

# Western Avenue Corridor Study & Rezoning



**DRAFT:** July 2022



**01.**

# **Executive Summary and Planning Framework**

---

# Summary

## The Western Avenue Corridor Study and Rezoning is the next step in realizing more than 15 years of community visioning and planning.

Over those 15 years, the North-Allston neighborhood has seen significant change as the result of development pressure, community engagement, and focused planning. In response to these changes, past planning initiatives have revealed key community goals:

- access to more housing, especially affordable housing;
- more open space and better connections;
- multimodal connections and improved transit access;
- a stronger arts and cultural community; and
- a more vibrant Barry's Corner.

While many of these aspirations have been realized through projects such as the Charlesview Residences, improvements to Smith Field and Herter Park Amphitheater, Charles River Community Health, and the revitalized Speedway Headquarters, there remains enormous untapped potential for more positive change. The neighborhood is still home to large areas of surface parking and obsolete commercial buildings; conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists on Western Avenue are unpleasant at best and unsafe at worst; and it is still too difficult for residents to access the Charles River and Allston Village.



Public artwork along Western Avenue by Jessica Unterhalter and Katey Truhn

The Western Avenue Corridor Study and Rezoning has been developed in close consultation between the community, the Boston Planning & Development Agency, and the City of Boston. **To fulfill the community's unrealized goals, the study relies on three major components:**

- New zoning to incentivize private developers to deliver the land uses, public realm improvements, and public benefits desired by the community.
- Urban Design Guidelines, to ensure that new open space and new development are designed to meet the needs of residents.
- A mobility plan for a multimodal Western Avenue with both short- and long-term plans that support envisioned growth.



Smith Field



The Western Avenue Corridor study area boundary, overlaid with significant community assets and recent development projects

Achieving the results of these three implementation strategies will require collaboration between public and private investment in the area. **To mediate between community goals and market pressures, the study proposes a number of specific land use, building, and transportation controls to ensure that new development along Western Avenue will:**

- Support the growth of housing throughout the area.
- Incentivize the creation of significant new income-restricted housing through a residential density bonus.
- Encourage arts and cultural spaces.
- Create a mix of land uses and enough density to support an active streetscape and retail that serve the neighborhood along all of Western Avenue, with a particular focus on Barry's Corner to Telford Street.
- Support the creation of new retail and office/lab spaces near Barry's Corner and Lincoln Street (in proximity to Boston Landing commuter rail station).
- Limit building height and massing to be compatible with existing neighborhood fabric.
- Create new open spaces, including a significant new 1-2 acre open space in the center of North Allston.
- Ensure that new development is of a human scale, guarantees access to sunlight, and mitigates wind at the street level.
- Convert surface parking lots to pervious open space that will help manage stormwater.
- Expand the current network of streets, creating new streets and connections from the neighborhood to the Charles River and introduce a normalized block structure.
- Support multimodal & transit improvements, in particular on Western Avenue, including enabling a future transitway.

Over time, economic conditions and community desires may change—but the core principles described in this study will lay the groundwork for a Western Avenue that develops according to the needs of its residents.



*Continuum, an example of recently completed housing*



*Open space created as part of the 180 Telford Street residential development*



*Blue Bike station along Telford Street*



*Western Avenue, facing west toward Speedway Headquarters and Continuum housing development*

# Planning Timeline

## Visioning

Fall 2019 / Winter 2020

- Open House: Review of past planning (September 2019)
- Walking and Biking Tour (October 2019)
- Workshop (October 2019)
- Review of Workshop Outcomes + Development Feasibility and Benefits (December 2019)
- Development Feasibility and Benefits, Cont. (January 2020)
- Building Blocks for Mobility Improvements

Spring 2020

Hiatus in public process due to Covid-19

## Developing a Framework

Summer 2020

- Virtual Chat with a Planner (July 2020)
- Preliminary Urban Design Framework and Real Estate Analysis (August 2020)
- Land Use Scenarios (August 2020)

## "Deep Dives"

Fall 2020 / Winter 2021

- Affordable Housing (September 2020)
- Virtual Chat with a Planner (October 2020)
- Overview of City's Sustainability and Arts & Culture policies (November 2020)

## Refining Recommendations

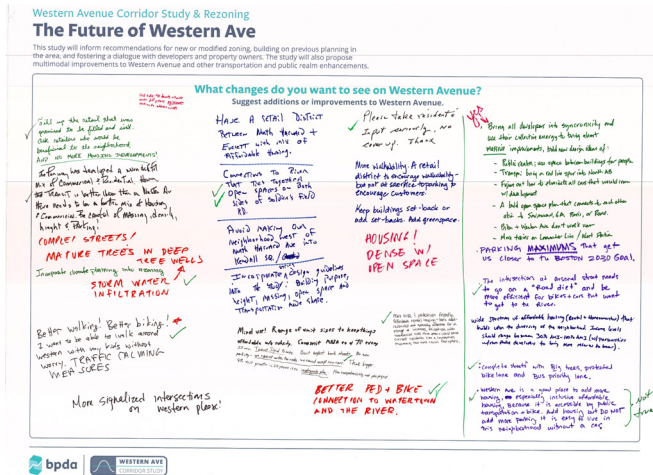
Spring / Summer 2021

- Review of principles, presentation of framework, and zoning recommendations (March 2021)
- Transportation analysis and short-term multimodal recommendations (April 2021)
- Urban Design and Housing revisions (May 2021)

