

Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning

Study Background

Why This Initiative?

Previous planning initiatives have captured this community's vision for its future: a neighborhood rich with housing and jobs for a diverse population, community-serving retail, active sidewalks, and open space. Those aspirations are now matched by the desire of developers to invest in the area.

But the existing zoning does not support this vision. The zoning was not written to promote housing production and the allowed density is not sufficient to leverage development for additional benefits such as greater housing affordability or major investments in the public realm.

When the zoning for this area was written 30 years ago, Boston was a different city and Allston was a different neighborhood. The city's population had barely started to grow again after losing more than a quarter of its population. Harvard had not yet emerged as a significant player in the Allston neighborhood.

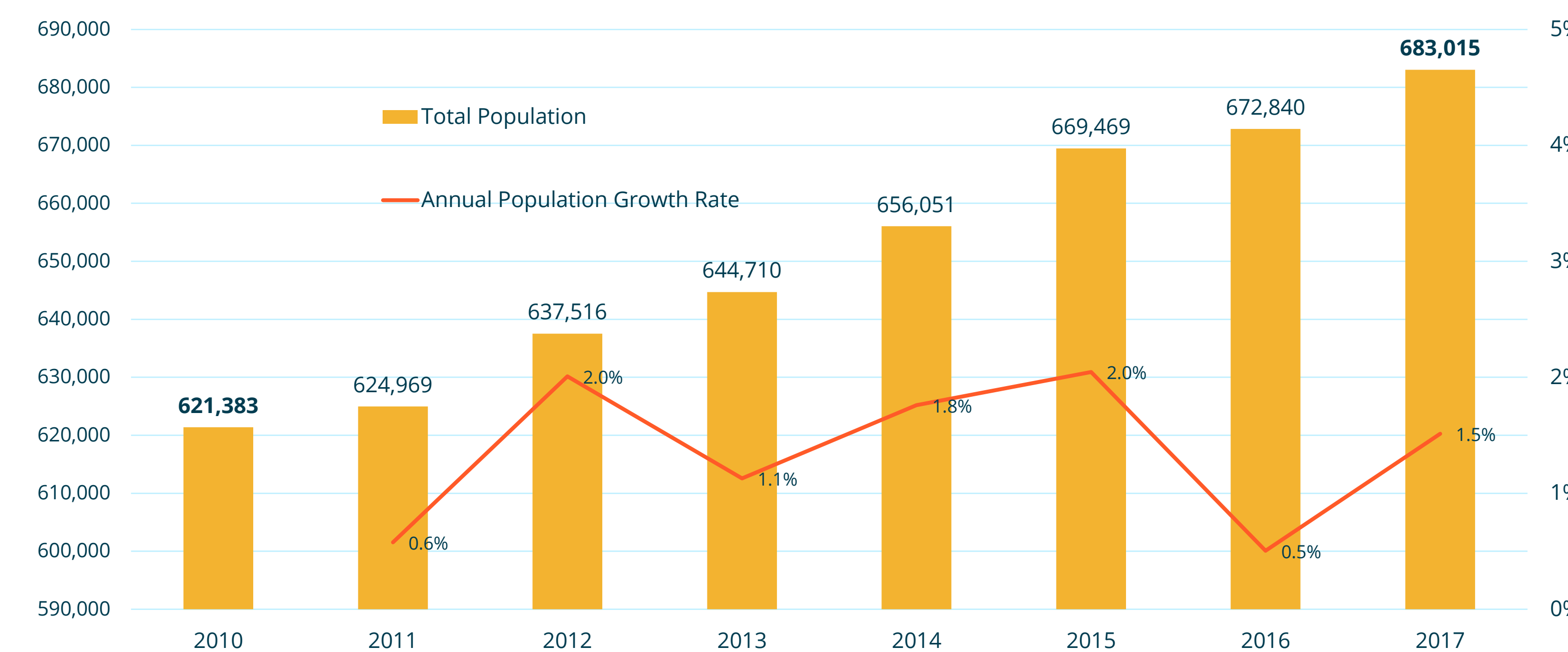
Boston is now growing rapidly: between 2010 and 2017 the city added 60,000 residents--nearly 10% growth! This is driving up the price of housing, and the high cost of housing is the average Bostonians' number one concern. **We have heard from residents a strong desire for more housing, especially owner-occupied and/or affordable housing.**

Furthermore, as the home of Harvard's new life sciences and innovation efforts, **Allston is taking its place as one of the main nodes in Boston's world-leading innovation economy.** The Harvard Science and Engineering Complex will bring the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences to Western Avenue, setting the stage for new industries.

The Western Avenue Corridor Study and Rezoning will yield new zoning, a vision for Western Avenue as a more beautiful multi-modal street, and the tools to address public realm and mobility aspirations.



The 2005 North Allston Strategic Framework for Planning presented a vision for the neighborhood's future.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2017 American Community Survey, BPDA Research Division Analysis



The Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences complex in Allston is scheduled to be completed in 2020. Image source: Behnisch Architekten



The Study Area has a significant volume of cyclists but conditions leave much room for improvement. Image Source: BPDA

"Boston is growing every single day. Our economy is booming. Our colleges and universities are thriving. We're adding 20,000 new jobs every year. More people are choosing to move here, to stay here, to raise families here. This is a great thing for our city, but it has also put pressure on our housing market. Families and working people are feeling the pressure."

— Mayor Martin J. Walsh

Boston's population is expected to increase to 760,000 by 2030, still slightly less than the high of 800,000 in 1950, but up about 230,000 from its low in 1980.

Source: BPDA Research Division

Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning

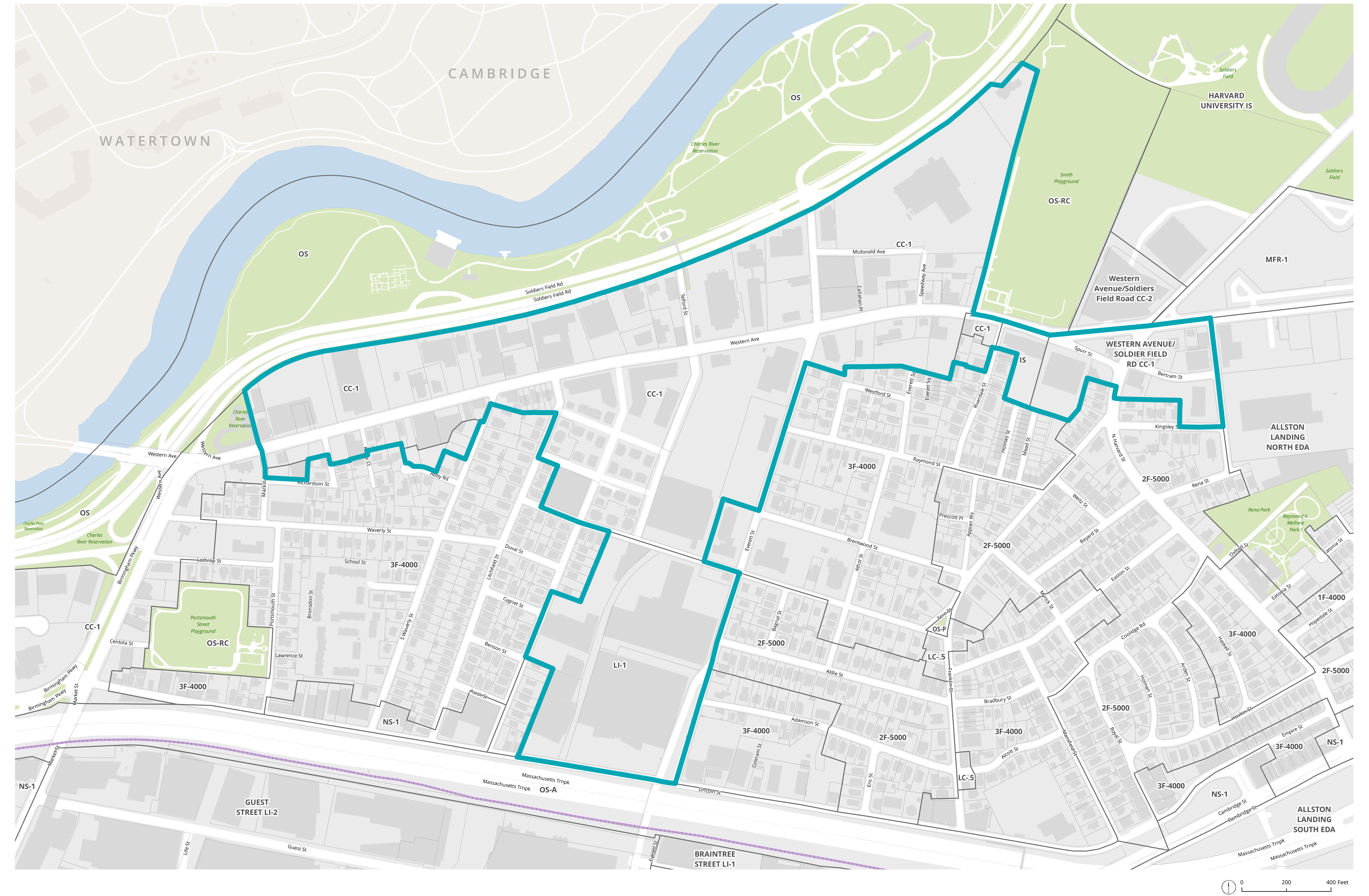
Study Overview

About the Study

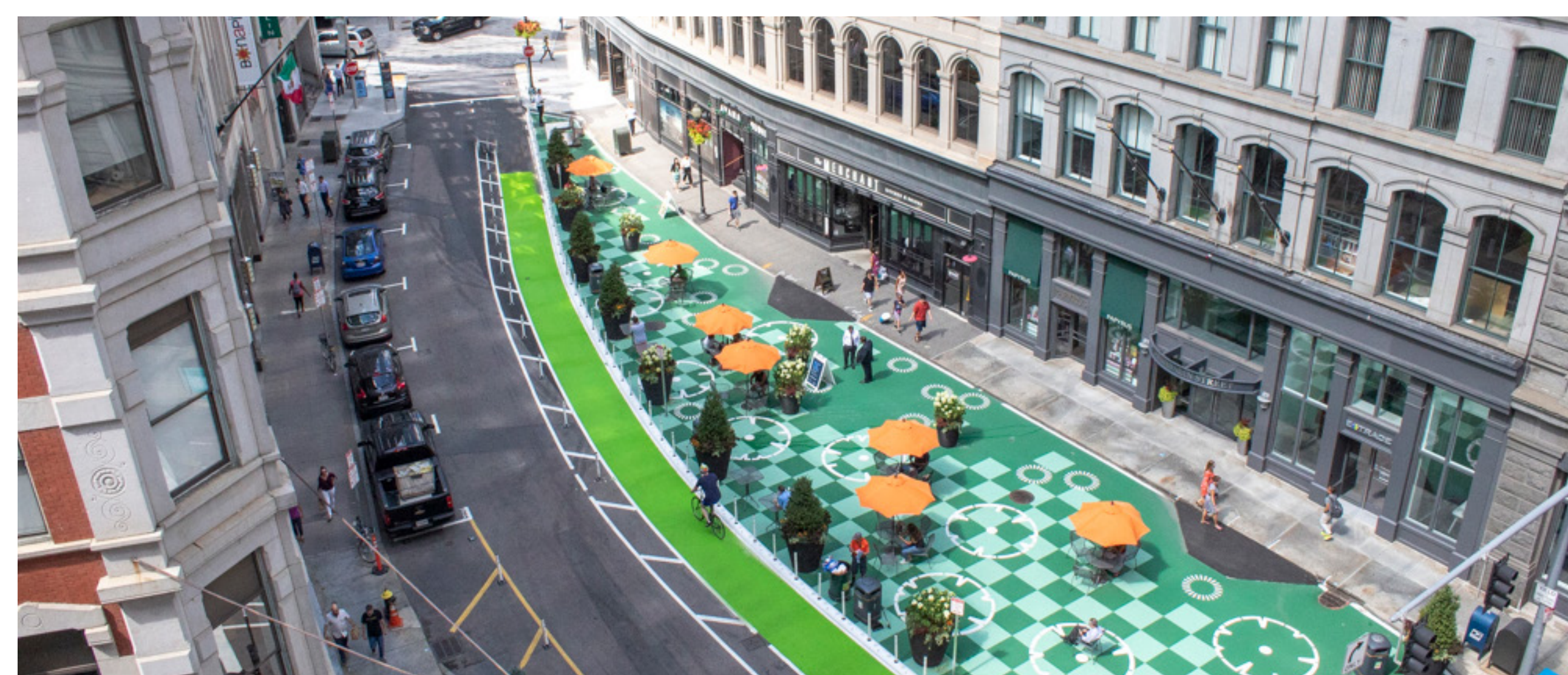
The Western Avenue Corridor Study and Rezoning will have three primary outcomes:

- 1** New or modified zoning to reflect the planning work already completed, as well as new analysis regarding the appropriate density of new development, where additional height might be appropriate, the mix of uses (residential vs. commercial), and how to leverage development to create benefits.
- 2** A vision to transform Western Avenue in both the short and longer terms with key Complete Streets features such as a high-quality pedestrian environment, better bus service, and improved bicycle facilities.
- 3** Coordination with the Allston-Brighton Mobility Study on transportation improvements.

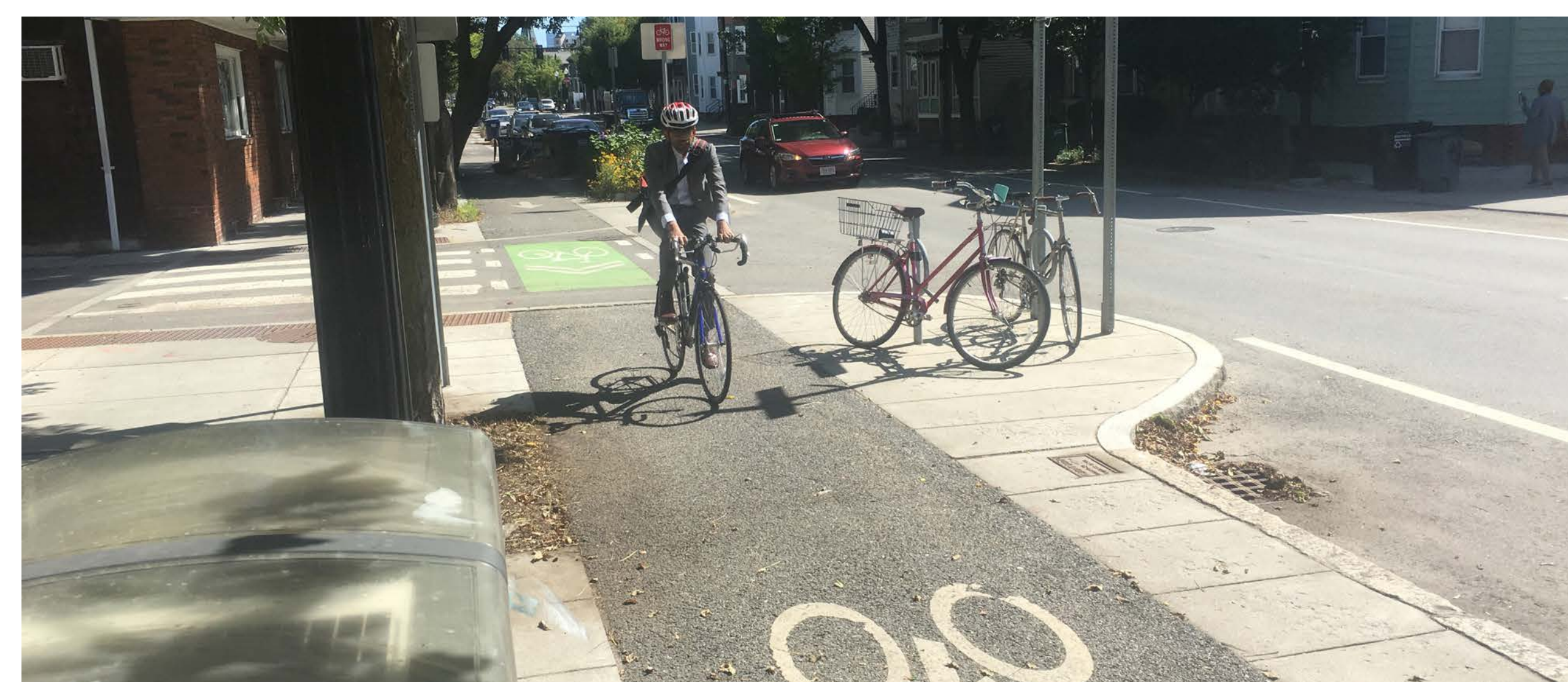
Map of Study Area



The boundaries indicated here correspond approximately to the zoning subdistricts. The inclusion or exclusion of particular properties should not be interpreted as indicating any conclusions about those properties on the part of the BPDA.



