residential Subdistricts - Use Regulations

Uses are encoded as “Allowed” (A), “Conditional” (C), or “Forbidden” (F). Table A of Article 53 of the Boston Zoning Code lists 26 distinct use categories. For definitions of each use category and certain specific uses, see Article 2A of the Boston Zoning Code.

A - Allowed

C - Conditional

F - Forbidden



Existing Non-conformity - Land Use

There are many examples of existing uses that are forbidden by zoning but are desirable to the neighborhoods they are located in. Co-locating some amount of retail with residential uses helps create walkable neighborhoods.

Map of Existing Land Use by Parcel

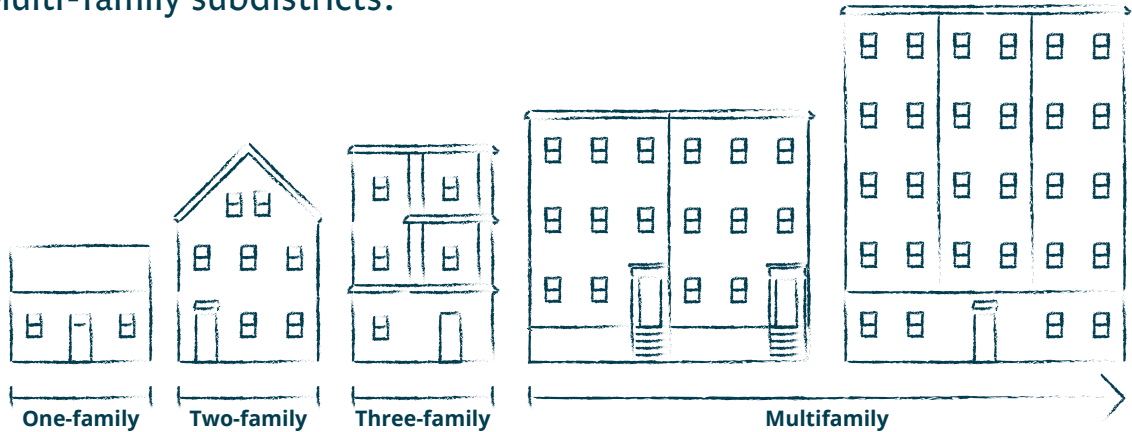
- Single-family
- Two-family
- Multi-family
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Mixed Use
- Exempt
- Commercial Vacant
- Residential Vacant
- Planned Development Area (PDA)
- Zoning Subdistrict Boundary

Sources - Zoning, Assessing FY'18 (as of Jan.1 2017)

Zoning

Residential Land Use

East Boston’s zoning further differentiates uses within the residential use category—creating One-family, Two-family, Three-family, and Multi-family subdistricts.



Land Use and Building Types

The multi-family designation technically applies to all buildings with 4 or more dwelling units and covers a wide range of residential building types.

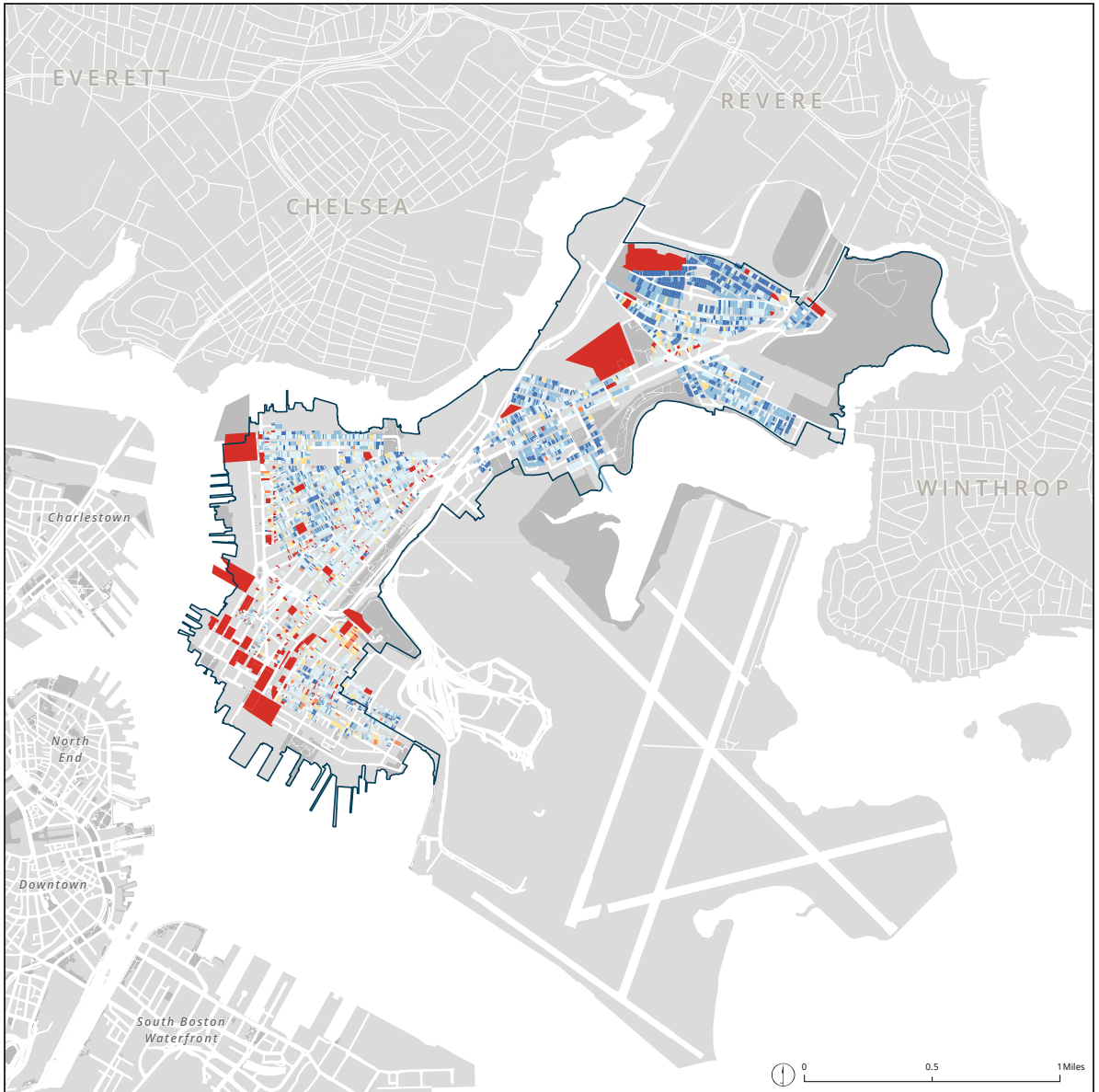
USE	1F	2F	3F	MFR	MFR/LS
Multi-family	F	F	F	A	A
Rowhouse	F	F	A	A	A
One-family	A	A	A	A	A
Two-family	F	A	A	A	A
Three-family	F	F	A	A	A