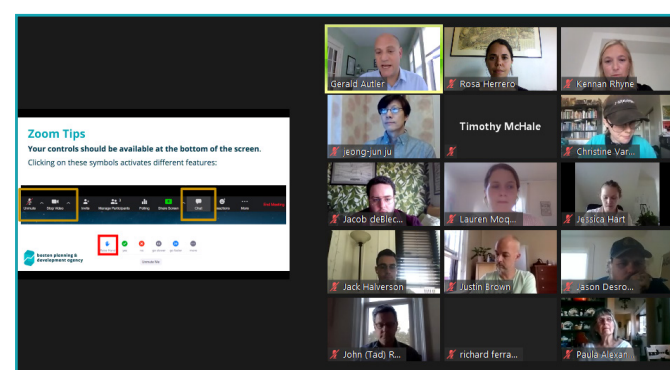
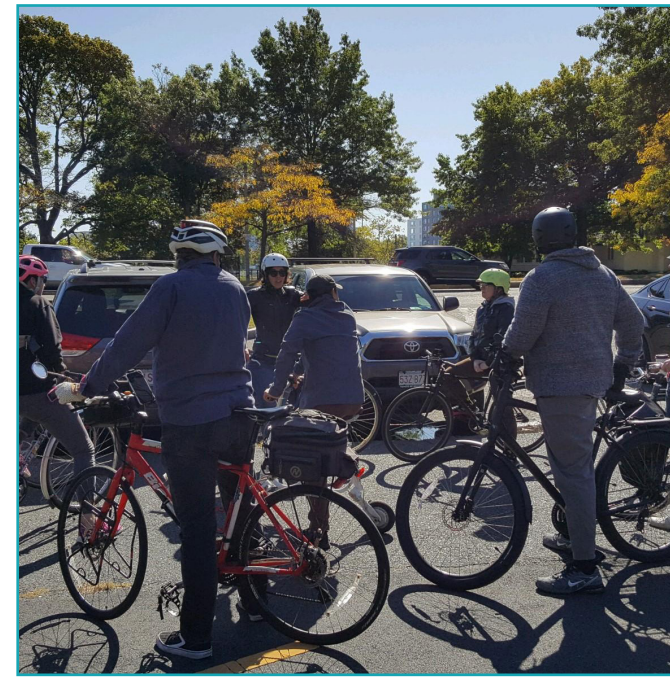
## Implementing Recommendations

Fall 2021 / Summer 2022

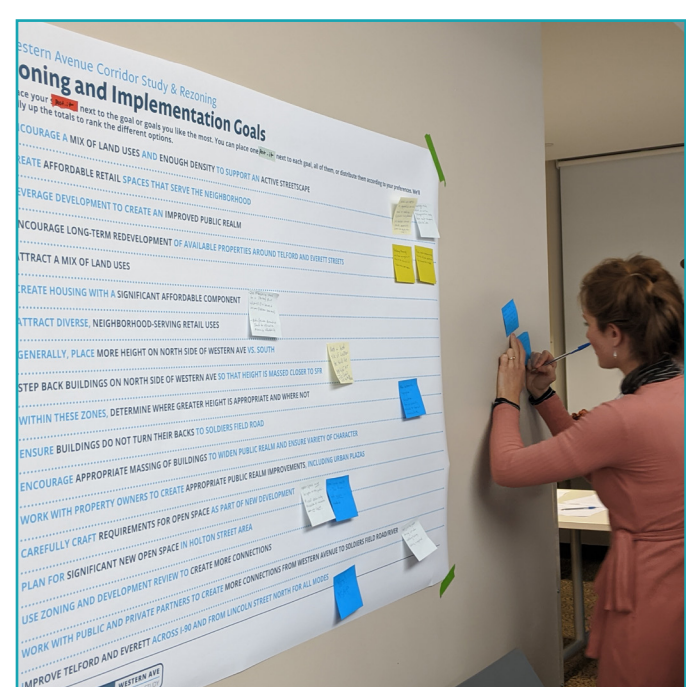
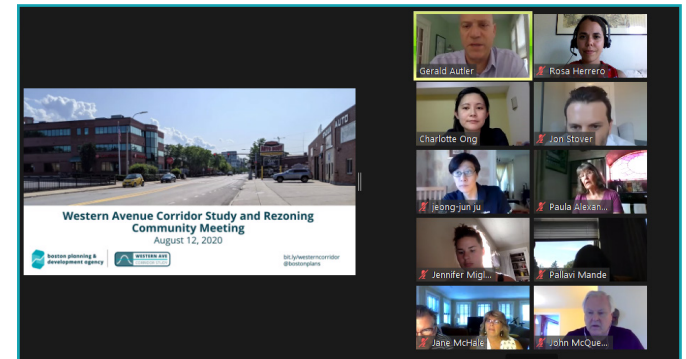
- Urban Design refinements
- Transportation updates
- Draft Report
- Final Report
- Rezoning