The Study will recommend opportunities for tactical and permanent public realm enhancements, such as those shown in this picture of downtown Boston. Image Source: Howard Stein Hudson



The Study will produce a design for short-term and long-term improvements to Western Avenue, including opportunities for better bicycle infrastructure, such as on Western Avenue in Cambridge. Image Source: BPDA



In conjunction with the Allston-Brighton Mobility Study, the Study will recommend strategies for improving bus service. Image Source: BPDA

Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning

Previous Planning Efforts

Much work has been done to produce a vision for the Study Area and a set of community aspirations. The initiatives that form the foundation of this vision are as follows:

North Allston Strategic Framework for Planning (2005)

The North Allston Strategic Framework for Planning (NASFP), completed in 2005, articulated and integrated the aspirations of the North Allston-North Brighton neighborhood, Harvard University, and the City of Boston in the wake of Harvard's acquisition of significant amounts of land in North Allston-North Brighton. The vision set forth in this document forms the foundation of our current work.

Community Wide Plan (2009)

The 2008-9 North Allston-Brighton Community Wide Plan (CWP) picked up where the NASFP had left off, providing land use recommendations for the Brighton Mills area and a number of neighborhood-wide circulation concepts.

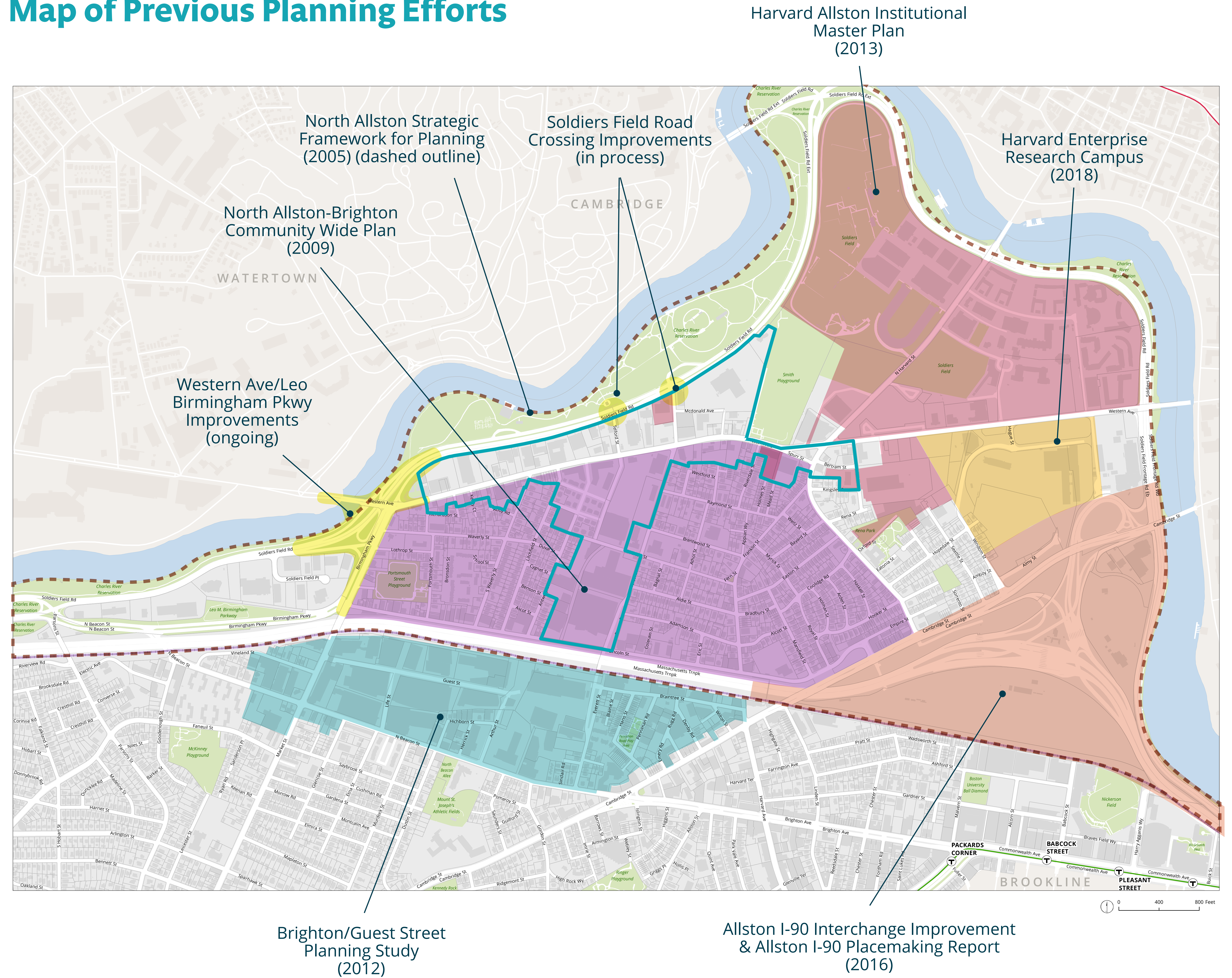
Soldiers Field Road Crossings (present)

Responding to the community's desire for improved access to the river and Herter Park, we are working with DCR to plan better crossings to the riverfront parks. This includes an improved crossing at Telford Street and a new at-grade crossing at Everett Street. An additional crossing at Smith Field has also been studied and may be feasible in the near future.

Western Ave/Soldiers Field Road/Birmingham Parkway Intersection Improvement Ideas (present)

This initiative proposed short-term improvements and long-term concepts for the section of Leo Birmingham parkway that intersects with Western Avenue, at the western end of the Study Area.

Map of Previous Planning Efforts



Other relevant projects or plans:

- Harvard Institutional Master Plan (2013)
- Harvard Enterprise Research Campus (ongoing)
- Allston Brighton Mobility Study (ongoing)
- Housing a Changing City (2014)
- Brighton Guest Street Area Planning Study (2012)
- Imagine Boston 2030
- Allston Multimodal Project (I-90 Interchange)

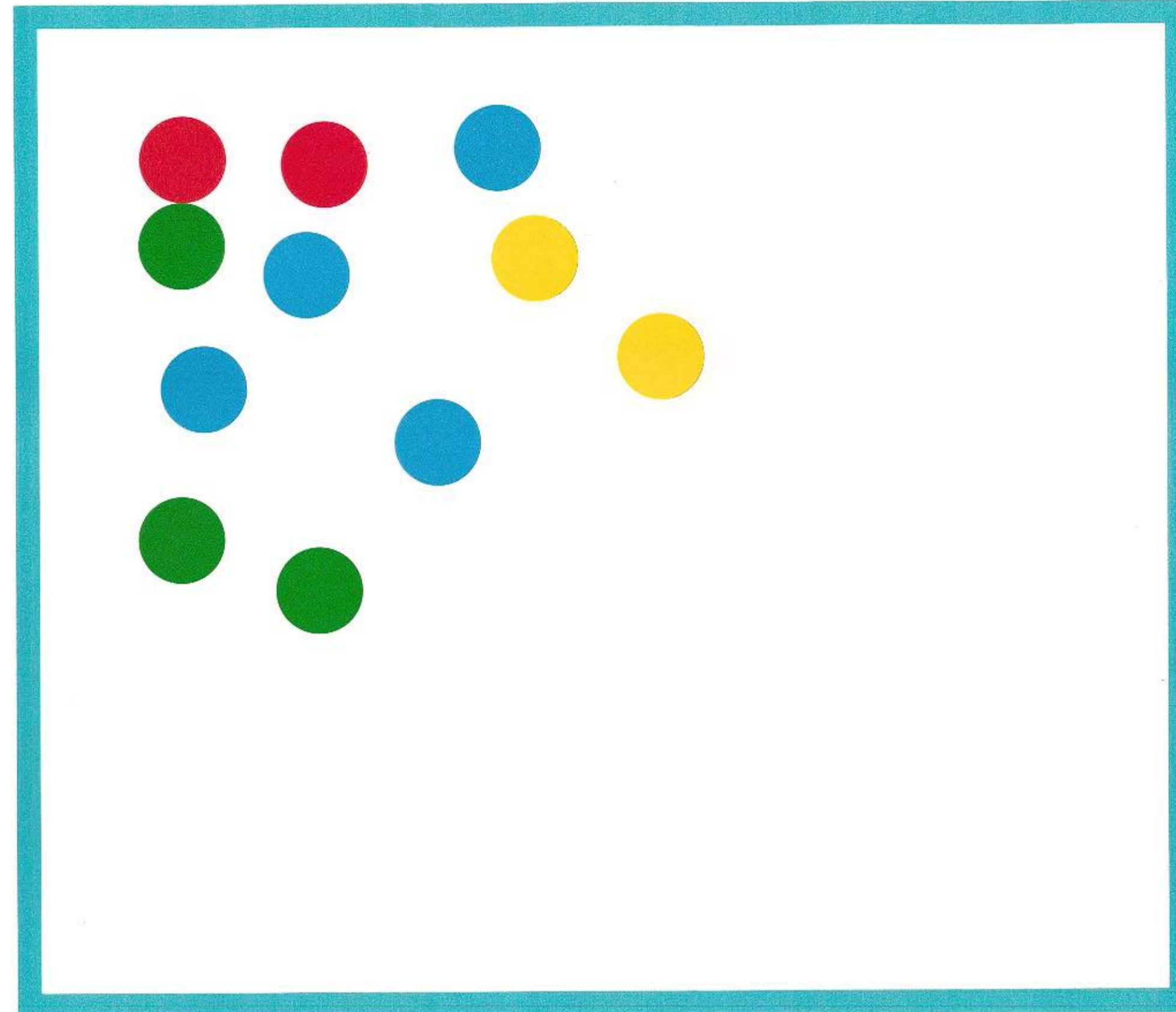
Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning

Vision: Growth

Drawn from the North-Allston Strategic Framework Plan

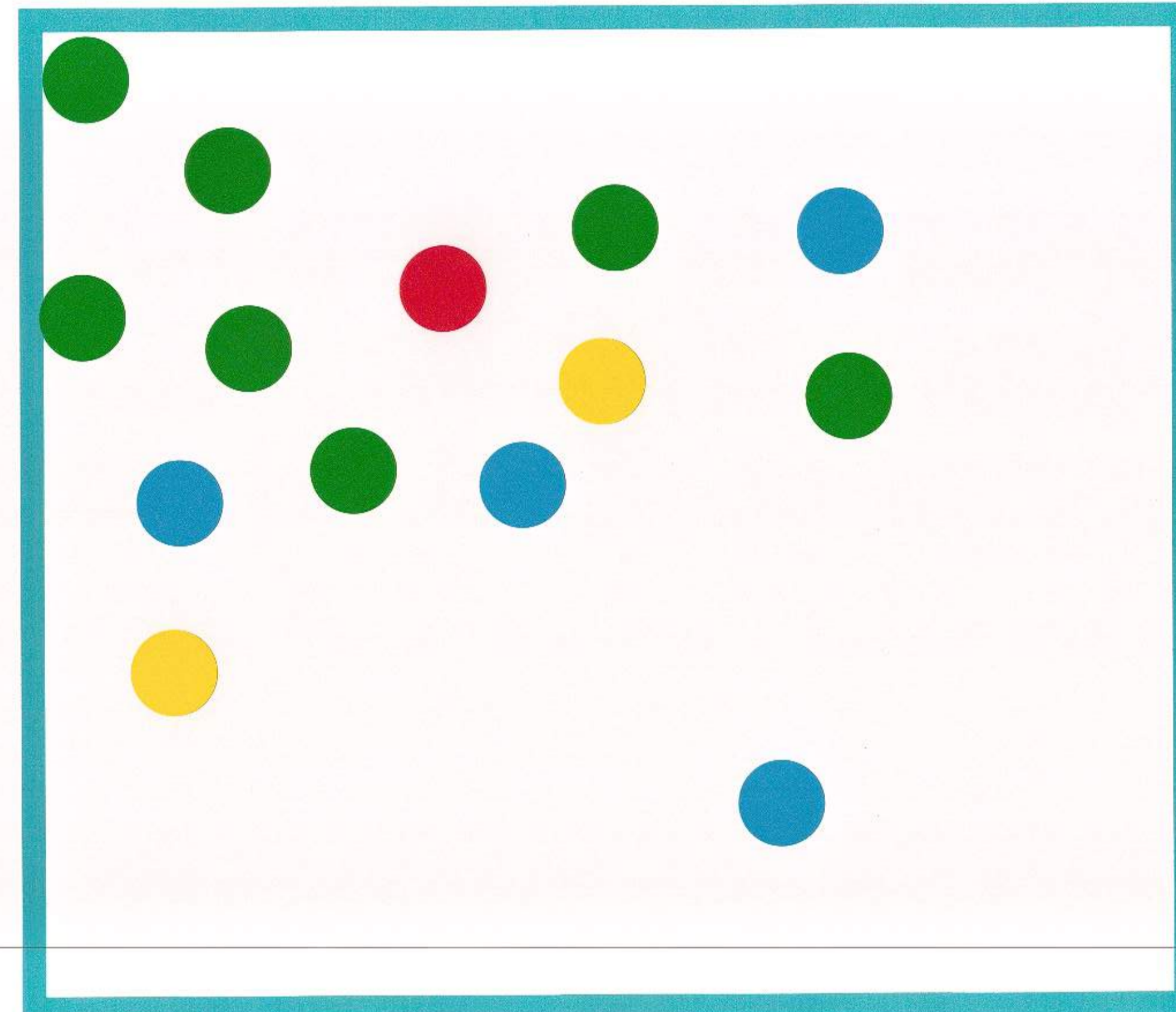
Guide growth to areas in which change is viewed as desirable and in ways that support new community amenities, such as a walkable Main Street.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