Article 53 - Table A

Residential Subdistricts - Use Regulations

Residential subdistricts are unique from other types of land use subdistricts in Article 53 in that they refer to a building typology and have a minimum lot size associated with them. There are 17 specific uses identified within the Residential Use category. This table references a few of the most common uses within East Boston’s neighborhood residential areas.

A - Allowed
 C - Conditional
 F - Forbidden



Existing non-conformity - Residential Land Use

34% of parcels in the Two-Family (2F) areas of East Boston contain three-family houses!

Map of Residential Parcels by Number of Units

- 1 unit (971)
- 2 units (1,276)
- 3 units (2,272)
- 4-7 units (304)
- 8-9 units (47)
- 10 or more units (259)

Source: Assessing FY'18 (as of Jan.1 2017)

Zoning

Height

Building height is one of several dimensional regulations encoded by zoning. Height is recorded in both feet and number of stories, and is currently measured from the average grade of a parcel to the top of the highest occupiable floor.



2-½ Stories

3 Stories

Flood Resilience Zoning Overlay District

The BPDA is studying how to include future flood projections in zoning by amending the definition of height. Once adopted, height would be measured from the Finished Floor Elevation (FFE) of the ground floor, which would allow buildings to raise their ground floor without losing available height.

Roof access

Mechanical space, roof decks, and access to roof decks are not included in measuring the height of a building because they are not technically occupiable space. Access to roof decks can be an important architectural feature of a building and in some cases may contribute to the impression of height.