Workshop activities completed throughout the community engagement process

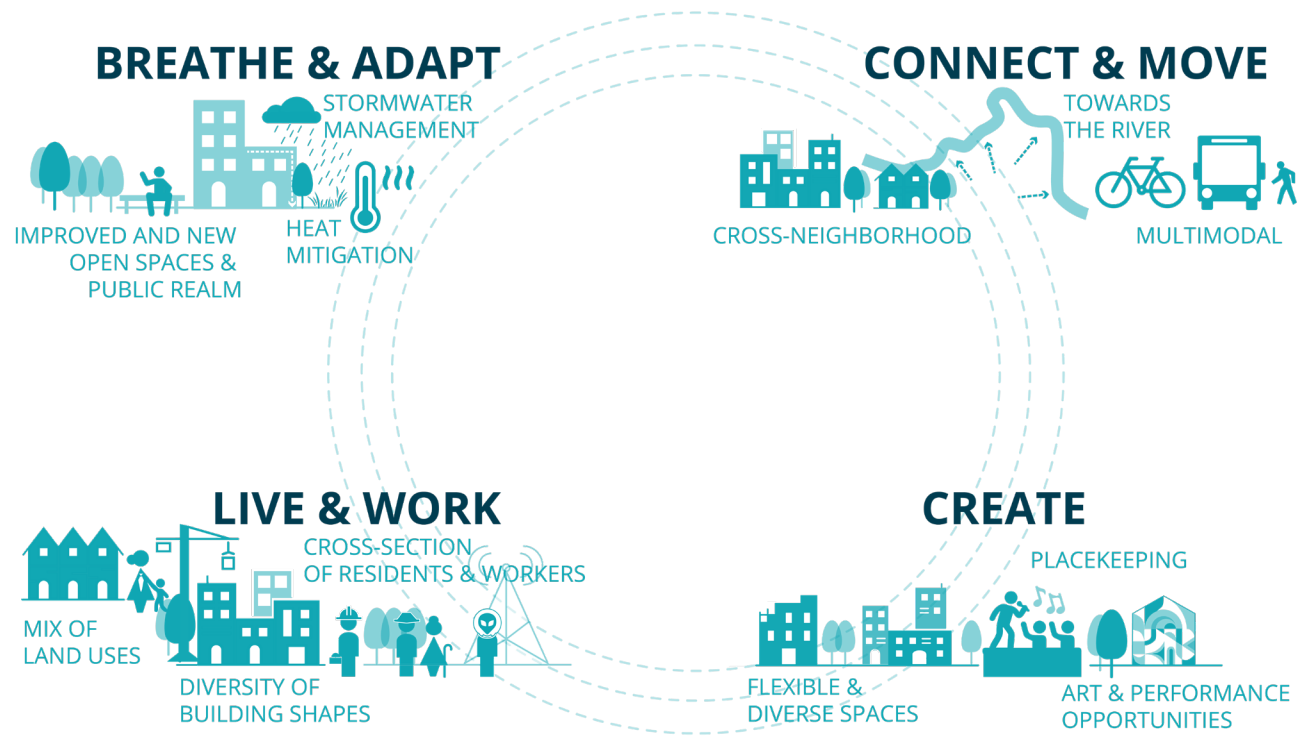


Snapshots of community engagement from throughout the planning process, from Fall 2019 to Summer 2022



# The Future of Western Avenue

The Western Avenue Corridor Study and Rezoning establishes a guide for well-designed, well-connected, and appropriately-scaled development that complements the existing Allston neighborhood and results in a vibrant, people-centric, multimodal place.



The planning framework establishes a guide for a connected, appropriately-scaled, and well-designed Western Avenue that complements the existing North Allston neighborhood. In conversations with residents, three clear visions for the future of the Western Avenue corridor emerged. Residents want to see:

- A Western Avenue that creates connections and ease of movement.
- A Western Avenue that can breathe through new open space and adapt to future development.
- A Western Avenue where current residents and future residents can live, work, and create safely and productively.

To achieve these goals, the planning framework proposes three strategies:

- New zoning will make sure new development is appropriately scaled and supports land uses that are important to the neighborhood.
- Design guidelines will translate these goals into sustainable, human-centered solutions.
- Transportation improvements will create a multimodal Western Avenue.

The recommendations presented in this report are based on community conversations and feedback in addition to analysis conducted by the BPDA and its consultants. The recommendations constitute a framework for future growth that is financially feasible, with significant benefits such as



View of Western Avenue today



Hypothetical future view of Western Avenue

affordable housing, new open space, and neighborhood retail. That framework has also been tested and revised to ensure that the transportation network can support the proposed future growth, and that development can help create safe mobility options, in line with other city policies and goals.

### Live, Work, & Create

New zoning subdistricts and metrics will guide Western Avenue toward a diverse mix of land uses, with an emphasis on residential, commercial / lab, and new street-level retail. Mixed-use nodes near Barry's Corner and the Lincoln Street area will bring people and liveliness to the neighborhood through retail and neighborhood-serving amenities, creating more 24/7 areas of activity. Residential uses throughout, with ground-floor retail and/or small-scale production, reflect the community's vision for a 21st century neighborhood while ensuring Allston's existing cultural assets remain intact and future culture thrives.