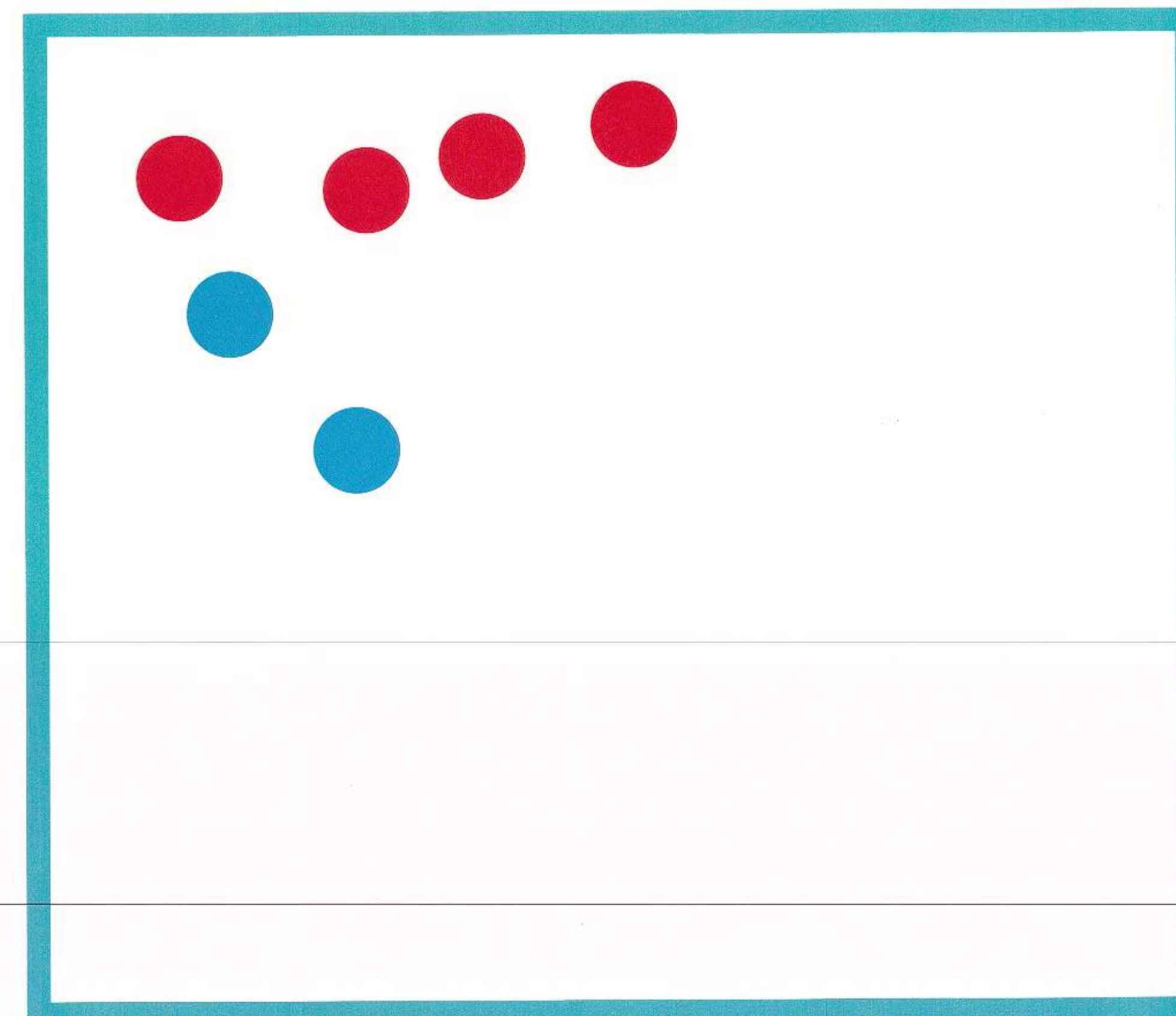
Match increases in height and density with new public spaces, affordability, appropriate transitions to existing neighborhoods, good design, and enhanced connections to the river.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



In the Brighton Mills/Holton Street corridor, provide an appropriate, economically viable mix of uses for the area that will support: a range of housing choices, strengthened retail, including a neighborhood supermarket and neighborhood retail along Western Avenue, and expanded opportunities for new and existing neighborhood businesses and jobs.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



Previous Plans

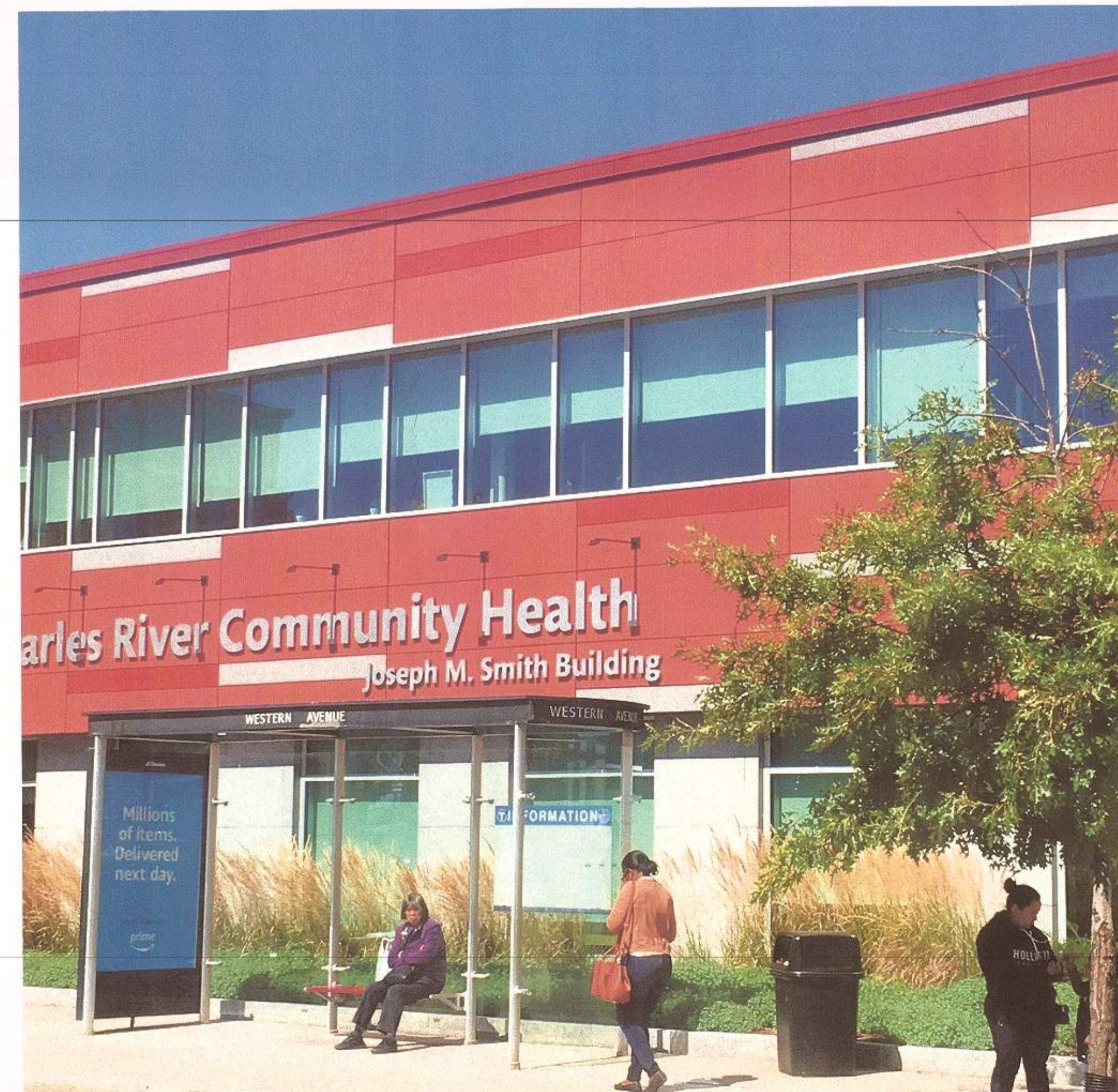
Proposed Housing Distribution
PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DENSITY by CITY BLOCKS



Community Wide Plan (2009)

The Community Wide Plan proposed a mix of medium-density residential development and open space in the Brighton Mills/Holton Street corridor. **The densities shown could yield between 600 and 1000 units of housing in addition to Charlesview, as well as up to four acres of open space.** For purposes of comparison, Charlesview's overall density is approximately 38 DU/acre. It has not been analyzed if the proposed density would support this level of amenities.

Current Snapshot



Since the publication of the NASFP, the Study Area has added roughly 600 net new units of housing, approximately 60,000 square feet of retail space, and



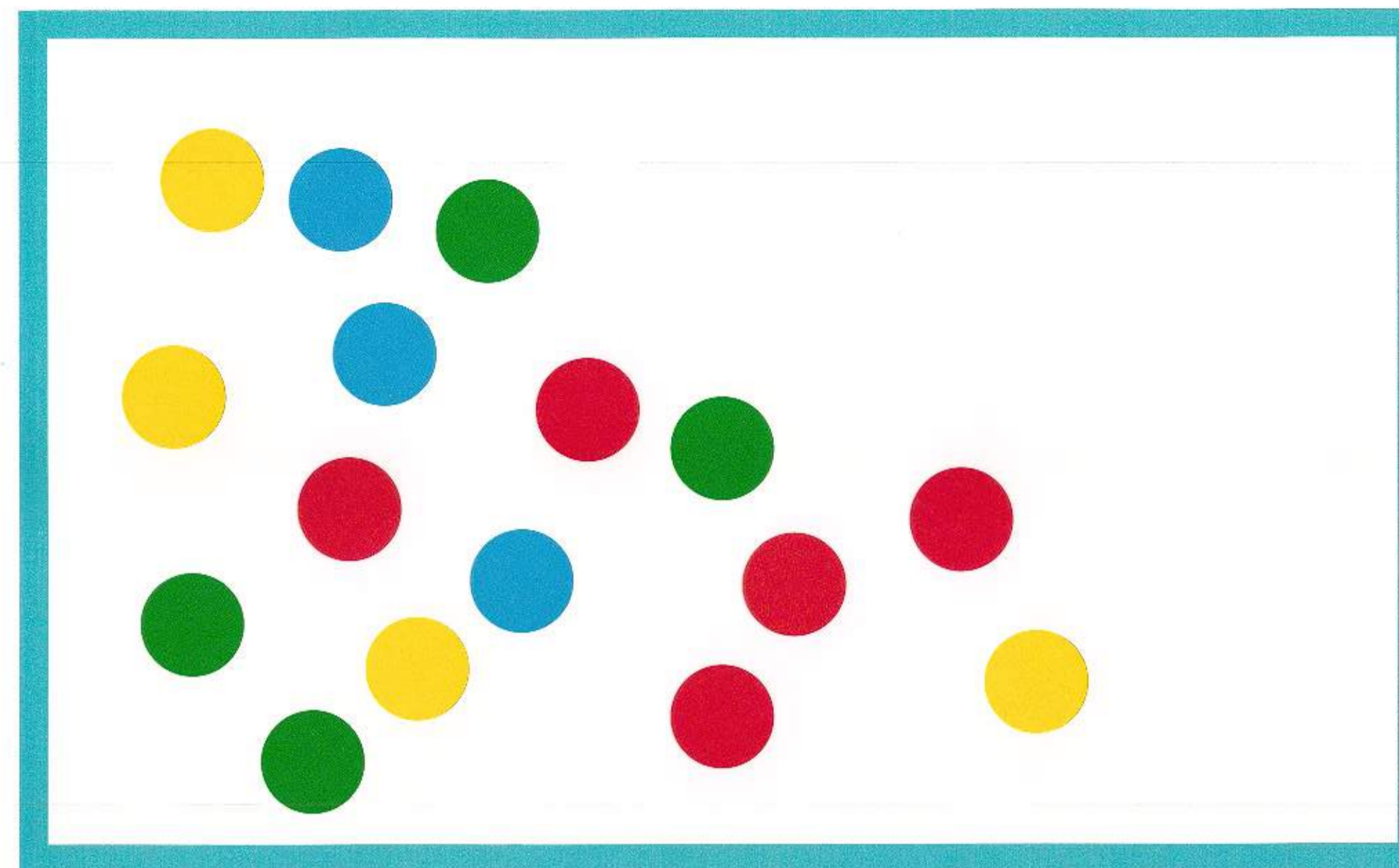
the new Charles River Community Health building. These have brought Trader Joe's, restaurants, and a preschool to the neighborhood. Image Source: BPDA

Vision: Public Realm

Drawn from the North-Allston Strategic Framework Plan

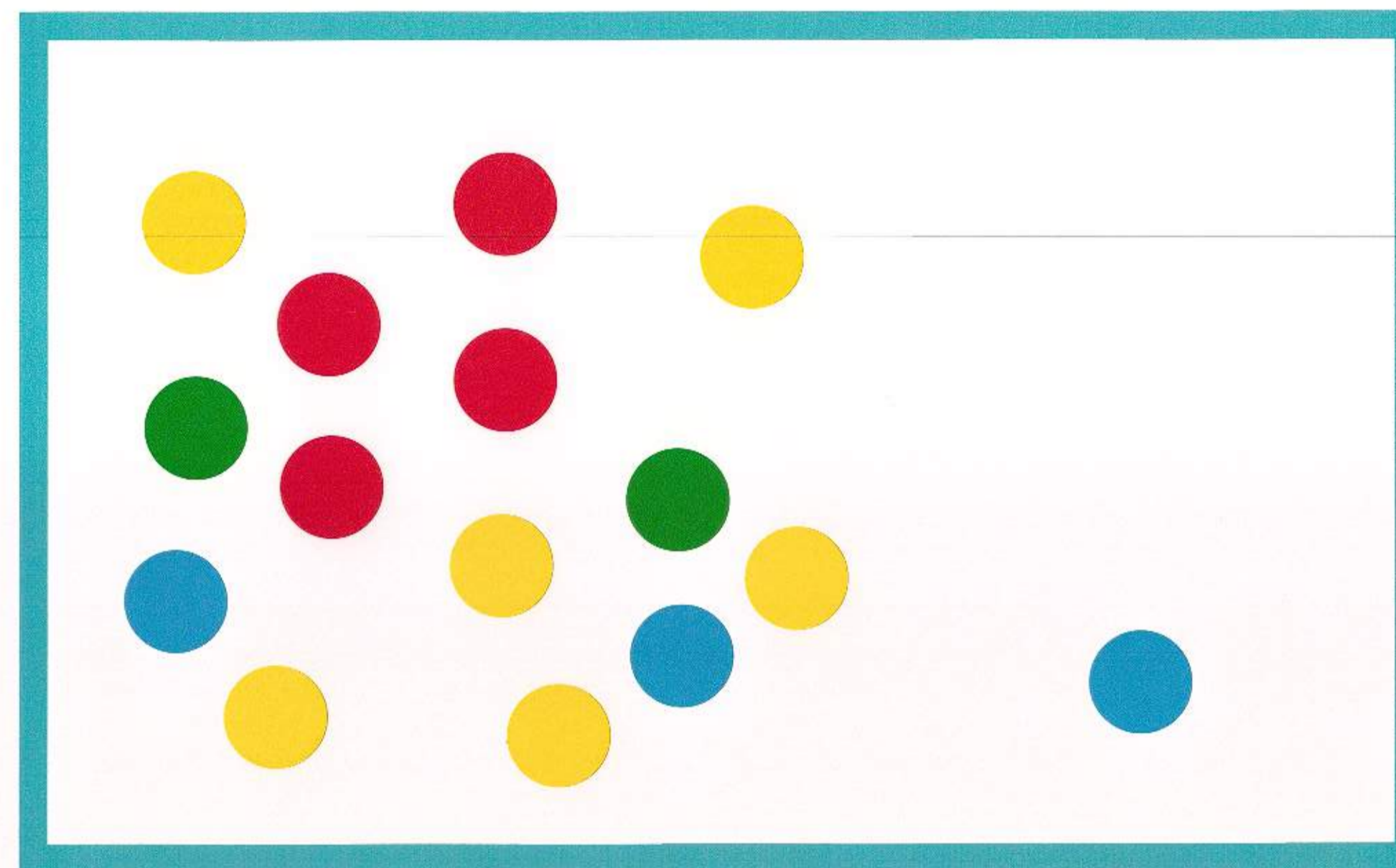
Create a walkable commercial and mixed-use “Main Street” along Western Avenue from North Harvard Street toward Brighton Mills and a vibrant commercial center at Barry’s Corner.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