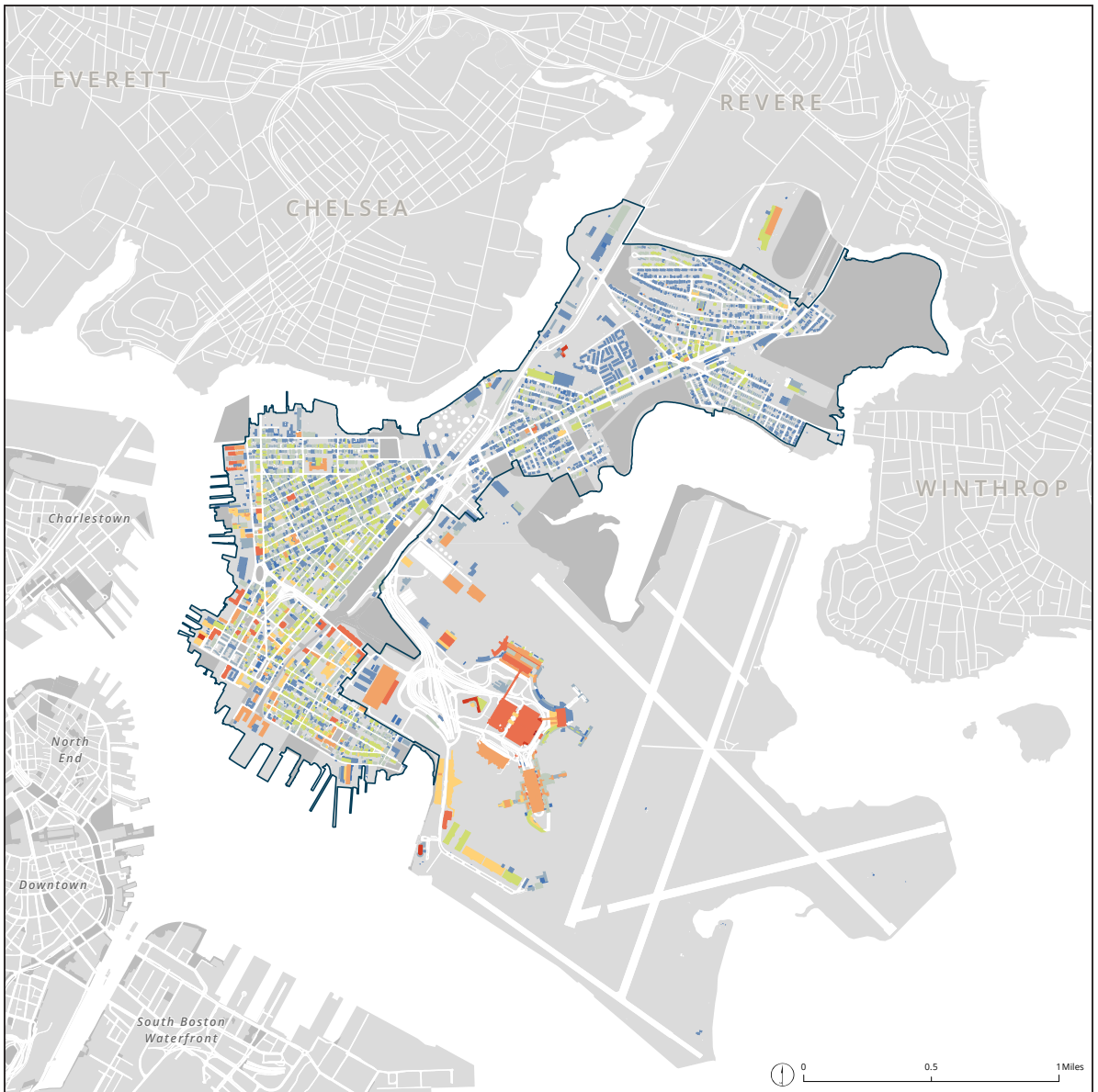
Article 53 - Table F

Residential Subdistricts - Dimensional Regulations

Residential zoning subdistricts in East Boston limit height to 35 feet uniformly but have slight variation in the number of stories allowed.

* Subdistricts are further subdivided into categories based on lot size. This feature is explained further in the section of this toolkit covering density. As it relates to height requirements, 2F-7000 allows for 3-story buildings, while all other 2F subdistricts limit height to 2-½ stories.

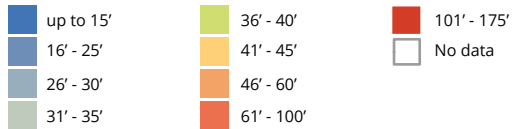
Subdistrict	Feet	Stories
1F	35'	2-½
2F	35'	2-½ *
3F	35'	3
MFR	35'	3
MFR/LS	35'	3



Existing Non-conformity - Building Height

Of existing buildings in East Boston, many are taller than the height allowed by zoning, many of which predate the adoption of the current zoning code.

Map of Existing Building Height

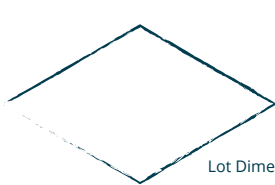


Source: 2010 LIDAR data, PNF documents for buildings erected after 2010. Building heights are approximate.

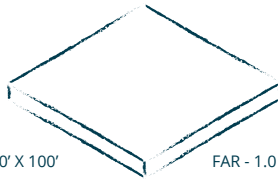
Zoning

Density

One of the main ways zoning limits the size of buildings is by regulating allowed Floor Area Ratio (FAR). FAR is the total square footage of all the floors of a building, divided by the total square footage of the parcel.



Lot Dimension - 100' X 100'
Lot Area - 10,000 SQ FT



FAR - 1.0 (10,000 GSF)
Building Footprint - 10,000 SQ FT
Building Height - 10 FT
Lot Coverage - 100%



FAR - 1.0 (10,000 GSF)
Building Footprint - 2,500 SQ FT
Building Height - 40 FT
Lot Coverage - 25%

Subdistrict	FAR
1F-4000	0.5
1F-5000	0.5
1F-7000	0.5
2F-2000	0.8
2F-3000	0.8
2F-4000	0.8
2F-5000	0.6
2F-7000	0.6
3F-2000	1.0
MFR & MFR/LS	1.0