### Breathe and Adapt

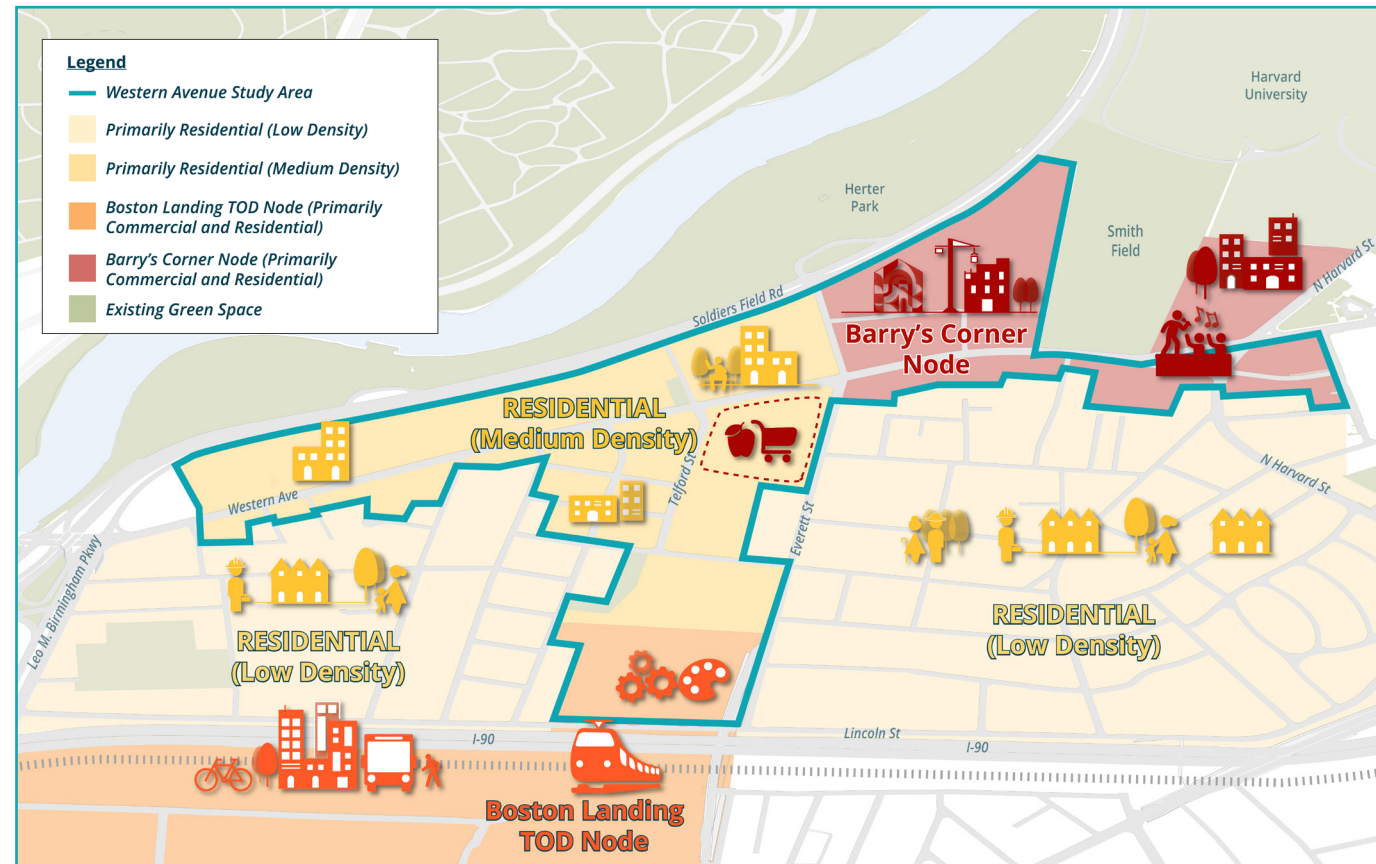
Design guidelines will help set expectations for the character of new development, with an emphasis on public realm, arts, and sustainability. Following these guidelines will ensure that new development complements the existing neighborhood, and that the neighborhood will itself be able to adapt to changes. Design guidelines also help curate the design of open space to promote sustainability and create connections between the neighborhood and the Charles River.

### Connect and Move

Through the integration of new local streets and the creation of a multimodal Western Avenue, transportation improvements will make the area safer to travel through and around; alleviate congestion experienced today; allow for future growth; and give residents, employees, and visitors of the area access to a more robust open space network.

# Live, Work, & Create

The planning framework envisions Western Avenue as a vibrant, mixed-use corridor, with nodes of higher density at Barry’s Corner and near Boston Landing.



Land Use Framework

At multiple community meetings, residents stated that housing, especially affordable housing, was needed in the neighborhood. The zoning proposed by this plan will allow smaller scale residential buildings and new green spaces to knit together the existing residential neighborhoods and provide a more porous environment between Western Avenue and Soldiers Field Road, enhancing the physical and visual connections to the Charles River. There is a strong desire for retail along the entire length of Western Avenue. The existing shopping center between Telford and Everett streets is envisioned as a location for key community-serving retail such as a grocery store as well as new housing.

To address the desire of many residents to fortify Allston's

rich artistic and creative character, space for arts and cultural activities will be allowed and encouraged in both the Barry's Corner Node and the Boston Landing TOD Node. Cultural uses, including creative sector workspace and cultural facilities, are a priority for preservation through redevelopment. Improved public realm infrastructure proposed by new development projects will create gathering places and venues for art, culture, and other placemaking and placekeeping initiatives.

Residents have also expressed concerns about development creating a "wall" between the neighborhood and the Charles River. The community expressed a preference for any greater heights to be primarily located north of Western

*"Wide spectrum of affordable housing (rental + homeownership) that builds upon the diversity of the neighborhood."*

Community feedback from September, 2019 public meeting



Public art along Western Avenue

Avenue and closer to the river to avoid undue impact on the ground-level experience, as well as a desire for variation in heights throughout the corridor to avoid monotony.

As a result, zoning proposed by the planning framework limits large-scale commercial, office, and lab development to certain areas where that density, scale, and transportation impacts can be better managed. Throughout the study area, a density bonus will incentivize residential uses and the creation of additional income restricted housing (see

"Residential Affordability Incentive" on page 31).