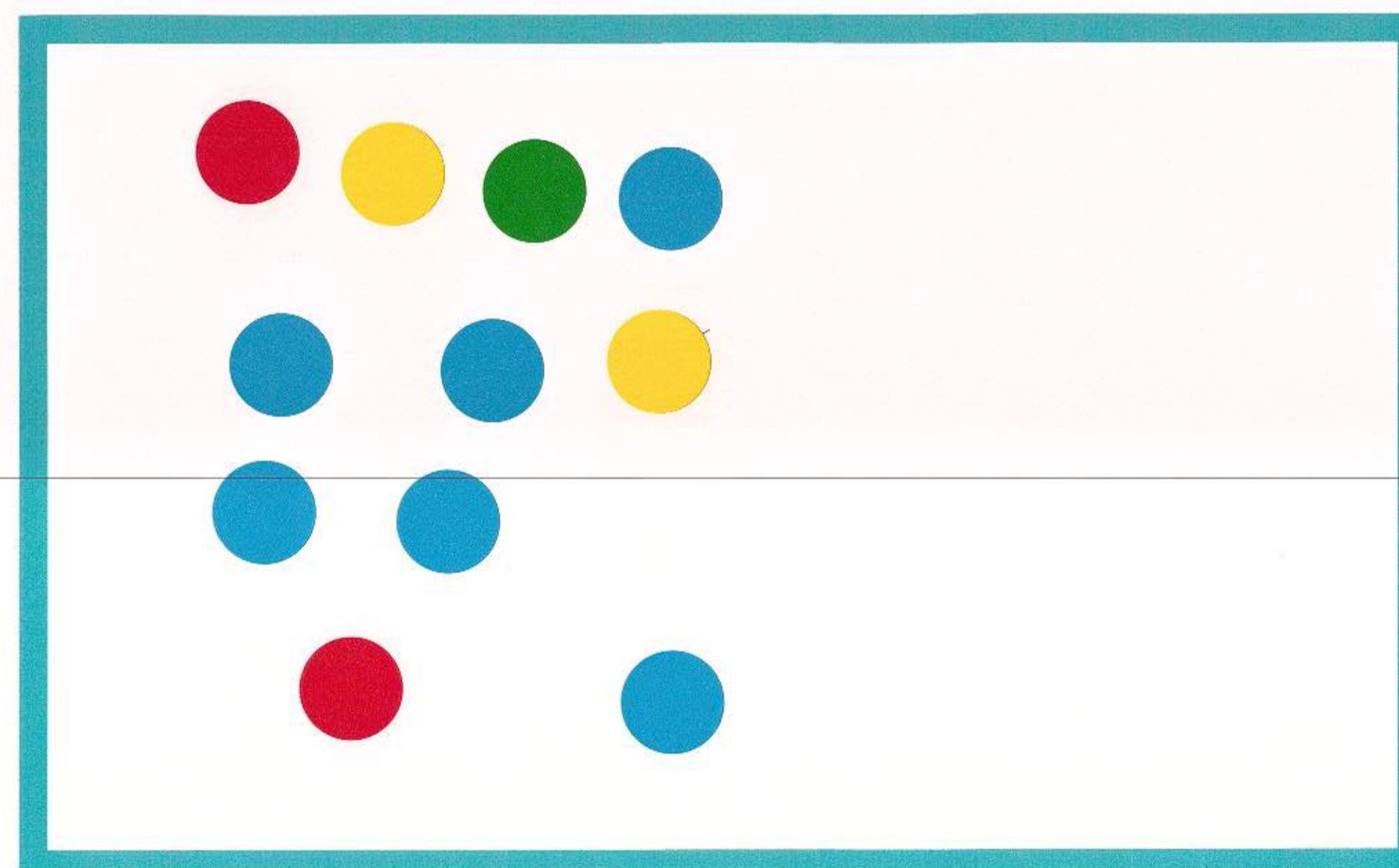
Enhance Western Avenue and North Harvard Street as pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environments.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



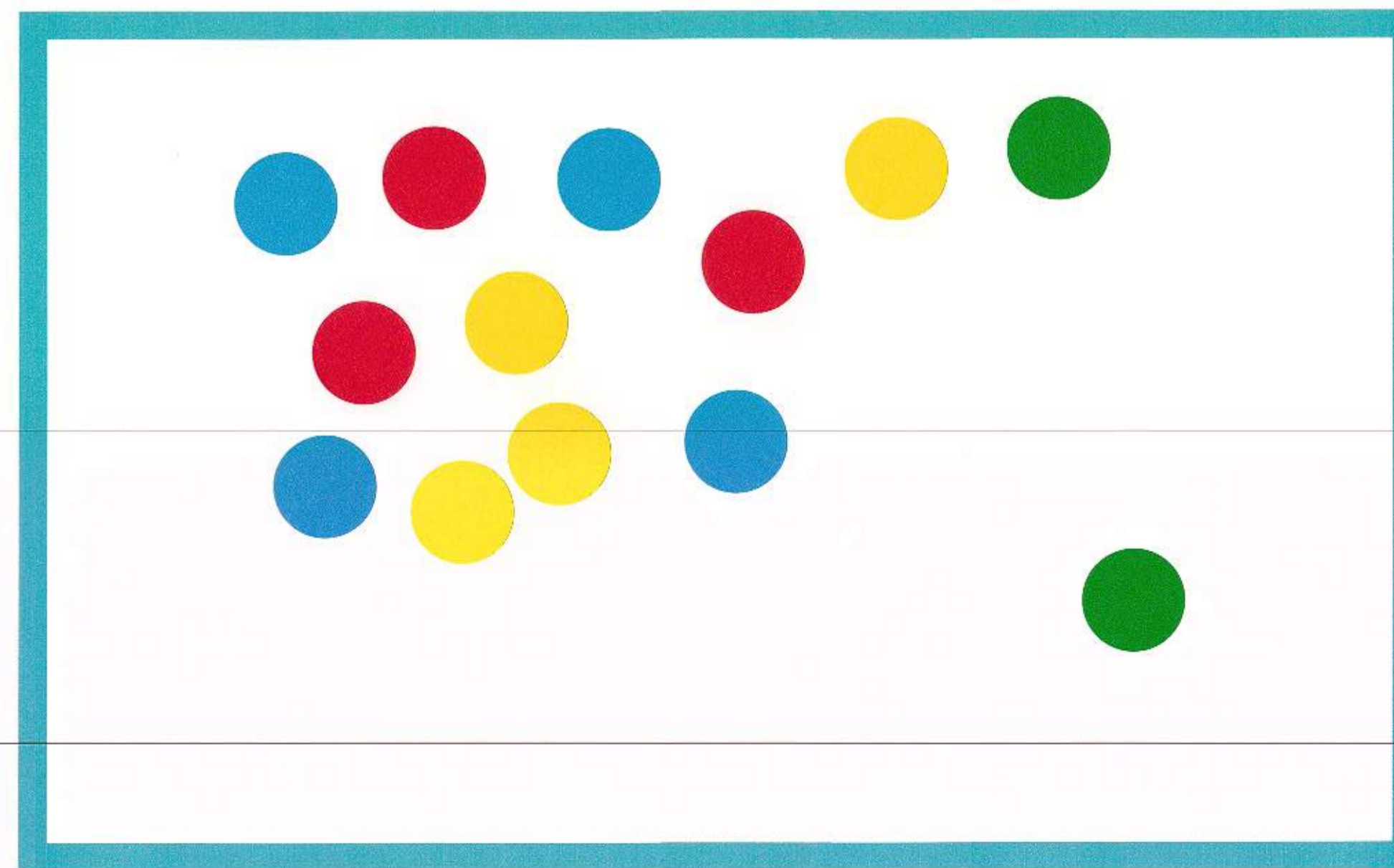
Enhance access – both visual and physical – to the Charles River from the traditional neighborhoods and other parts of the community.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



Preserve, enhance, and increase open spaces and public realm opportunities for an expanding population.

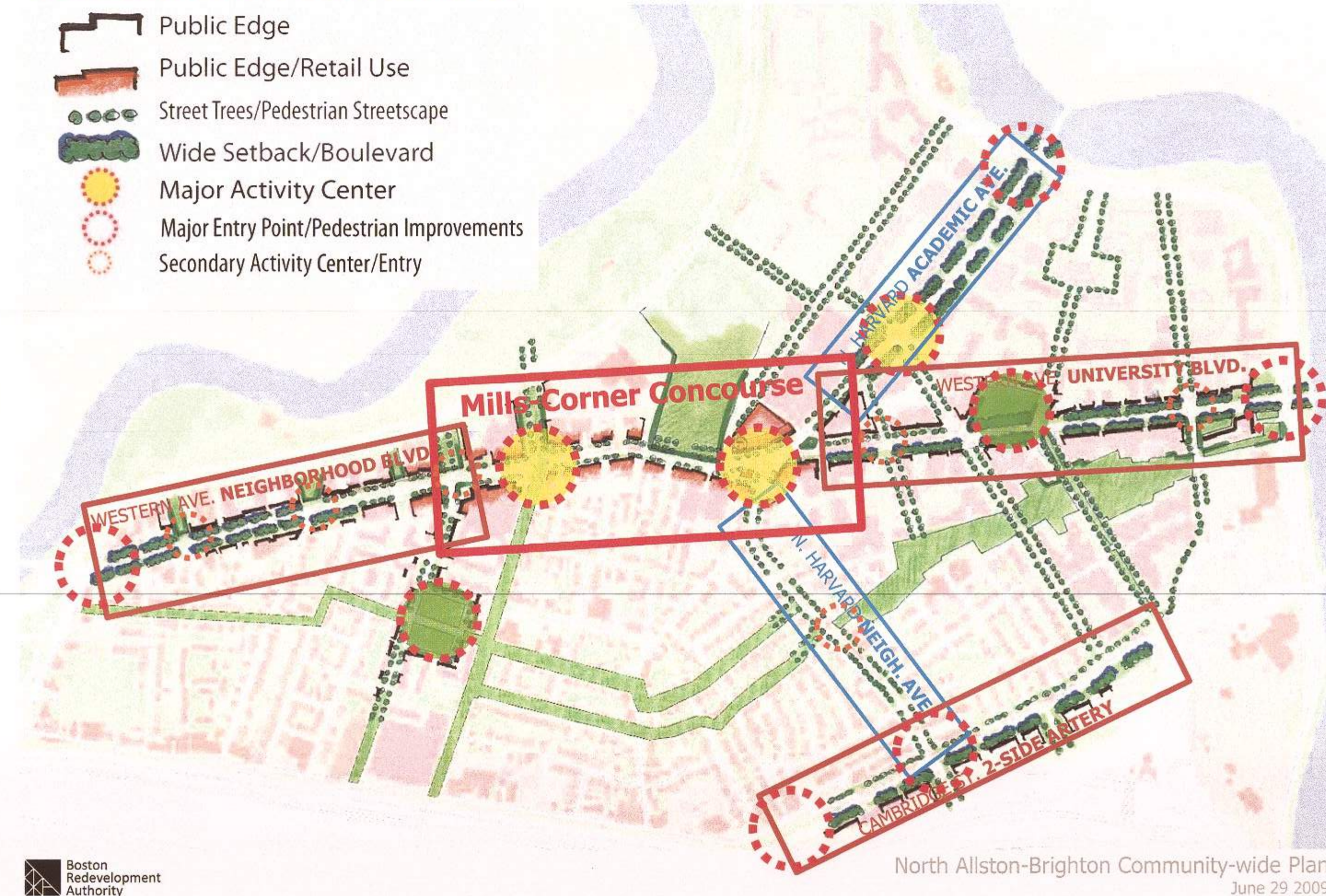
Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



Previous Plans

Recap of Framework Plan DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

- Public Edge
- Public Edge/Retail Use
- Street Trees/Pedestrian Streetscape
- Wide Setback/Boulevard
- Major Activity Center
- Major Entry Point/Pedestrian Improvements
- Secondary Activity Center/Entry



Community-Wide Plan (2009)

The Community Wide Plan proposed to provide an appropriate, economically viable mix of uses in the Brighton Mills/Holton Street corridor that would support:

- A range of housing choices
- Strengthened retail, including a neighborhood supermarket and neighborhood retail along Western Avenue
- Expanded opportunities for new and existing neighborhood businesses and jobs.

Current Snapshot

- The neighborhood’s open space has both expanded and improved.
- The city is completing a \$6.5 investment in Smith Field, with a second phase of renovations to follow.
- Herter Park is undergoing its own renaissance with the revitalization of the amphitheater, improvements to Artesani Playground, and new programming.
- Ray Mellone Park is a new public park behind the Honan-Allston Library
- Harvard has begun construction of its Greenway from North Harvard Street to the Charles River.
- Continuum has started the process of creating a “vibrant commercial center” at Barry’s Corner
- Charlesview has put in place one piece of the envisioned “walkable and commercial mixed-use ‘Main Street.’”