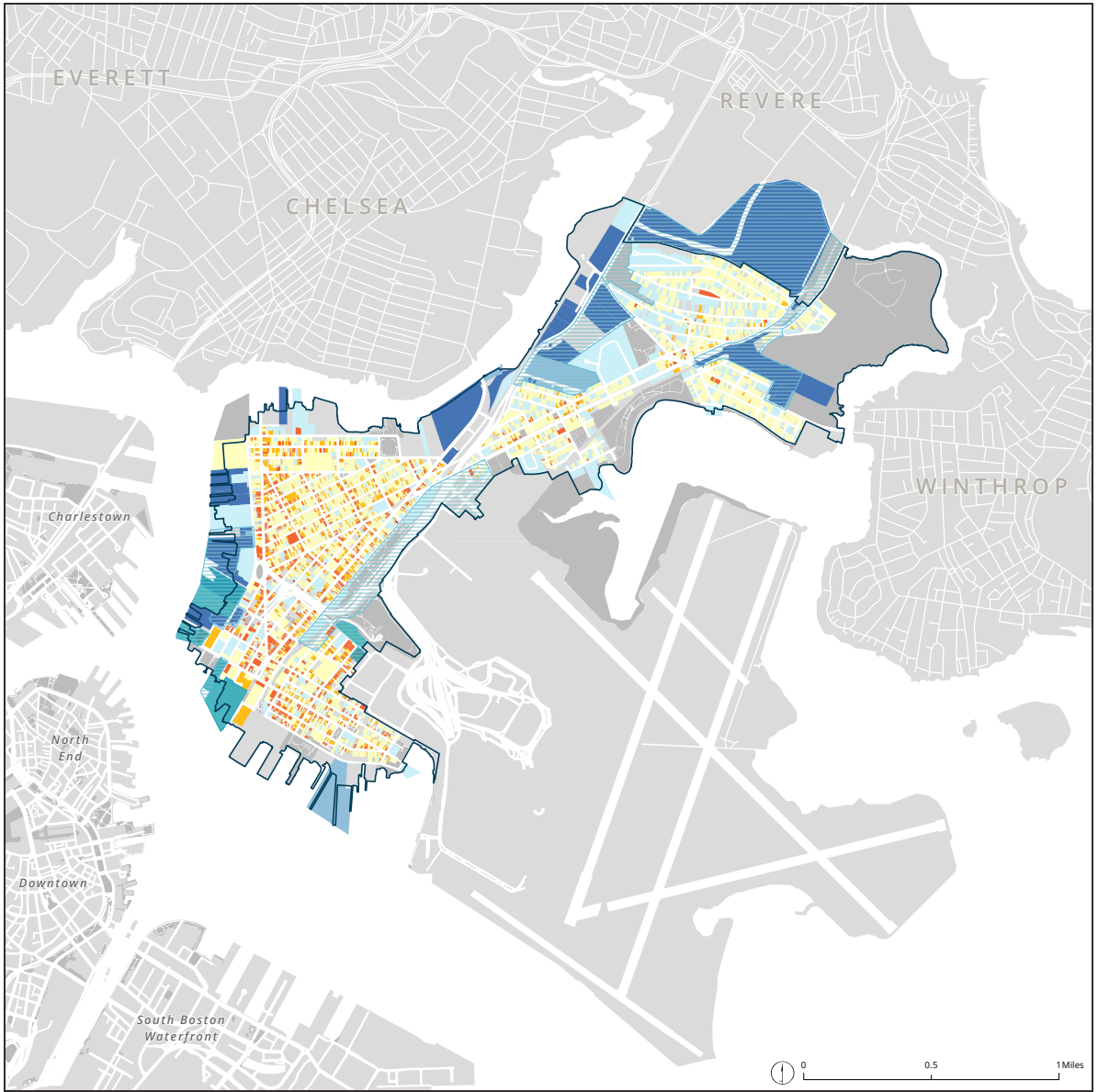
Calculating FAR

FAR operates as a multiplier. If a parcel is zoned as 1.0 FAR, multiply the site area by 1.0 to determine how much development would be allowed on the site. For instance, a 1,000-square-foot parcel with an FAR limit of 1.0 would yield 1,000 square feet in total. The diagram above demonstrates how the same amount of development could be deployed many ways.

Article 53 - Table F

Residential Subdistricts - Dimensional Regulations

The number following the "1F," "2F," or "3F" designation refers to the minimum lot area required in that subdistrict for the first one or two dwelling units. Minimum lot area requirements further limit the density of a given subdistrict. For example, a 2F-3000 subdistrict allows for a 1- or 2-family detached building on a 3,000 square foot lot for 1 or 2 dwelling units.



Existing Non-conformity - Building Height

60% of the parcels in East Boston have buildings with a larger FAR than zoning allows, many of which predate the adoption of the current zoning code.

Map of Existing FAR in relation to Allowable FAR

Ratio exceeding allowed: Available capacity ratio:

- 8.3 - -10.9
- 1.5 - -8.2
- 1.0 - -1.4
- 0 - -0.9
- 0.1 - 1.0
- 1.1 - 1.5
- 1.6+

- Planned Development Area (PDA)
- PDA Permitted Area
- Zoning Subdistrict Boundary

Source: Zoning, Assessing FY'18 (as of Jan.1 2017)

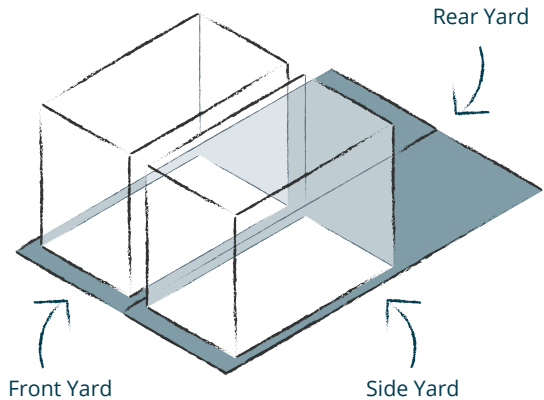
Zoning

Space between buildings

Setbacks refer to how far a building must be from the property line. Zoning uses setbacks to control how much of a parcel is built on by requiring setbacks from the front, rear, and side property lines.

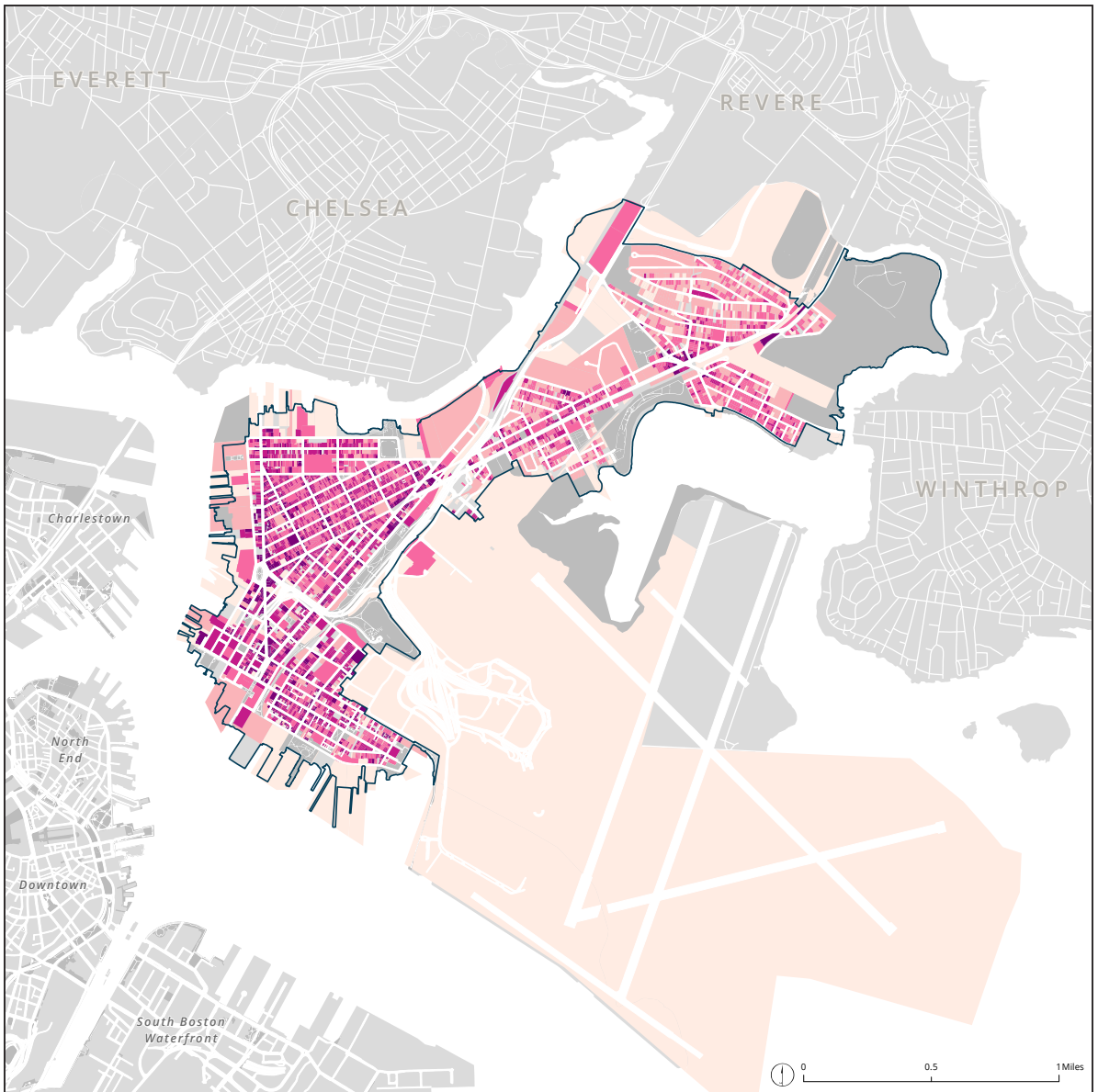
Article 53 - Table F
Residential Subdistricts - Dimensional Regulations