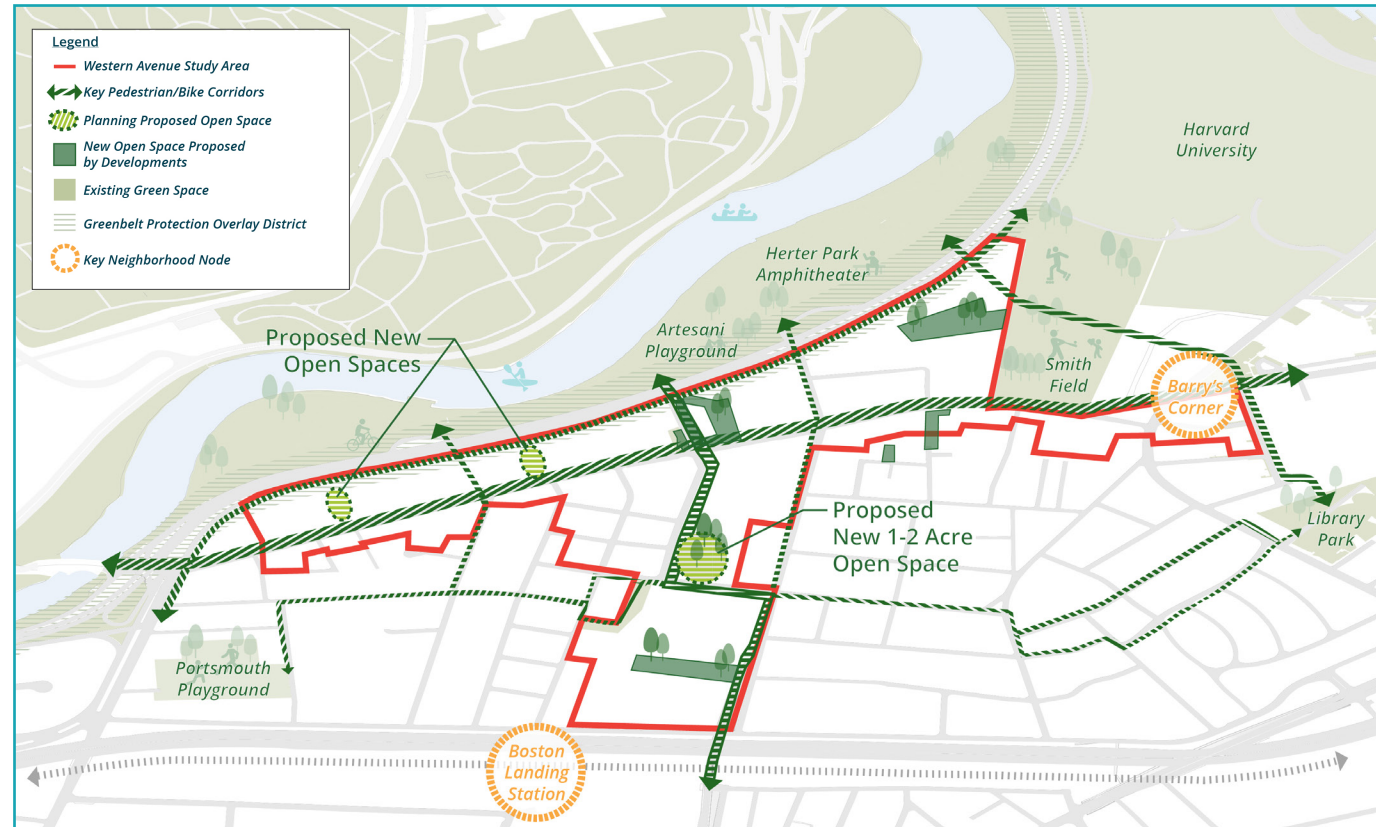
The remainder of the study area will support new housing to serve a variety of household types and residents of a range of income levels. In particular, the majority of the segment of Western Avenue between Telford Street and Barry's Corner is envisioned as a neighborhood main street lined with retail and other active uses. Greater height and density as well as lab and commercial uses will be allowed in that segment. This additional density will help establish the active and vibrant uses that residents must leave the area to find today.

### Land Use Objectives:

- Create a mix of land uses and enough density to support an active streetscape and retail that serve the neighborhood along all of Western Avenue, with a particular focus on Barry's Corner to Telford Street
- Support a mixed-use TOD node near Lincoln Street near the Boston Landing MBTA Commuter Rail Station
- Allow the development of housing throughout the study area
- Leverage development to create an improved public realm, through setbacks to create wider sidewalks, space for other mobility improvements, and limit building footprints to ensure sufficient space is set aside to accommodate new open spaces and plazas
- Create additional income-restricted housing with a density bonus throughout the study area (see "On-site Affordability Requirement" on page 31)
- Allow the redevelopment of existing retail and industrial uses to create significant new housing and neighborhood-serving retail such as a grocery store
- Allow small-scale commercial uses, such as professional offices, retail, and craft manufacturing on ground floors
- Encourage the retention or re-provision of space for arts and cultural uses throughout the study area

# Breathe & Adapt

The planning framework envisions Western Avenue as open and connected, with new open spaces and an improved public realm.



Open Space Framework

The public realm consists of publicly accessible spaces, fixtures, and paths that animate a neighborhood. This definition includes open space, such as traditional green parks, green “connector” corridors, small pocket parks, and hardscape plazas, as well as wider sidewalks with planting zones, street trees, cafe seating, and multimodal mobility options.