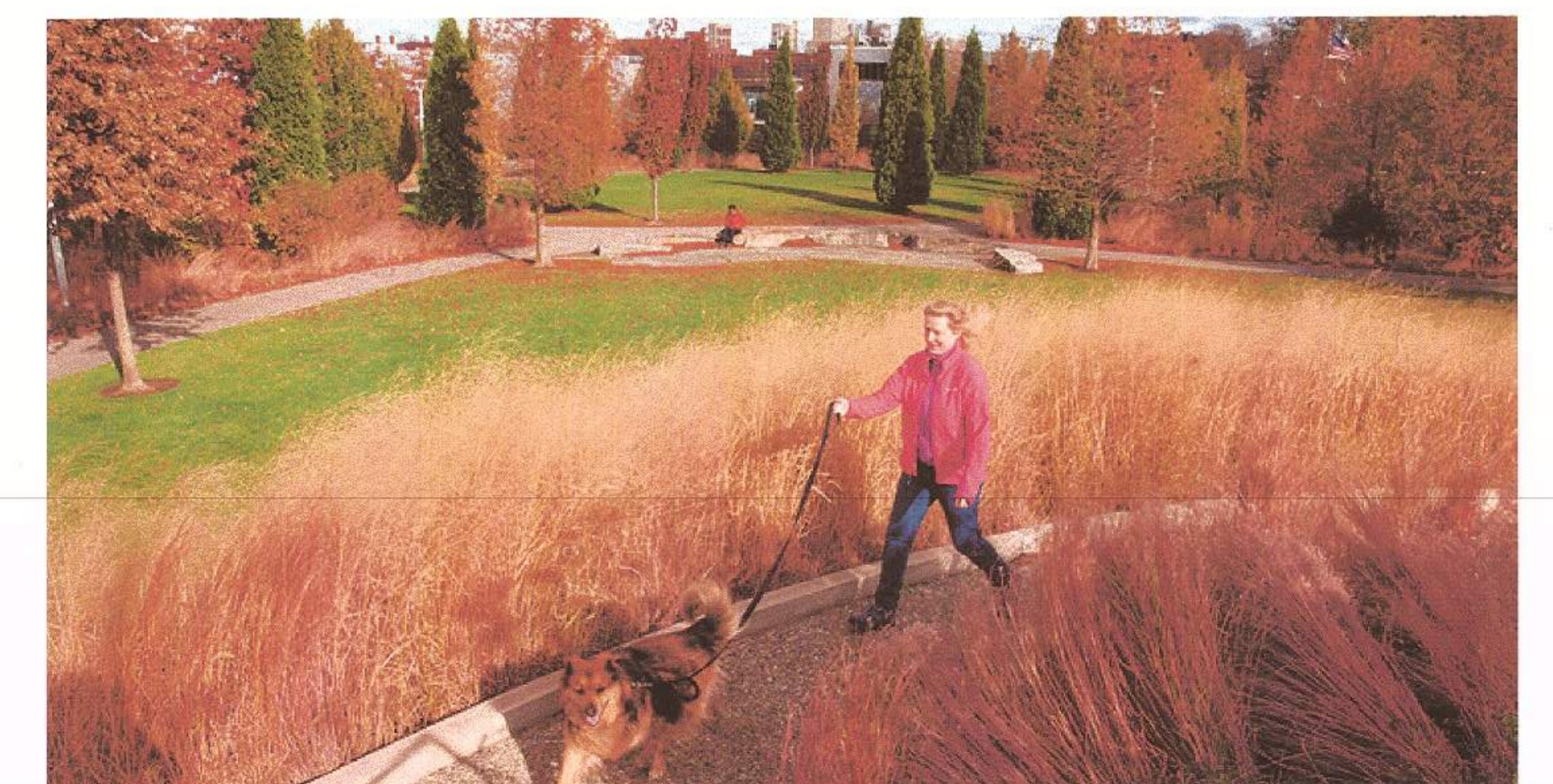


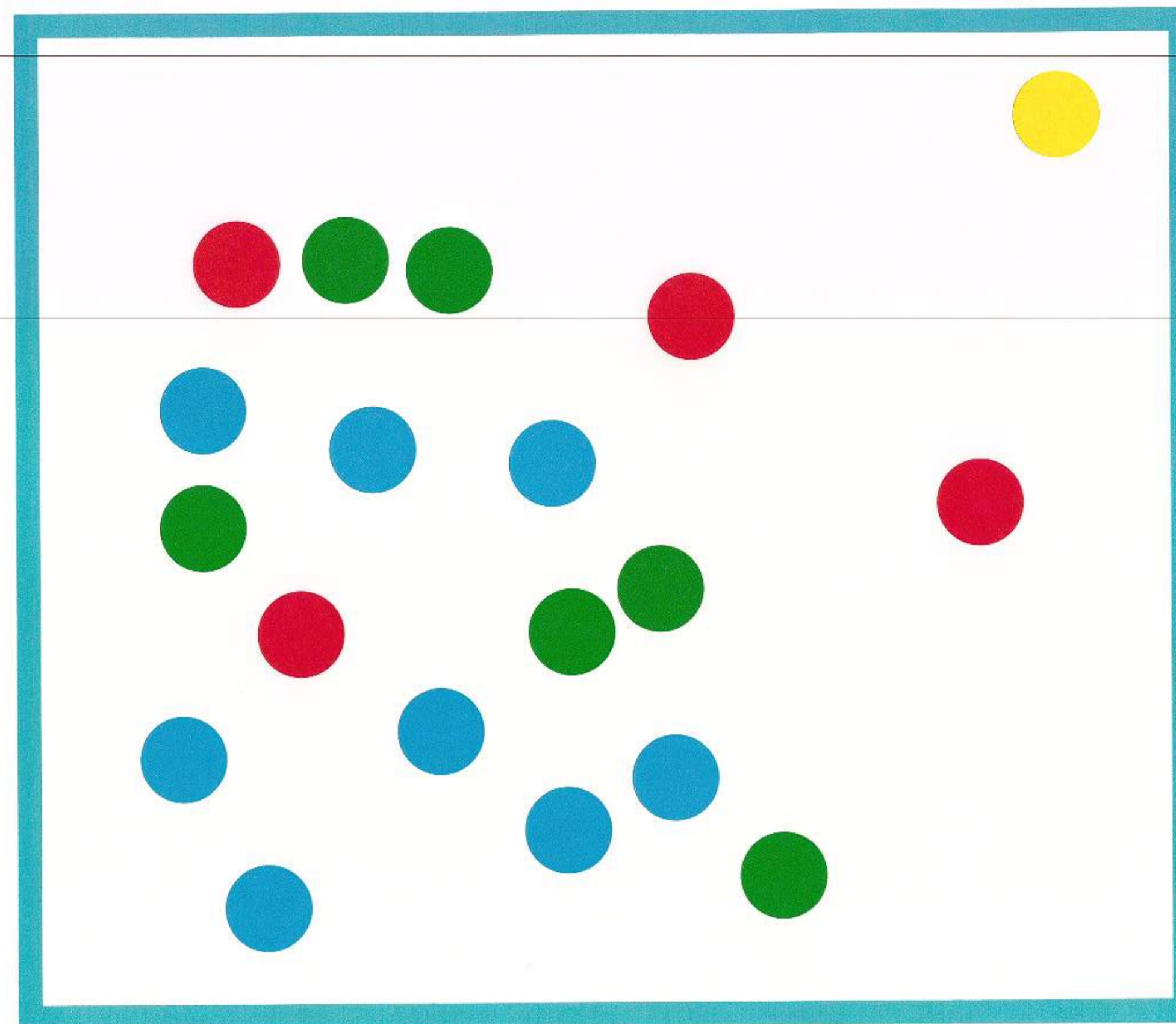
Image source: BPDA, Michael Van Valkenburgh Architects

Vision: Housing

Drawn from the North-Allston Strategic Framework Plan

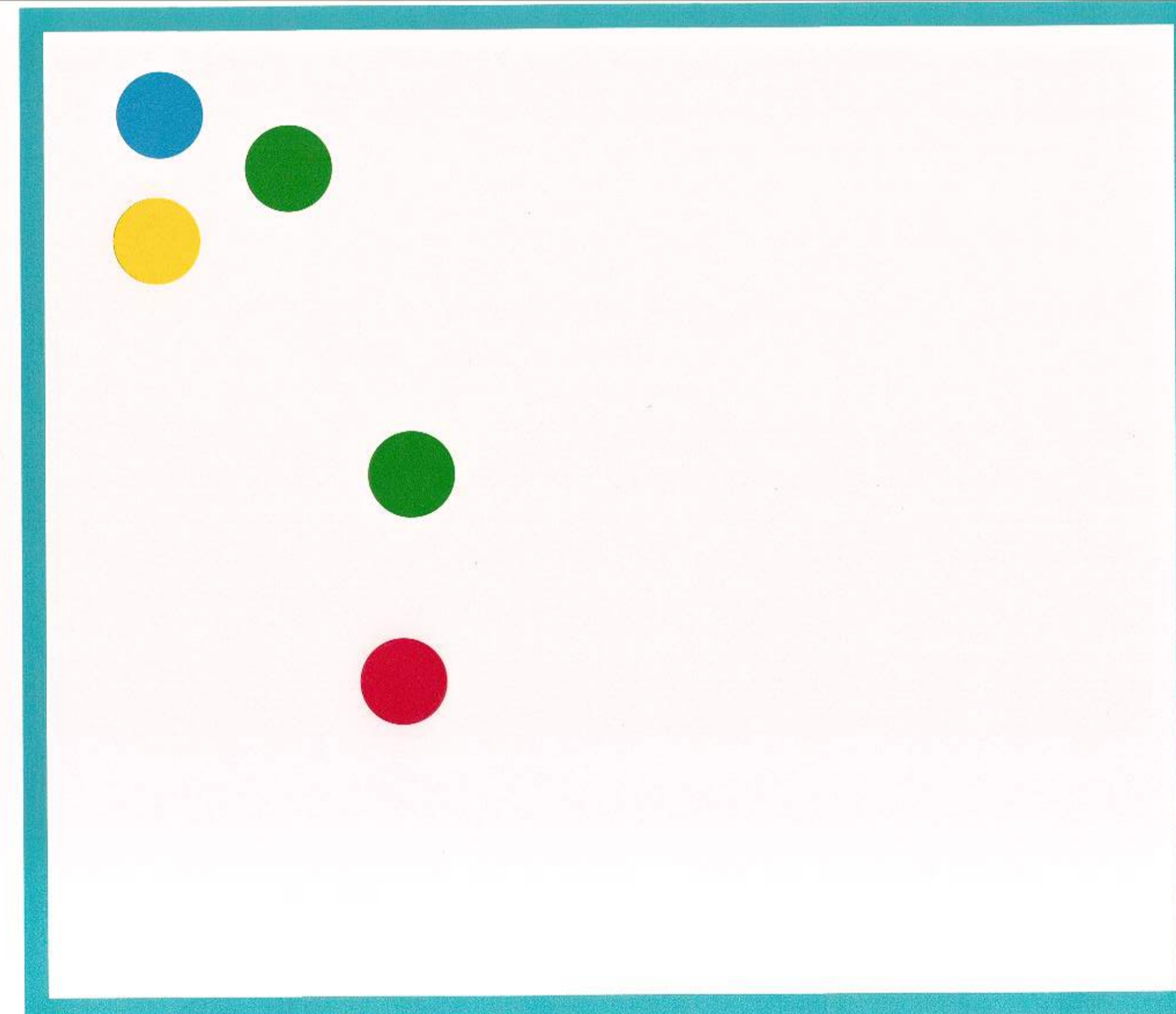
Provide significant new housing affordable to a wide range of incomes and family types. Expand the affordable options for potential homebuyers and renters.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



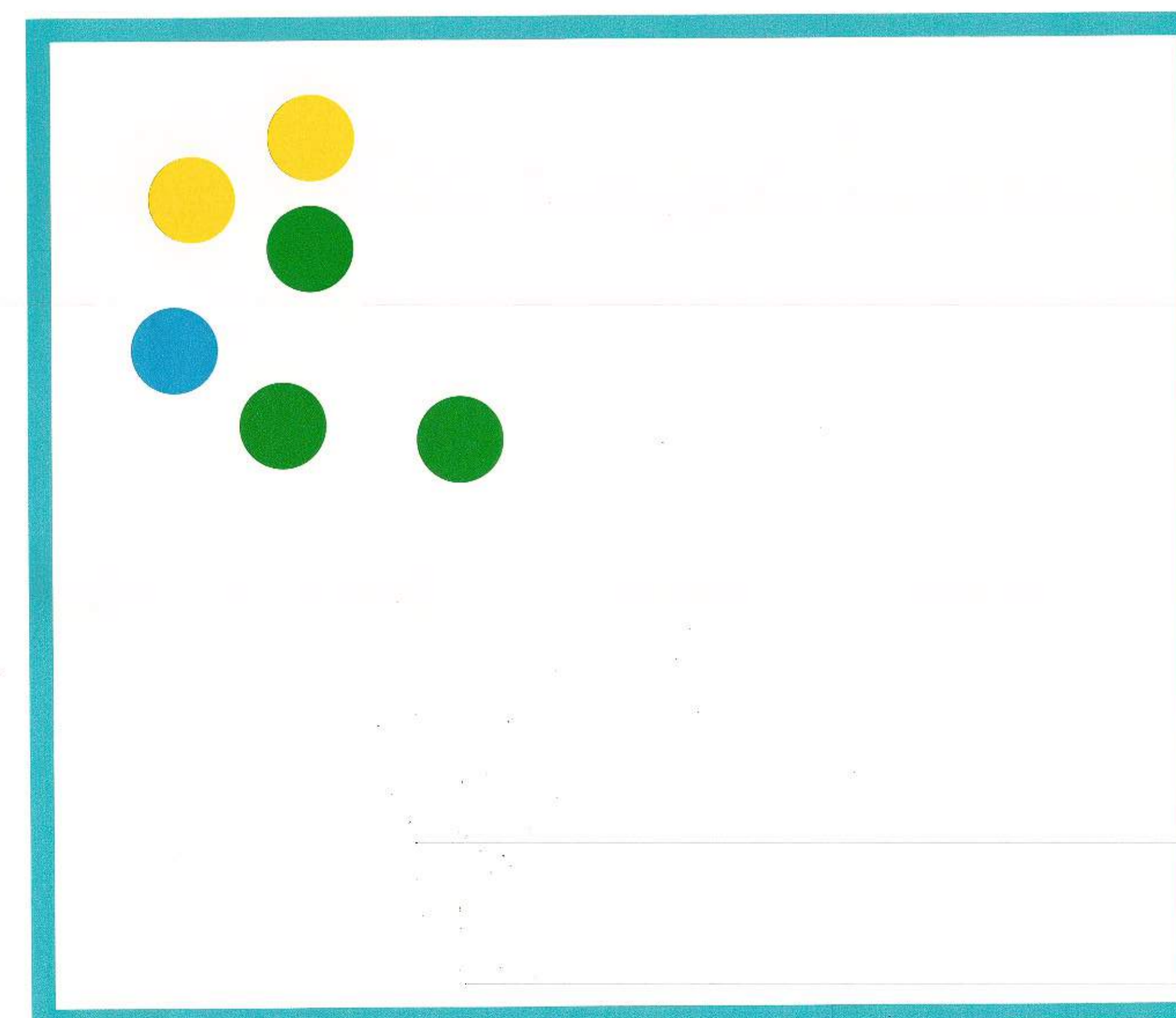
Create over 20 years (i.e. from 2005-2025) a goal of 2,400 to 2,800 new housing units in North Allston.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



Concentrate new housing in the "Focus Area for New Housing," which corresponds closely to the Study Area.

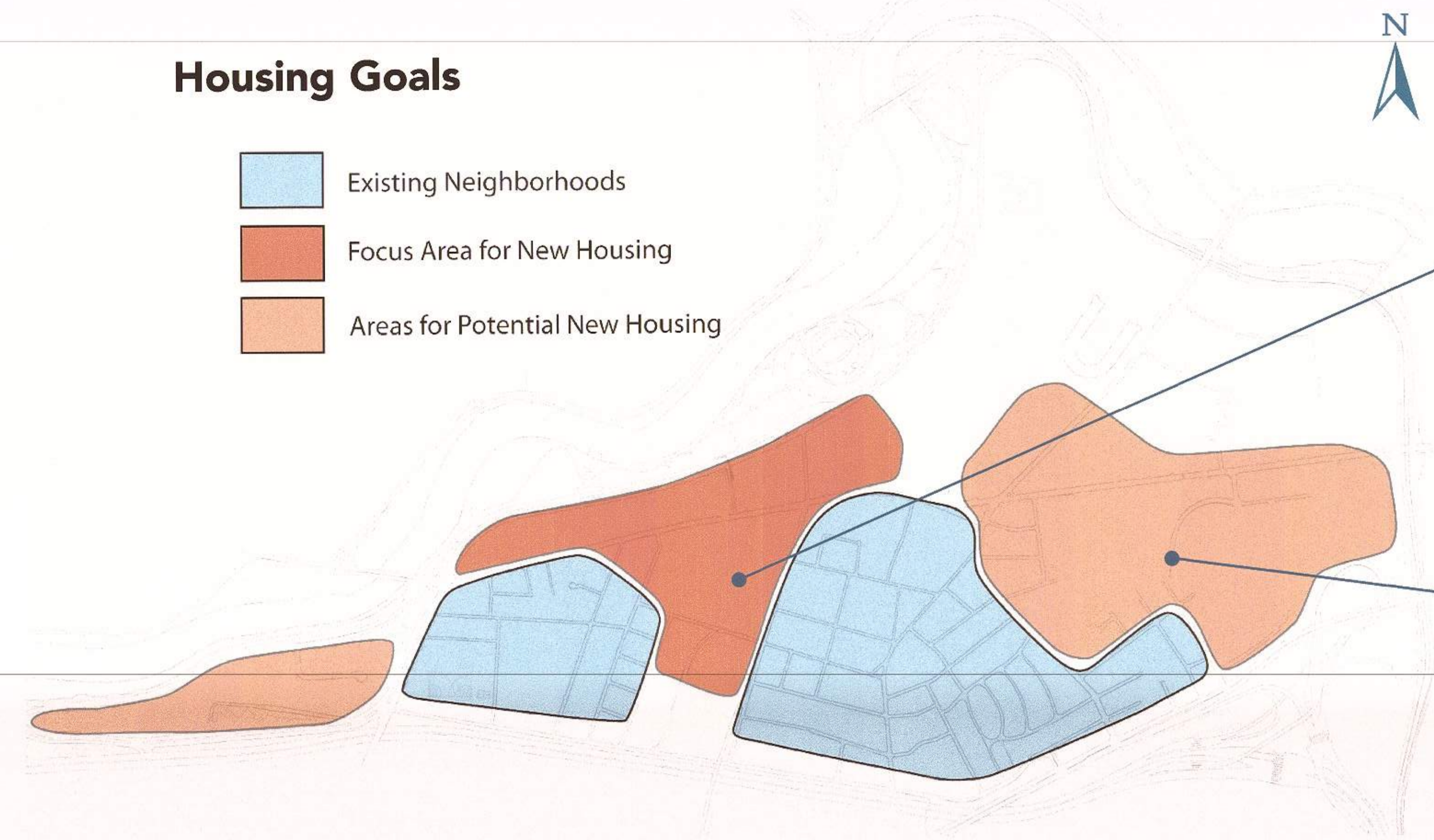
Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



Previous Plans

Housing Goals

- Existing Neighborhoods
- Focus Area for New Housing
- Areas for Potential New Housing



North Allston Strategic Framework for Planning (2005)

The NASFP envisioned that a geography corresponding roughly to the Study Area would be where most new housing would be built.

Harvard is contemplating approximately 1,000 units in the medium to long term in the Enterprise Research Campus.