Subdistrict	Setback (in feet)		
	Front	Rear	Side
1F-4000	15	35	10
1F-5000	15	40	10
1F-7000	20	45	10
2F-2000	5	30	2-1/2
2F-3000	5	35	5
2F-4000	10	40	7
2F-5000	10	40	10
2F-7000	15	45	10
3F-2000	5	40	2-1/2
MFR/LS	5	30	2-1/2



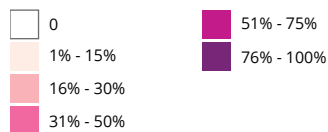
Setbacks

Front yard setbacks determine the distance between a building and the sidewalk. In East Boston, dimensional requirements in neighborhood residential areas can vary from 5 feet to 20 feet. Side yard setbacks determine the distance between buildings as seen from the street.



Zoning could also limit how much of a lot you can build on by setting lot coverage limits. East Boston zoning does not currently encode lot coverage but relies on setback requirements to perform a similar function.

Map of Existing Lot Coverage

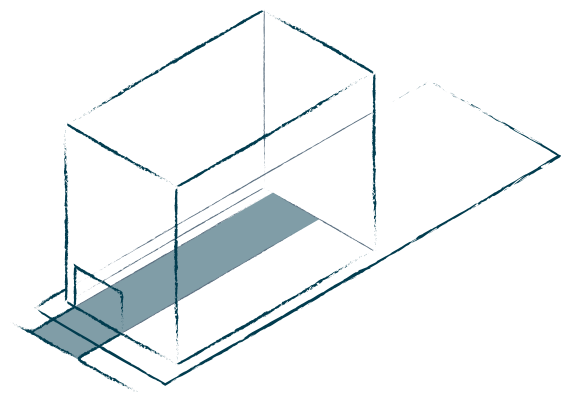


Source: Assessing FY'19 (as of Jan. 1 2018), Boston Zoning Code

Zoning

On-site parking

Zoning says how many parking spaces are required per use in different districts. For residential uses, zoning typically requires at least one to two parking spaces per unit, depending on building size.