Allston residents value existing open spaces, such as Smith Field, Herter Park, the Charles River Reservation, and the Artesani and Portsmouth playgrounds. Residents have expressed a desire to stitch together the residential neighborhoods on either side of Everett Street and create stronger connections to the river. Residents have also long envisioned a significant new park between Everett and Telford Streets, identified as a new 1-2 acre open space. Through the development review process, design guidelines

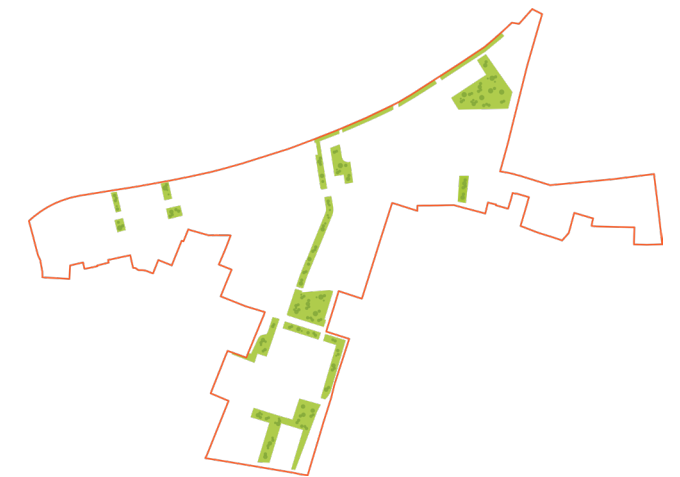
ensure that new development projects provide the types of open space that can create those connections, such as green connector corridors, pocket parks, and plazas. Design guidelines also help shape the form of buildings to create more open space and visual connections through building setbacks and stepbacks. Collectively, these new open spaces will knit together the existing and new development fabric with green spaces, new streets, and vibrant nodes such as Barry's Corner.

More open space is itself good, but to serve the needs of Allston residents it also needs to be well-designed. Open space, whether public or private, plays an important role in helping the city “breathe” by mitigating air pollution, absorbing stormwater, and reducing the heat island effect.

This planning framework ensures that open space and



Community feedback from December 2019 public meeting



Potential sites of 9 - 10 acres of new public open space provided through development

the public realm are invested in alongside redevelopment. Development projects will be required to contribute to the expansion of public park resources and the public realm at a level commensurate to the scale of the project and its impact.

Using the best practices established by design guidelines, where today there exists only surface parking or other unusable or inaccessible areas the plan could yield 9 to 10 acres of new green spaces, plazas, greenways, and

other usable public and ground-level amenities. For more information on the design guidelines proposed by the plan, see “Urban Design Guidelines” on page 38.

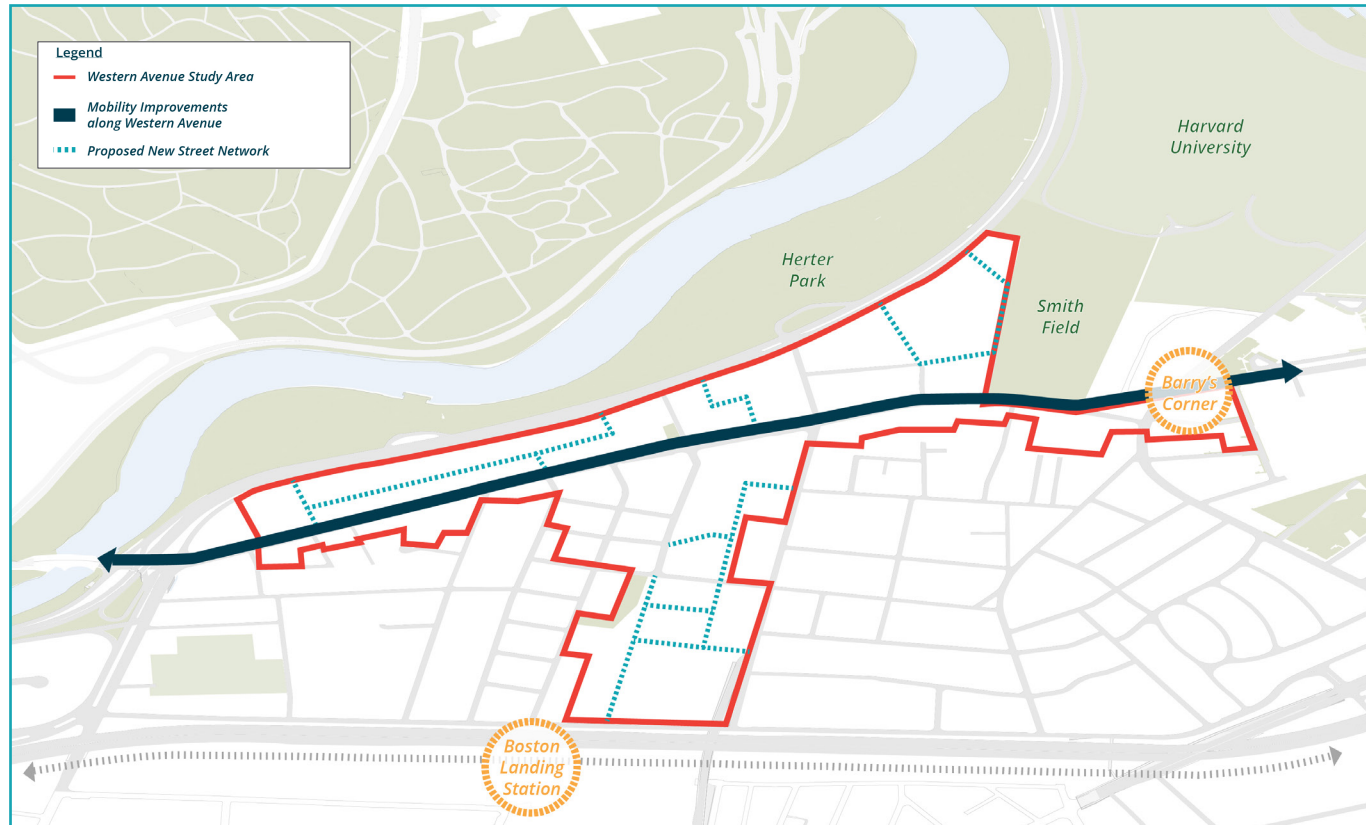
### Open Space Objectives:

- Connect existing and future residential developments to the Charles River to the north and to the Boston Landing commuter rail station to the south, with a generous, wide green corridor from Telford to Holton to Everett Street
- Connect to new and improved crossings across Soldiers Field Road (through coordination with the Department of Conservation and Recreation)
- Develop a 1-2 acre park between Telford and Everett Streets that connects the existing residential neighborhoods
- Create pocket parks that facilitate connections from Western Avenue to the Charles River
- Improve visual connections to the Charles River from Western Avenue
- Provide guidelines for how taller buildings, when well-designed, can create a high-quality pedestrian experience and leave generous visual and physical connections in between buildings



# Connect & Move

The planning framework envisions Western Avenue as a multimodal street with a new, low-stress bikeway and transitway.



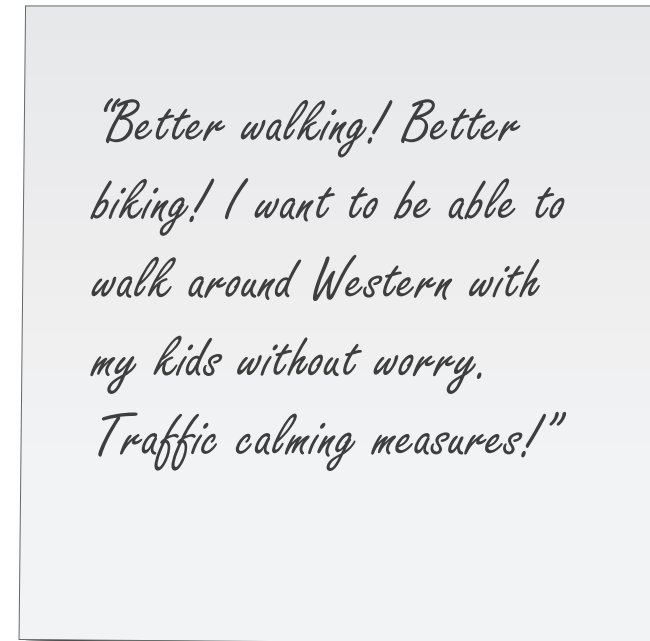
Mobility framework

Allston residents have expressed a strong desire for increased transit and mobility options along Western Avenue. In October 2019, workshop attendees were asked to allocate space for certain transportation modes within a limited street right-of-way. Better bus and bicycle facilities were the highest priorities ahead of other options including on-street parking. In April 2021, the planning team presented short-term design concepts for Western Avenue and polled meeting attendees for their feedback. In response to the statement, “Safe and efficient multimodal transportation (transit and bicycles) are a higher priority than on-street parking,” more than two-thirds of the respondents (43 individuals) said they “agree” or “strongly agree.”

To that end, the planning framework proposes a range of mobility improvements and public realm enhancements,

centered around a proposal for a new transitway along Western Avenue. When implemented, these options—better transit infrastructure, sidewalk-level bicycle facilities, and wider sidewalk zones—will enable more people to safely walk and bike through the area.

Residents have also expressed concern about the impacts of new vehicular traffic in the neighborhood, and in particular about parking for new development. The planning team conducted a survey in the winter and spring of 2021 to solicit input from local businesses and organizations about their transportation and parking needs, in order to create a strategy for improving management of curbside use regulations for the benefit of all. The response highlighted that many businesses have dedicated off-street parking for employees or customers. Short-term parking is typically accommodated in off-street parking locations



Community feedback from September 2019 meeting



Workshop activity from October 2019 community meeting

or via unrestricted curbside parking. While short-term customer and visitor parking was noted as a need, survey respondents also observed that more bicycle parking, safer bicycle infrastructure, and improved transit were needed.

Residents asked for improved transportation that considers growth elsewhere in Allston and in nearby communities such as Watertown, and the BPDA conducted robust traffic modeling in response.

Through these types of treatments, a variety of safe and convenient mobility options would be afforded to people who live and work throughout the area, all the while supporting citywide mode shift and mobility goals and accommodating new growth. Details on this new street network and Western Avenue’s multimodal recommendations are discussed in “04. Mobility Recommendations” on page 51.

### Mobility Objectives:

- Introduce a finer grain network of streets and blocks and create a multi-modal street network for people walking, biking, using transit, and driving to move through the area without burdening existing streets
- Create east-west connections for people walking and biking from residential neighborhoods on either side of Everett Street, primarily on Holton Street and Western Avenue
- Create sidewalks that are not only easily traversable regardless of one’s physical ability, but pleasant to walk along
- Promote bicycling as a viable and safe commuting and every day travel option through a new low-stress Western Avenue bikeway
- Advance transit use by prioritizing bus movements along Western Avenue through improvements such as a dedicated transitway
- Incorporate an improved street network to facilitate anticipated growth and create more traditional block sizes

# Zoning Recommendations

These recommendations have been developed with the goal of implementing the community vision and achieving the mobility improvements described in the planning framework.