Current Snapshot

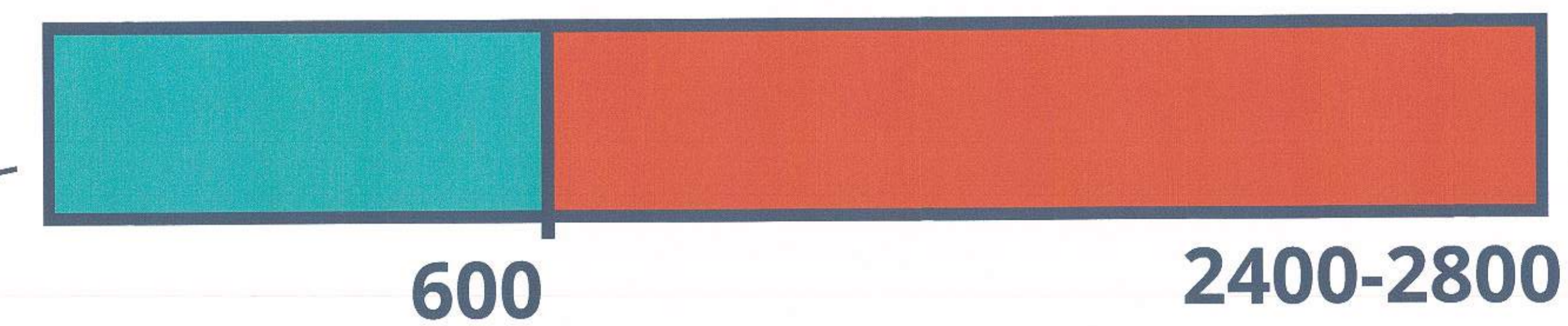
From the North Allston Strategic Framework Plan:

2400 - 2800 housing units

to be built in the neighborhood from 2005-2025

Built

Goal



as of 2019:
fewer than 600 units of housing

have been built in the neighborhood

2000 additional units of housing

would have to be built between now and 2025 to meet the NASFP goal

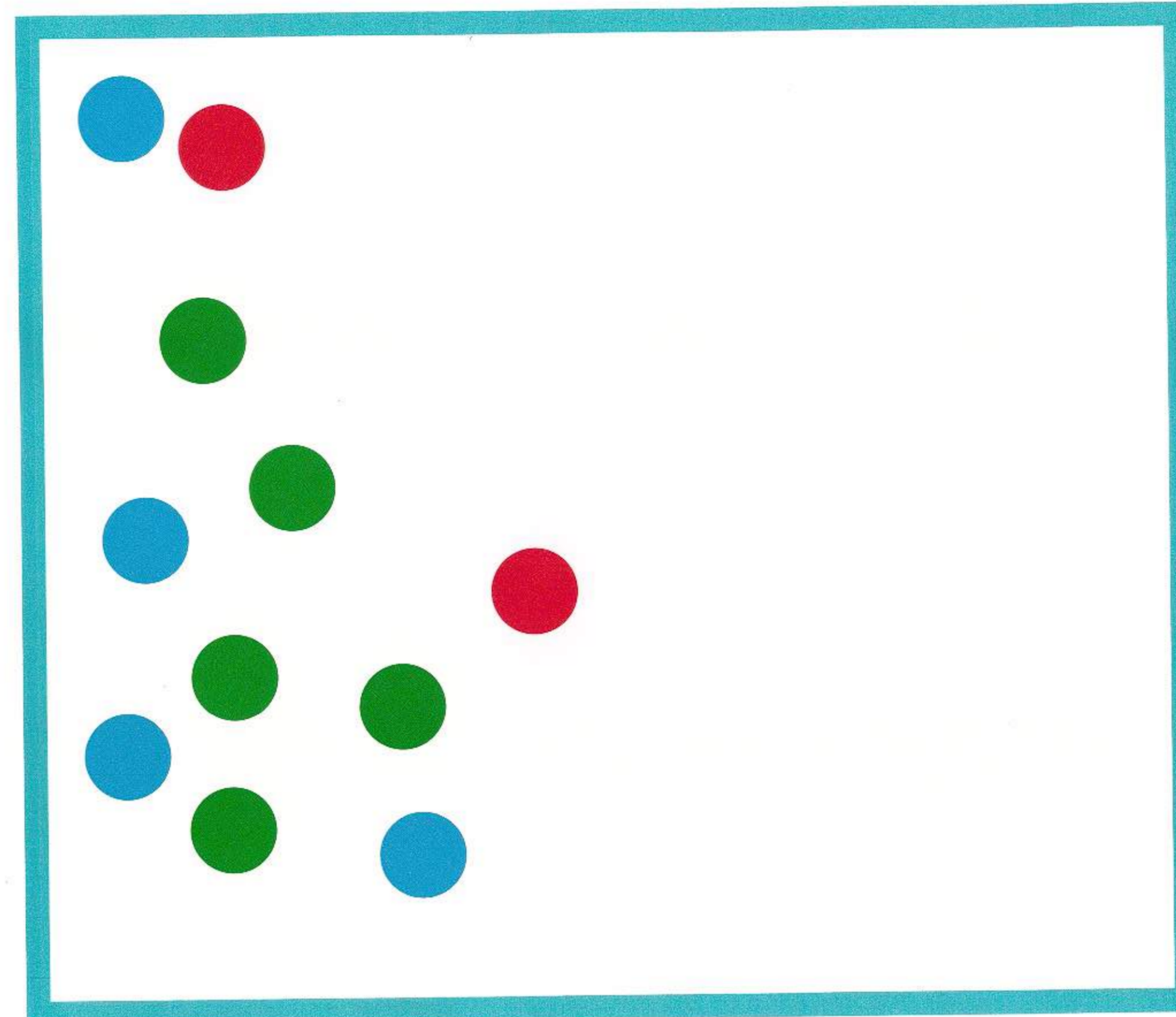
Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning

Vision: Economic Development

Drawn from the North-Allston Strategic Framework Plan.

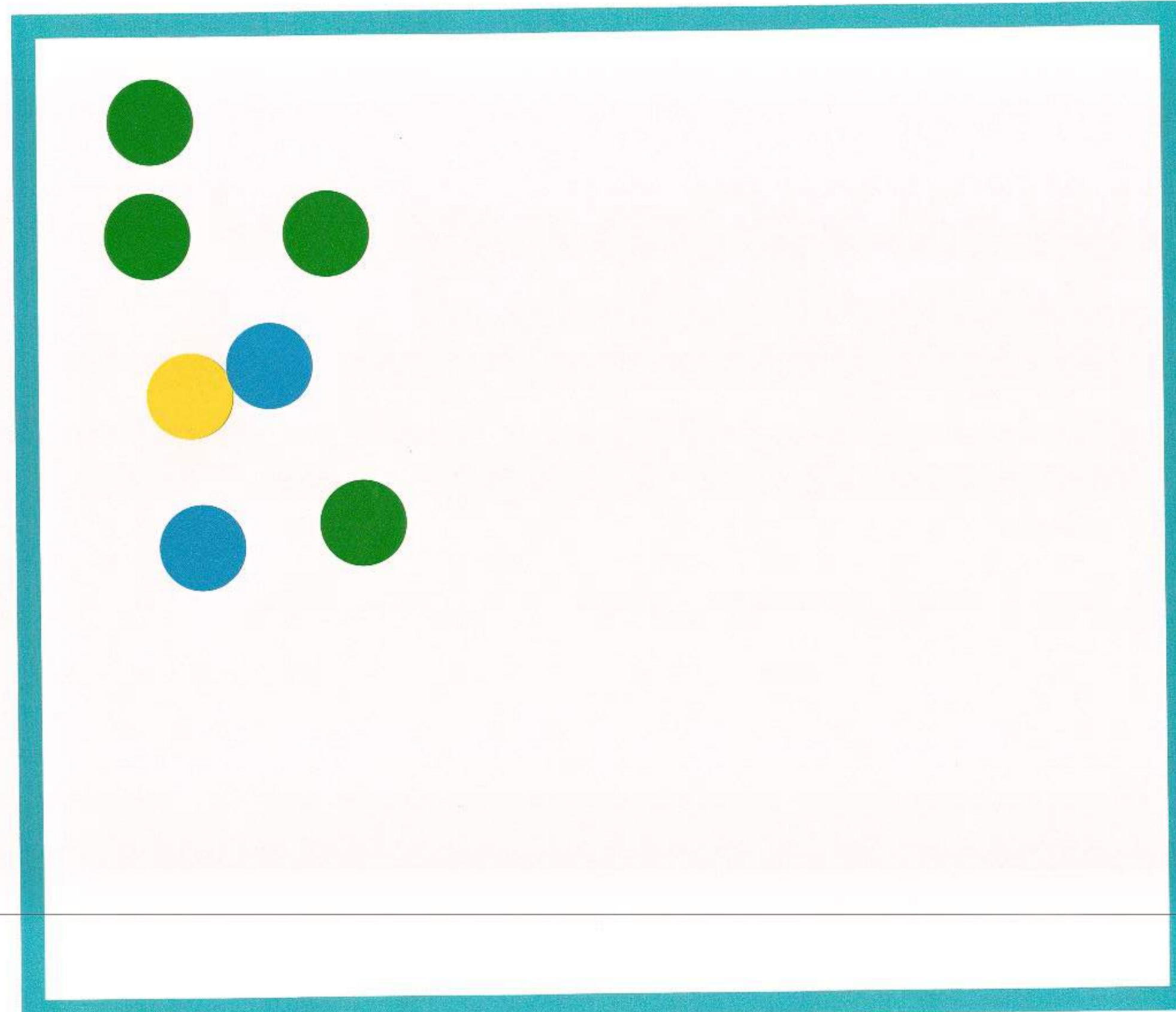
Leverage the economic development opportunities afforded by Harvard's presence in North Allston to create new well-paying jobs.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



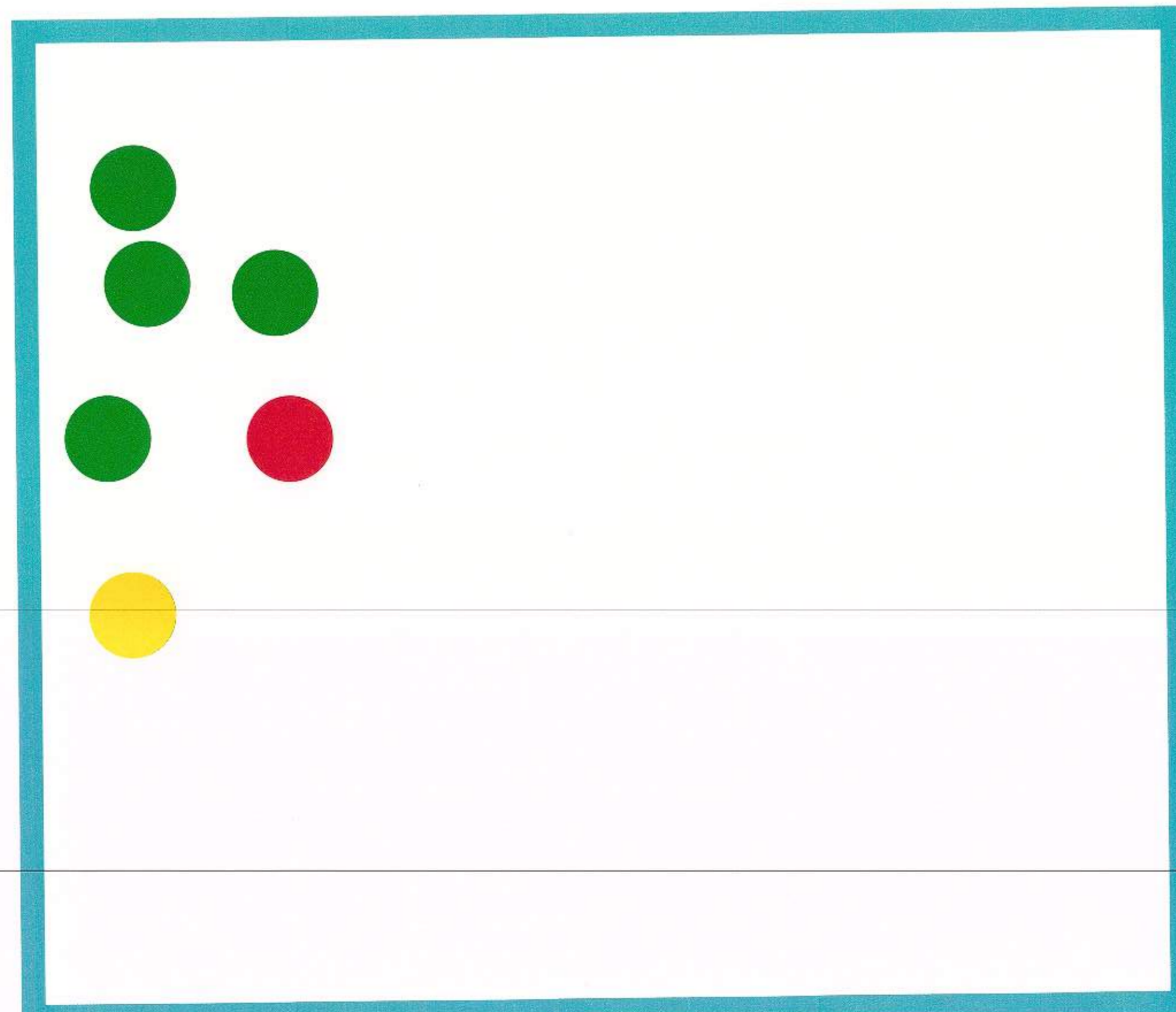
Build on North Allston's infrastructure and economic strengths to expand and deepen its contribution to the city's and the region's economy.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!

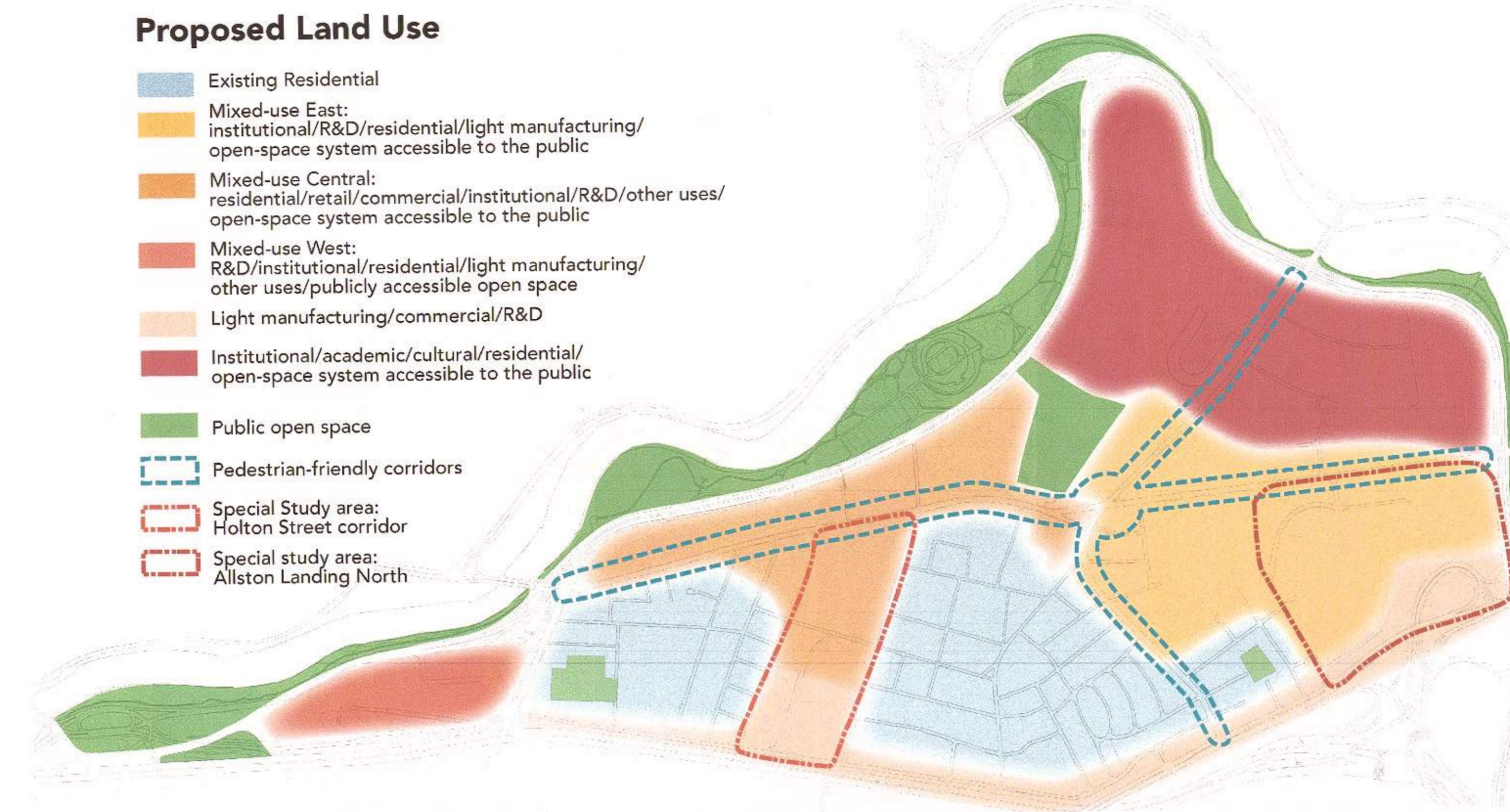


Protect, support, and expand North Allston's role as a primary locus and generator of jobs across an array of present and future industries and technologies.