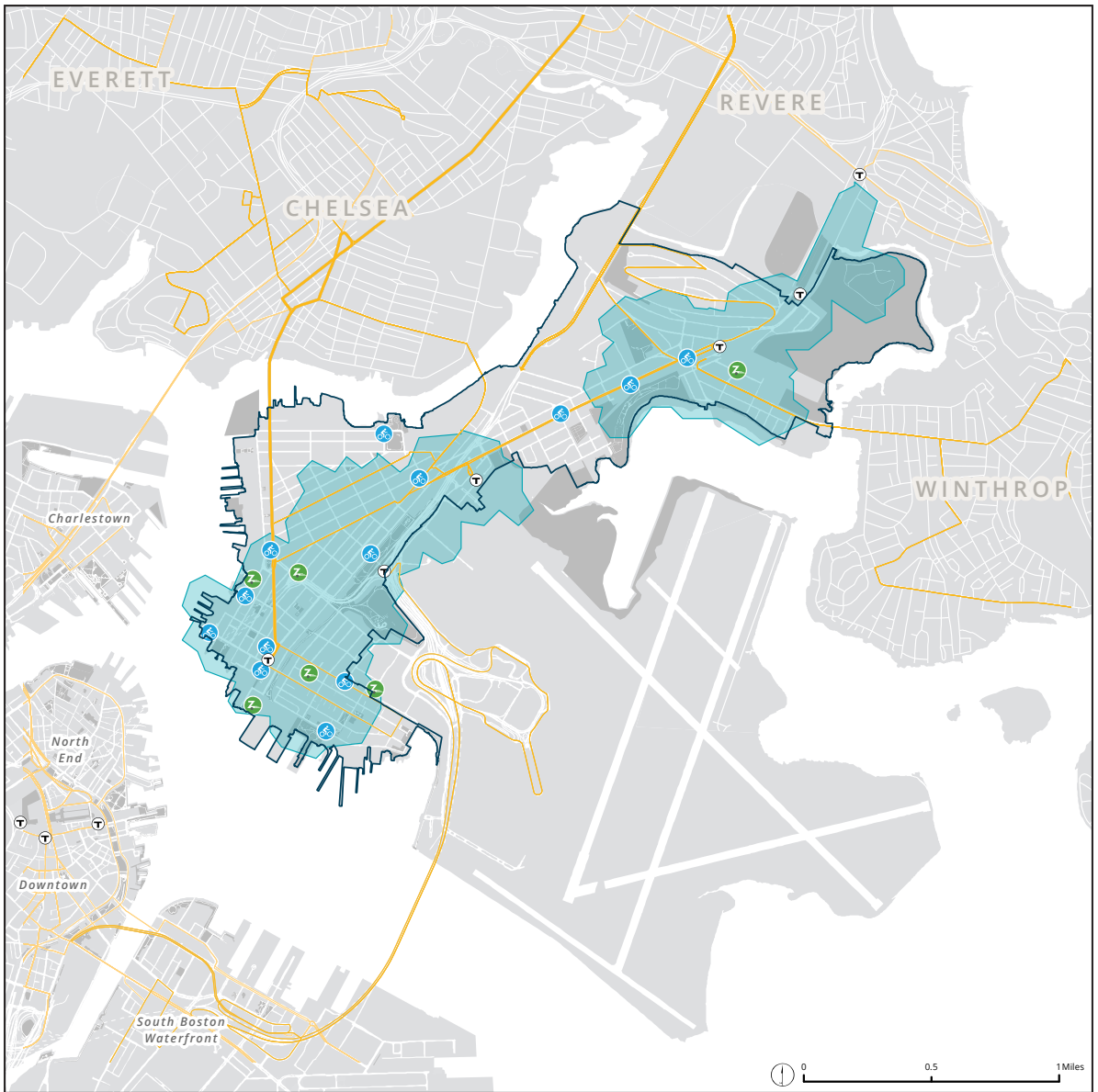
Parking diagram

On-site parking requires square footage for the storage and maneuvering of vehicles, which could otherwise be allocated to active ground floor uses. Parking also requires a curb cut to provide access to the street, which introduces a vehicular conflict point with pedestrians and eliminates opportunities for public realm enhancements and on-street parking.

Subdistrict	Minimum spaces per unit
1F, 2F, 3F	1.0
MFR (4-6 units)	1.5
MFR (7-9 units)	1.75
MFR (10+ units)	2.0
Affordable housing	0.7

Article 53 - Table N

Zoning requires a minimum number of parking spaces for all proposed residential projects. It does not cap or limit the total number of parking spaces that can be provided. However, the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) recommends maximum parking ratios for large developments (at least 50,000 gross square feet). The Mayor's Housing Innovation Lab also designates maximum parking ratios for developments participating in the Compact Living Pilot.



Minimum Parking Requirements

Minimum parking requirements in zoning do not vary based on proximity to nearby travel options. Maximum parking guidelines set by BTD and the Compact Living Pilot are reduced near MBTA subway stations. More than one-third of households in East Boston don't have access to a car.

Map of 10-Minute Walk to Blue Line MBTA Station

- Within a 10-minute walk of a Blue Line station
- Key Bus Route
- Local bus route
- B Bluebikes station
- Z Zipcar

Complete Streets Guidelines

Street Types

Street types form the basis of the Boston Complete Streets Design Guidelines, which considers walking, biking, and taking transit equally important as driving. Street types are based on adjacent land uses, the character of the street, and the needs of all transportation modes.



Street types move beyond traditional transportation planning by broadly responding to the built environment and the needs of a safe and accessible multimodal network.

Surrounding density

Most street types are divided into Downtown or Neighborhood contexts, responding to differences in public space needs and connectivity to the local and regional transportation network.