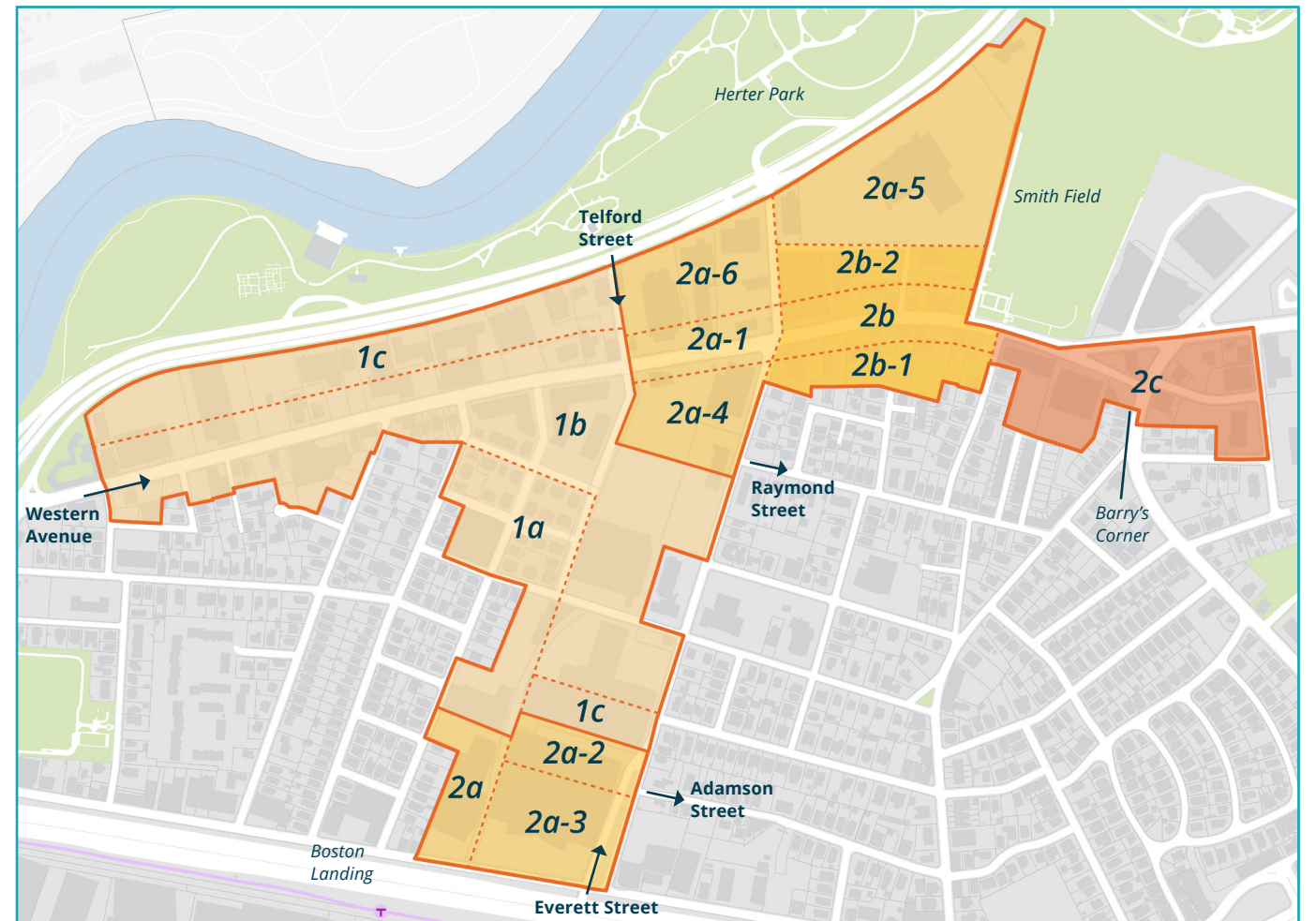
Hypothetical maximum massing envelope under proposed zoning

The following diagrams and maps illustrate the proposed building and open space controls to be written into Article 51 of the Boston Zoning Code. The controls that follow are tools that are designed to work together, and they have been modeled throughout the planning process to ensure that they will be effective in limiting new building masses and ensuring the necessary open space is provided between buildings.

Together, these zoning limits will manage and mitigate the potential for adverse impacts that can be associated with new development.

Urban design and transportation guidelines will complement the zoning and will establish best practices as they relate to:

- Site Context
- Site Design
- Streets, Sidewalks, and Building Setbacks
- Parking and Loading
- Project Massing
- Building Heights and Density
- Parking Structures
- Rooftop Mechanicals
- Design and Sizing of Open Spaces
- Programming
- Environment and Comfort
- Connectivity



Summary of proposed zoning districts and metrics

Zone	FAR	Incentive FAR	Lot Coverage	Height	Incentive Height/Lab Mechanicals	Residential	Retail/Cultural	Lab
1a	2.5	-	60%	45 ft	-	✓	✓	-
1b	2.5	-	60%	65 ft	-	✓	✓	-
1c	2.5	-	60%	90 ft	-	✓	✓	-
2a	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	60%	65 ft	-	✓	✓	✓
2a-1	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	60%	75 ft	-	✓	✓	-
2a-2	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	60%	90 ft	-	✓	✓	✓
2a-3	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	60%	125 ft	- / 165 ft	✓	✓	✓
2a-4	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	60%	125 ft	-	✓	✓	-
2a-5	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	60%	135 ft	170 ft / 175 ft	✓	✓	✓
2a-6	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	60%	150 ft	185 ft / -	✓	✓	-
2b	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	70%	75 ft	-	✓	✓	✓
2b-1	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	70%	90 ft	-	✓	✓	✓
2b-2	3.5	4.0 / 4.25	70%	135 ft	170 ft / 175 ft	✓	✓	✓
2c	3.5	4.25	80%	90 ft	-	✓	✓	-