Paste a sticker to indicate your support!



Previous Plans



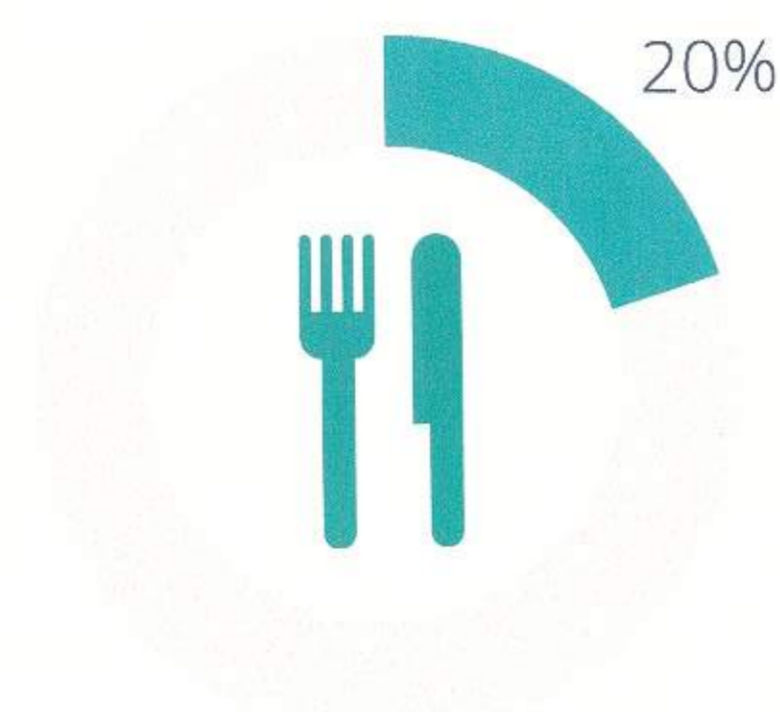
North Allston Strategic Framework for Planning (2005)

The NASFP envisioned the Study Area as a mixed-use district with residential, retail, commercial, R&D, and other uses, as well as publicly accessible open space. The development community has shown interest in all these building types. Harvard's development of a life sciences and innovation campus has generated momentum for other R&D and life sciences uses.

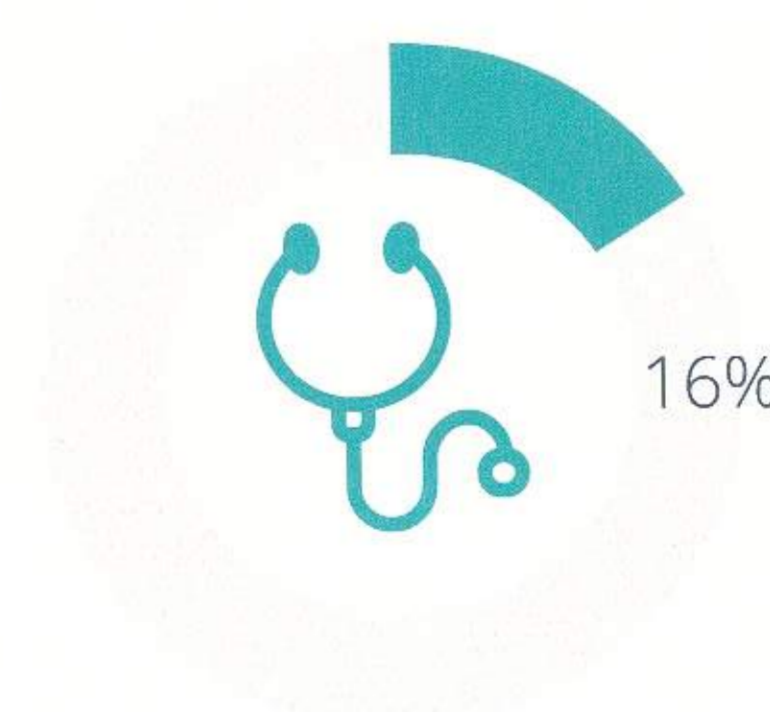
Current Snapshot

1,757 payroll jobs in the study area

Top three industries in the study area:



Accommodation & Food Services
346 jobs



Healthcare & Social Assistance
273 jobs



Finance & Insurance
223 jobs

Fun Zoning Terms!

1

ZONING

The rules established by the city to regulate the size, density, and uses of buildings in a given area. The Boston Zoning Code (BZC) has different rules for different areas of the city.

2

ARTICLE 51

The portion of the Boston Zoning Code that establishes zoning for Allston and Brighton.

3

ZONING SUBDISTRICT

The Allston-Brighton Neighborhood District is divided into a number of subdistricts that establish different regulations depending on the character of the area (e.g. residential or industrial) and the type of growth desired.

4

ALLOWED USE FORBIDDEN USE CONDITIONAL USE

Typically, uses such as housing, industrial uses, retail uses, and so on are either **ALLOWED**, **CONDITIONAL**, or **FORBIDDEN** in a given subdistrict. If a use is **ALLOWED** then a developer can build it without requesting special permission. If it is **CONDITIONAL** then it can be granted permission if it complies with certain conditions. If it is **FORBIDDEN** then it is not permitted.

5

ZONING RELIEF ZONING VARIANCE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

The **ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS (ZBA)** makes decisions on requests for **ZONING RELIEF** and **ZONING VARIANCES**, which are exceptions from the zoning code's regulations on dimensions or uses (for example, **CONDITIONAL USE** permits).

6

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT AREA (PDA)

A **PLANNED DEVELOPMENT AREA (PDA)** allows for more tailored zoning to be written for a project that is well-suited to its location but that cannot be accommodated by the general zoning for the area. A PDA requires at least an acre of land and additional review and approval by the Boston Zoning Commission (BZC). PDAs are not permitted in all zoning subdistricts.

7

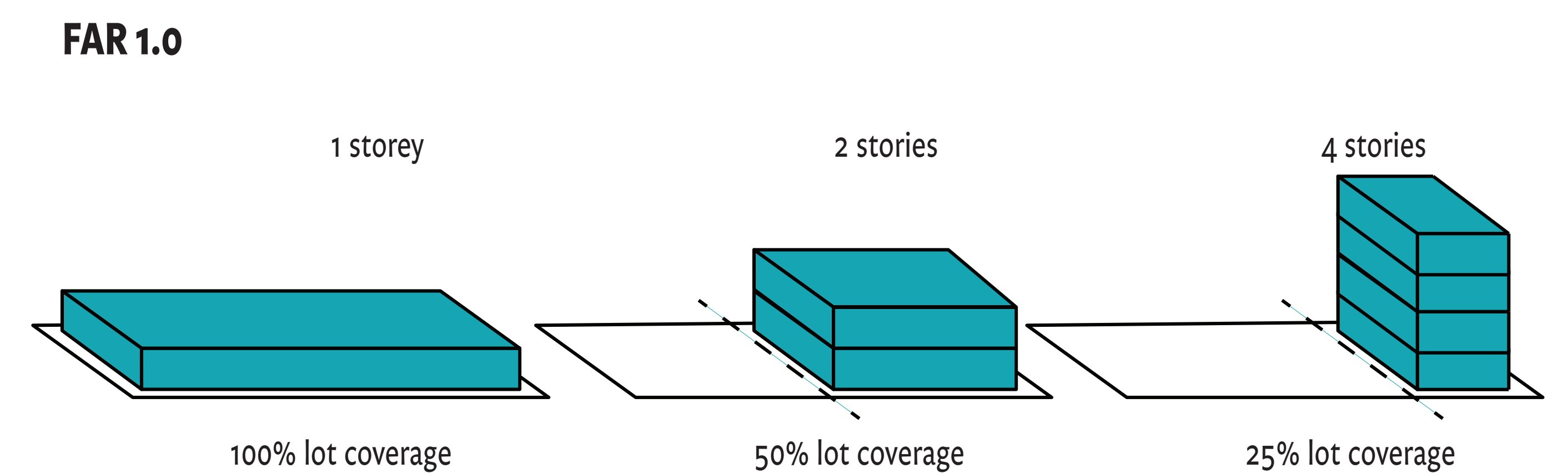
ARTICLE 80 LARGE PROJECT REVIEW

ARTICLE 80 is the portion of the zoning code that governs how large development projects are reviewed. **LARGE PROJECT REVIEW** applies to projects greater than 50,000 square feet. The review includes potential impacts on transportation, public realm, the environment.

8

FLOOR AREA RATIO

FLOOR AREA RATIO (FAR) is the ratio of a building's total floorarea to the area of land on which it is built. It is a measure of the density (i.e., how much square footage) can be built on a given piece of land.



Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning

Existing Conditions

Existing Zoning

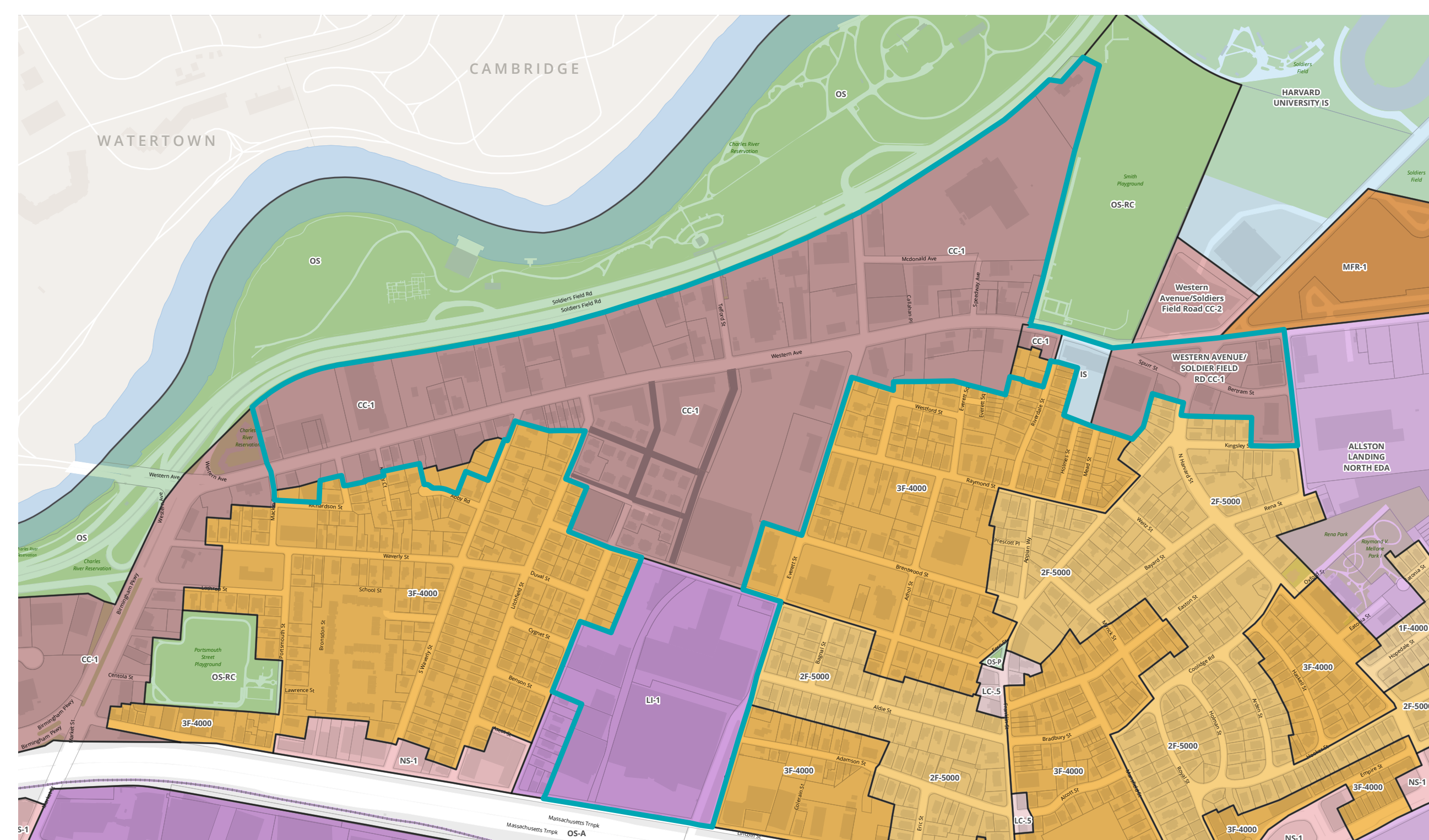
Allston-Brighton is governed by Article 51 of the Boston Zoning Code. Most of the study area is in the Western Avenue/Soldiers Field Road Community Commercial (CC-1) subdistrict. The southernmost part of the Holton Street area is in the Local Industrial (LI-1) subdistrict. **Currently, housing is not an allowed use anywhere in the study area.**

Community Commercial Subdistricts:

- “Community Commercial Subdistricts provide a diversified commercial environment serving larger markets...and... encourage the development of neighborhood businesses which provide essential goods and services as well as jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for the Allston-Brighton community.”
- A wide range of uses is allowed in CC-1, but most residential uses are conditional.
- In CC-1 the maximum FAR is 1.0 unless there is an approved PDA, in which case the maximum is 1.75.