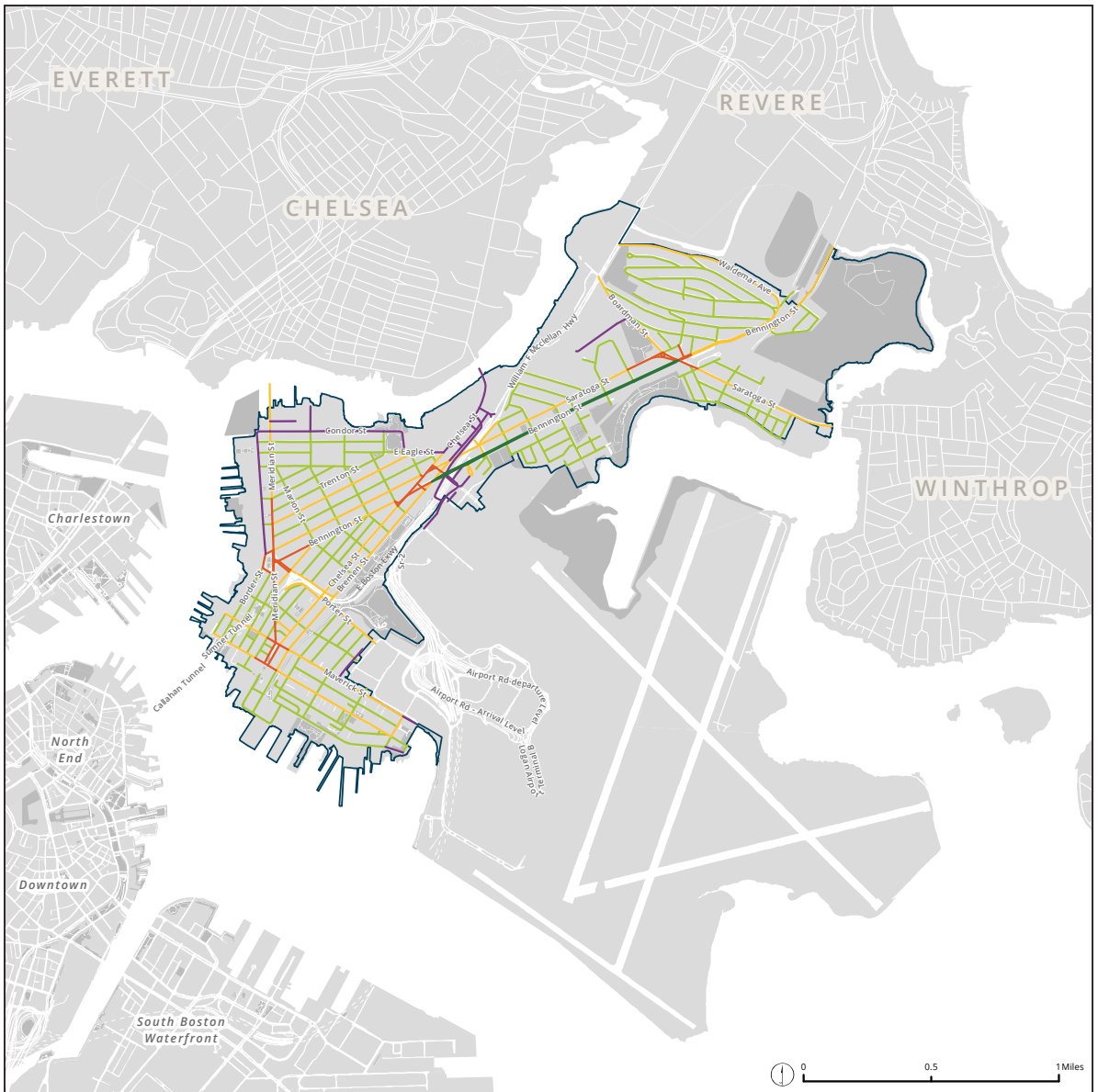
Adjacent land use

Street types can be fluid—a single corridor may change street types several times as the surrounding land uses change, for example passing through commercial or industrial use within a neighborhood. This, in turn, influences foot traffic, diversity of travel modes, public realm, and curbside use.

Special Street Types

In addition to land use, Shared Streets, Parkways, and Boulevards are characterized more by design elements unique to that type of street rather than solely by adjacent land use.

Bennington Street is a good example of how a single corridor may change street types several times as it moves through a neighborhood. The top image is of Bennington Street in Orient Heights, and the bottom image is of Bennington Street in Central Square.



Street Types in East Boston

East Boston currently accommodates five street types. In neighborhood residential areas, street types are primarily limited to Neighborhood Connector or Neighborhood Residential streets.

Map of Complete Street Categorization

- Neighborhood Residential
- Neighborhood Connector
- Neighborhood Main
- Boulevard
- Industrial

Source: Boston Complete Streets Guidelines, BPDA GIS analysis

Neighborhood Residential Streets

Neighborhood Residential streets provide immediate access to the residential fabric, are typically not intended for through-traffic, and often have on-street permit parking. They should reinforce slow speeds and provide space for street trees. Neighborhood Residential streets are the most common street type in East Boston.

Like all street types, Neighborhood Residential streets provide guidance when selecting design elements.

Travel speed

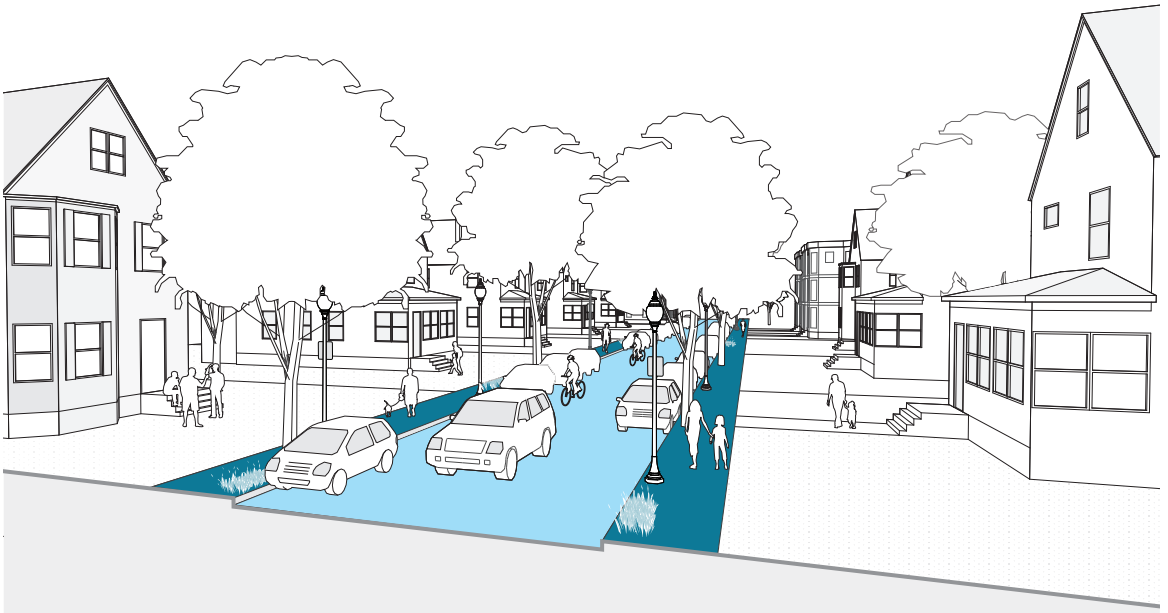
Neighborhood Residential streets should be designed to produce speeds that do not exceed 20 mph. Traffic calming design strategies can be appropriate to reinforce slower speeds, particularly where drivers are transitioning from higher-speed streets. Low speeds generally support bicycling without needing physical separation.

Sidewalks

Neighborhood Residential street sidewalks should be at least 7 feet wide; 5 feet of the sidewalk must be preserved for an accessible route (i.e., the Pedestrian Zone). Remaining width should be allocated to trees, street furniture, and other amenities.

Travel Lanes

Neighborhood Residential streets typically have one to two lanes, with or without parking, and do not have pavement markings.



Neighborhood Residential Streets

Neighborhood Residential streets are often the narrowest street type. In East Boston, most residences have limited or no setback from the street, creating the impression of a narrower street, helping calm traffic.

Source: Boston Complete Street Design Guidelines

Zoning Overview

A brief history of Boston's zoning

Fifteen of the Boston's twenty-six neighborhoods were once separate towns (or neighborhoods of separate towns). As the years passed, these neighborhoods were slowly annexed by the City of Boston. To this day, many of these neighborhoods remain unique in their look and feel compared to the rest of the City. The most recent edition of the Boston Zoning Code, enacted in 1964, has evolved and adapted to accommodate the unique character of these places and it includes many separate maps and amendments. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a comprehensive rezoning process that led to the rewriting of the zoning for many neighborhoods.

East Boston's zoning code, known as Article 53, was last updated in 1993.

How Zoning Works

Different City agencies, departments, and boards and commissions play important, but separate, roles in zoning.

- The Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) writes zoning.
- The Boston Zoning Commission (BZC) adopts zoning.
- The Inspectional Services Department (ISD) interprets and applies zoning.
- The Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA) determines eligibility for exceptions from zoning.

When the public comes in contact with zoning issues, it does so most often through the BPDA or ISD.

A property owner must apply to ISD for a building permit or a change in use or occupancy permit. If the permit is denied because the proposed project violates the Zoning Code, the applicant may appeal the decision to the ZBA within ISD.

The BPDA makes recommendations concerning the case after its planning staff:

- Evaluates zoning applications
- Reviews the proposal

The BPDA makes its recommendations to the Board of Appeal on requests for variances and conditional uses and to the Zoning Commission in cases concerning Zoning Code amendments.

Members of the public and elected officials can also weigh in on requests for variances.

The BPDA makes no final rulings. Final decisions are made by the Board of Appeal and the Zoning Commission.

Zoning Terms

Accessory use - a land use which is related to and on the same lot as the principal land use.

Allowed use - a land use which is permitted as a matter of right. Board of Appeal approval is not required.

Appeal - a request made to the Board of Appeal for relief from zoning code regulations.

As-of-right-use - those uses that are automatically allowed by the zoning code.

Article 80 - Adopted in 1996 by the BPDA to provide clear guidelines for the development review process relating to large projects (adding/constructing more than 50,000 square feet), small projects (adding/constructing more than 20,000 square feet and/or 15+ net new residential units), Planned Development Areas (PDAs) (new overlay zoning districts for project areas larger than 1 acre), and Institutional Master Plans (IMPs) (projects relating to academic and medical campuses). The Article 80 process may include, but is not limited to, review of a project's impacts on transportation, public realm, the environment, and historic resources. BPDA Project Managers assist developers in navigating the Article 80 process. Public input is encouraged throughout a project's review timeline.

Chapter 91, The Massachusetts Public Waterfront Act - The Commonwealth's primary tool for protection and promotion of public use of its tidelands and other waterways. The oldest program of its kind in the nation, Chapter 91 regulates activities on both coastal and inland waterways, including construction, dredging and filling in tidelands, great ponds and certain rivers and streams.

Conditional Use - a land use permitted by the Zoning Code provided that it is found by the Board of Appeal to comply with certain conditions set out in the Code.

Forbidden use - A use that is not permitted in a particular district because of harmful impacts on other allowed uses (e.g., noise or pollution.)

Height - height is measured from the average grade of a parcel.

Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) - Established in 2000 to promote the production of affordable housing in Boston. Under IDP, developers may include affordable units within their developments (on-site), create affordable housing in an off-site location, or make a cash contribution towards the creation or preservation of affordable housing.

Inspectional Services Department (ISD) - A City of Boston department which administers the Boston Zoning Code and the State Building Code and issues all building, use, and occupancy permits. If a project requires development review under Article 80, ISD will not issue a permit until the BPDA and the Zoning Commission (if necessary) have completed the required review and the BPDA has certified that the project described in the permit application is consistent with the project approved through development review.

Lot, lot area - the area of a parcel of land in single ownership and not divided by a street.

Nonconforming use - A use or activity that was lawful prior to the adoption or amendment of the Zoning Code, but which does not, because of such adoption or amendment, conform to the present requirements of the Zoning Code.

Variance - Permission to deviate from a specific requirement of the Zoning Code.

Zoning Commission - The Zoning Commission is responsible for adopting all new zoning and zoning amendments, for establishing PDAs and approving PDA Development Plans, and for approving Institutional Master Plans. The Zoning Commission is located within the City of Boston's administration, not the BPDA.

This workshop is part of a series focused on zoning and public realm in East Boston. These workshops explore the challenges and opportunities of different types of areas in the neighborhood including neighborhood residential, mixed-use nodes and corridors, and waterfront industrial and economic development areas. Discussions focus on how features of zoning and the public realm operate in these areas today, and how they could in the future.

Workshop 1 - Neighborhood Residential

OCT 24, 2019 6:30 - 8:00 PM

East Boston YMCA, 54 Ashley Street

Small group discussions about the character of East Boston neighborhoods.

Workshop 2 - Mixed-use Nodes & Corridors

NOV 06, 2019 6:30 - 8:00 PM

Excel Academy, 401 Bremen Street

Small group discussions about the character of East Boston's squares and main streets.

Workshop 3 - Waterfront Industrial & Economic Development Areas

NOV 21, 2019 6:30 - 8:00 PM

East Boston High School, 86 White Street

Small group discussions about the character of East Boston's waterfront industrial and economic development areas.

Contact

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