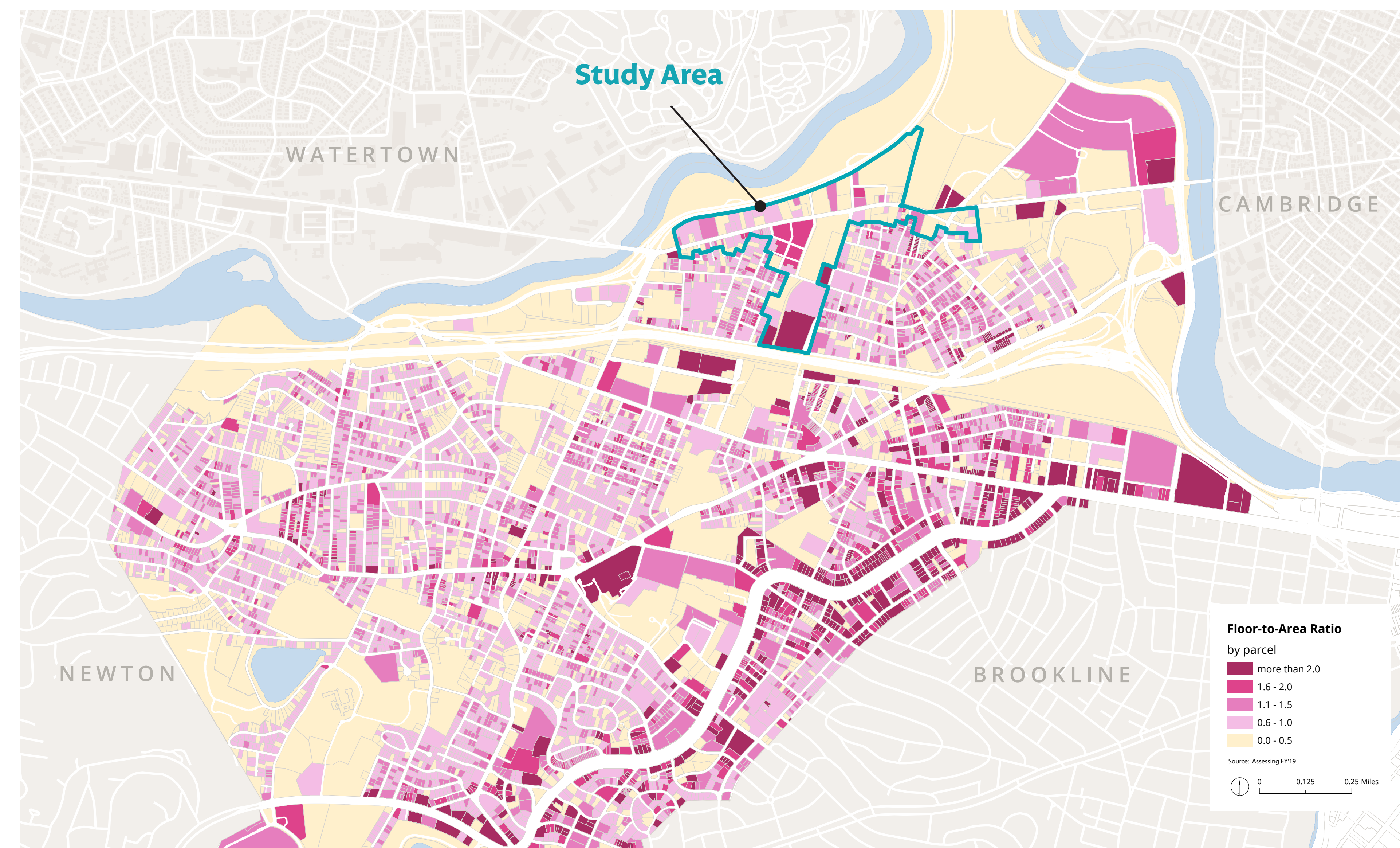
Local Industrial Subdistricts:

- “The purpose of the Local Industrial Subdistricts is to encourage the preservation of the existing manufacturing and industrial base in a manner which is sensitive to and preserves the quality of life of the surrounding neighborhoods, and to encourage the development of new job opportunities within the Allston-Brighton Neighborhood District.”
- A wide range of uses is allowed in LI-1, but residential uses are prohibited.
- In LI-1 the maximum FAR is 1.0 and PDAs are not allowed.



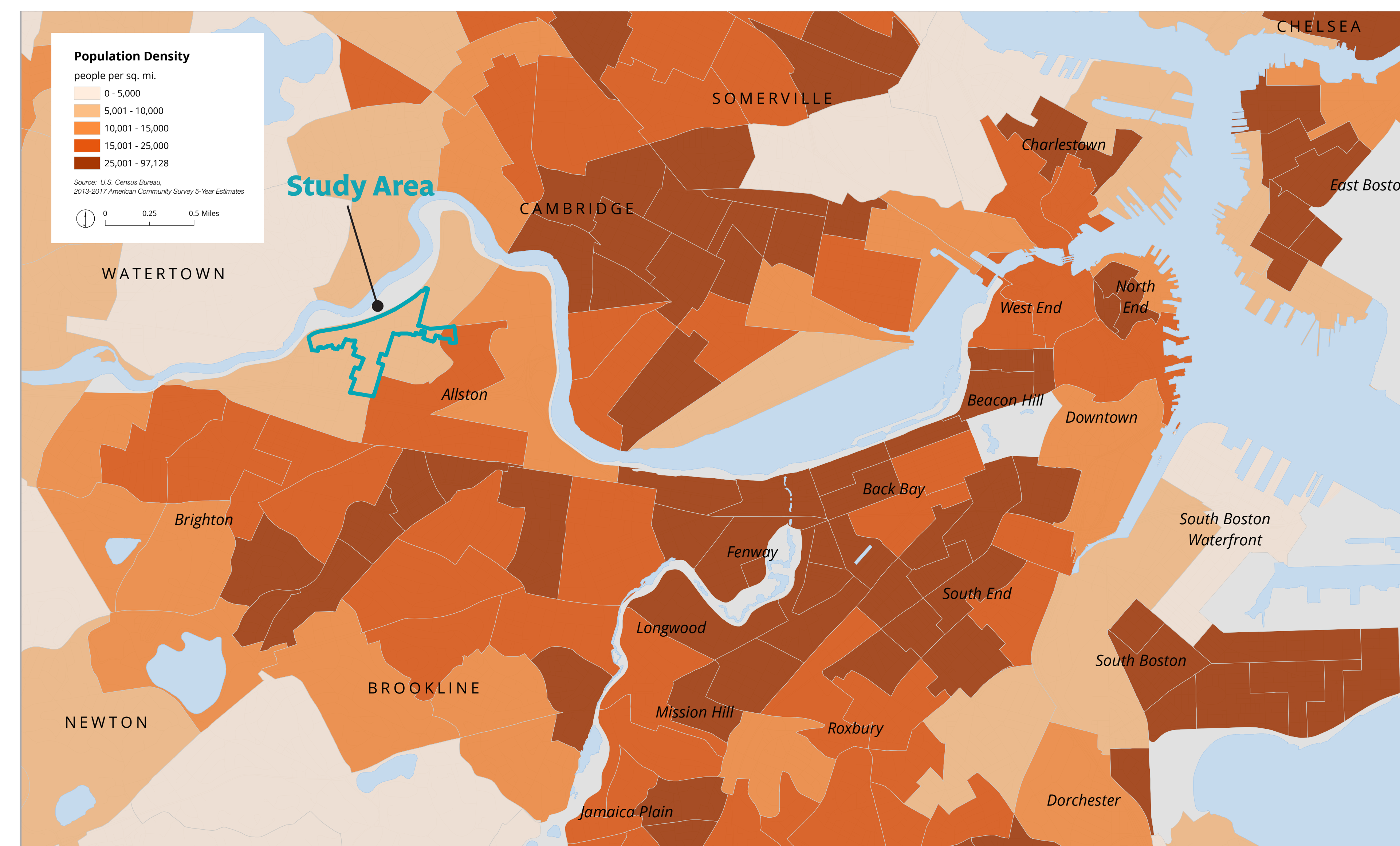
Zoning map of the Study Area and surroundings. Source: BPDA

Floor Area Ratio



North Allston-Brighton generally, and the Study Area in particular, is significantly less dense in terms of built square footage than the rest of Allston. The densest property in the Study Area, 176 Lincoln Street, has never been occupied.

Population



North Allston-Brighton has lower population density than most of the rest of Allston-Brighton, as well as Cambridge, parts of Brookline, and many other parts of Boston.

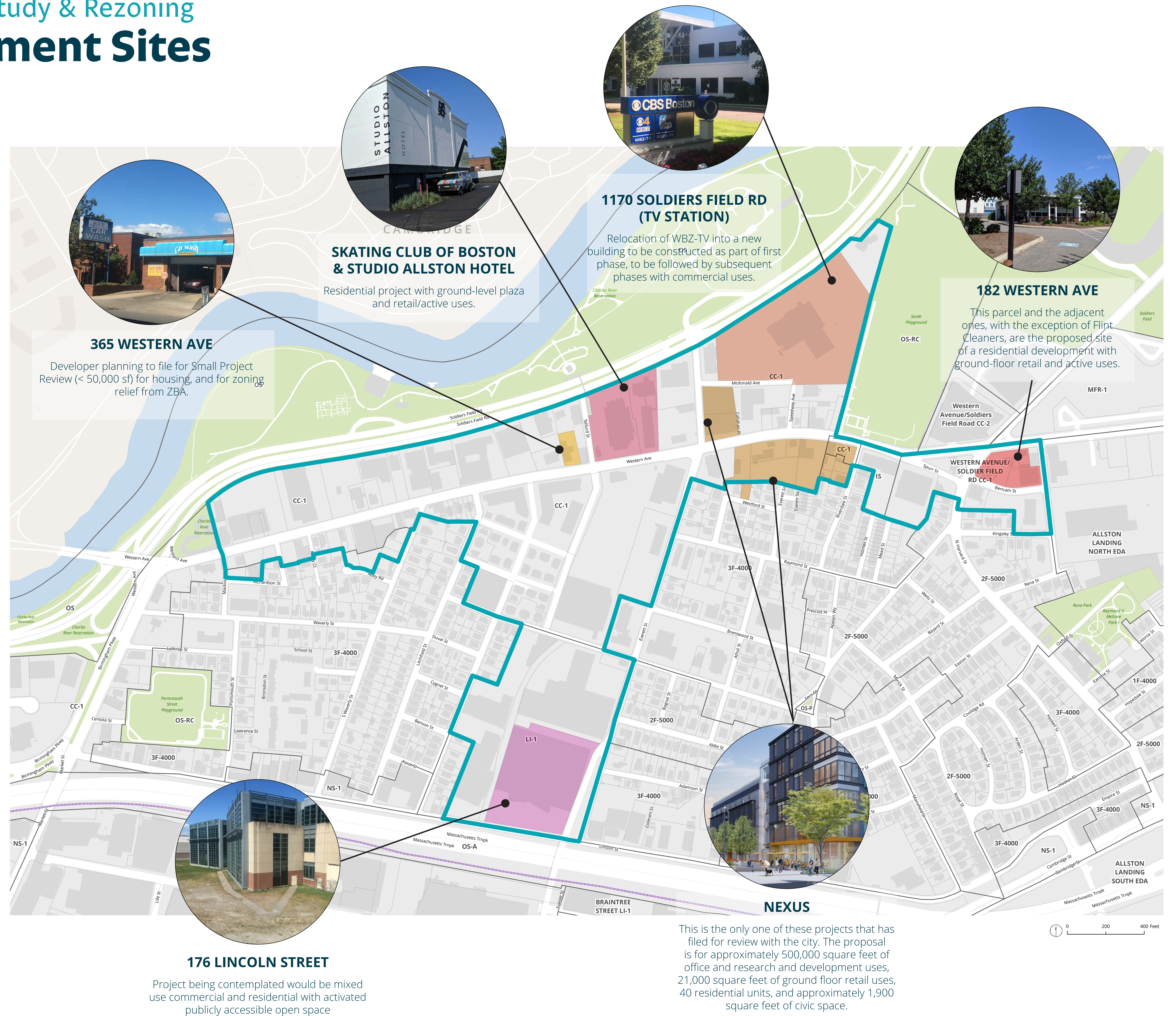
Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning

Known Development Sites

Development can yield much-needed housing and space for the jobs of the future. It replaces unsightly properties with new buildings, retail space, and public amenities. It generates property taxes, affordable housing, and funds for improving the public realm and transportation systems.

Developers are actively working on development proposals for a number of sites. We have encouraged developers to present their concepts even as this study is underway, both informally and through Article 80 review since developers may seek zoning relief from the Zoning Board of Appeals. The conversation about and review of specific proposals will enrich the zoning conversation.

Of course, projects will not be approved unless they are consistent with zoning, so in most cases there will be no approval until this process is complete. Depending on the outcome of the zoning process, developers may have to revise their initial proposals.



The Future of Western Ave

This study will inform recommendations for new or modified zoning, building on previous planning in the area, and fostering a dialogue with developers and property owners. The study will also propose multimodal improvements to Western Avenue and other transportation and public realm enhancements.

What do you want to stay the same on Western Avenue?

Tell us what you like about Western Avenue.

STAR MARKET

Star Market, Flint Cleaners, DD's, Gas Station, Big Daddy's.
has been developed enough. No more housing.

MAHONEY'S GARDEN CENTER ★ ✓

TRAKA Joe's ★

The Soul of the neighborhood

Keep it affordable, funky
artistic, familiar to flourish

Yes to Flint Drycleaners -
can the sign be protected?

Need to address
the traffic and
parking issues before
any projects

I don't see any SENIOR
housing being proposed.
Many senior home owners here
want to downsize + STAY here.
Create walkable SENIOR housing.

✓ Keep us as A
Neighborhood (NOT A
Commercial District)

✓ I CAN WALK Everywhere ← YES

How active it is now compared
to 15 years ago. Foot it
needs to be more walkable
+ bikable, please.

NOT TO CORPORATE
OR INSTITUTIONAL
SOMEWHAT DIVERSE
BUSINESSES + USES.

Boston Fencing Club
Deed restricted
home ownership.

Please don't do what
was done w/ the Seaport.
Manage the planning to
honor pet. parks, open
space between developments
of Western Ave.

Access to the RIVER is so
important

INNOVATION
Traffic Management.
Glad this is
coordinated w/
the Mobility Study!

What's Next?

October 5 (Rain date October 6):
Corridor Tour

October/November 2019: Second
public event

December/January 2019: Third
public event

February/March 2020: Final public
event, zoning recommendations

Throughout: Meetings on
development proposals

Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning

The Future of Western Ave

This study will inform recommendations for new or modified zoning, building on previous planning in the area, and fostering a dialogue with developers and property owners. The study will also propose multimodal improvements to Western Avenue and other transportation and public realm enhancements.

What changes do you want to see on Western Avenue?

Suggest additions or improvements to Western Avenue.

Hot take: 4x density citywide over 20 years minimum action to address crisis

Fill up the retail that was promised to be filled and isn't. Ask retailers who would be beneficial to the neighborhood. **AND NO MORE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS!**

The Fenway has developed a wonderful mix of Commercial & Residential. However the Transit is better than that on Western Ave. There needs to be a better mix of Housing & Commercial. Be careful of MASSING, density, height & Parking!

COMPLETE STREETS!

MATURE TREES IN DEEP TREE WELLS

Incorporate climate planning into rezoning

STORM WATER INFILTRATION

Better walking! Better biking! I want to be able to walk around Western with my kids without worry. **TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES**

More signalized intersections on Western please!

HAVE A RETAIL DISTRICT BETWEEN NORTH HARVARD + EVERETT WITH MIX OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

CONNECTIONS TO RIVER THAT TIES TOGETHER OPEN SPACES ON BOTH SIDES OF SOLDIER'S FIELD RD.

Avoid MAKING OUR NEIGHBORHOOD WEST OF NORTH HARVARD AVE INTO KENDALL SQ. / ~~CLUB~~

INCORPORATE DESIGN GUIDELINES INTO THE STUDY: BUILDING PURPOSE, HEIGHT, MASSING, OPEN SPACE AND TRANSPORTATION MODE SHARE.

Mixed use! Range of unit sizes to keep things

affordable w/o subsidy. Commit MBTA to 470 every

20 min. Transit Signal Priority. Don't neglect back streets. No new parking - we cannot widen the roads we cannot accept new cars. Think bigger.

3% unit growth in 20 years is an inadequate plan. Plan comprehensively, not per project.

✓ Please take residents' input seriously, no cover up. Thank you!

More walkability. A retail district to encourage walkability - but not at sacrifice to parking to encourage customers.

Keep buildings set-back or add set-backs. Add greenspace.

HOUSING! DENSE W/ OPEN SPACE

✓ More bike & pedestrian friendly. Affordable rental housing - both dedicated and naturally affordable for a range of incomes. Mixed-use, with commercial uses that ~~are~~ would serve current residents like a laundromat, pharmacy, and more casual food options.

BETTER PED + BIKE CONNECTION TO WATERTOWN AND THE RIVER.

Bring all developers into synchronicity and use their collective energy to bring about massive improvements, bold new design ideas of:

- Public realm; use space between buildings for people
- Transpo; bring a red line spur into North AB
- Figure out how to eliminate all cars that would come w/ development
- A bold open space plan that connects to each other akin to Savannah, GA, Paris, or Rome.
- Biken + Western Ave don't work now
- Move trains on Commuter Line / West Station

PARKING MAXIMUMS that get us closer to the BOSTON 2030 Goal.

✓ The intersection at Arsenal Street needs to go on a "Road diet" and be more efficient for bikes + cars that want to get to the River.

Wide spectrum of affordable housing (rental + homeownership) that builds upon the diversity of the neighborhood. Income levels should range between 30% AMI - 100% AMI (w/ partnerships w/ non profit developer to bring more resources to bear).

✓ "Complete streets" with Big trees, protected bike lane and Bus priority lane.

✓ Western Ave is a good place to add more housing, especially inclusive affordable housing, because it is accessible by public transportation + bike. Add housing but DO NOT add more parking. It is easy to live in this neighborhood without a car.

} not true