



# ROSLINDALE SQUARE

PLAN PRIMER - January 2024



Roslindale Square at the intersection of South Street and Washington Street

## PLAN PRIMER OVERVIEW

This Plan Primer provides an overview of the existing context of Roslindale Square and details the upcoming steps throughout the 6-9-month planning and engagement process launching early this year. The goal of the Roslindale Square Plan Primer is to provide a summary of important facts about the area being studied including details about what's already there, previous planning efforts, and existing community assets.

For more information on the background of Squares + Streets, visit the project webpage at [www.bostonplans.org/squares](http://www.bostonplans.org/squares).

## SQUARES + STREETS OVERVIEW

Squares + Streets is a planning and zoning initiative focused on adding, supporting, and improving housing, public space, small businesses, and arts and culture in transit-accessible neighborhood centers and along main streets. Squares + Streets zoning amendments will be one of the first steps toward shaping citywide zoning reform to respond to an ongoing housing crisis. Squares + Streets plans will focus on small geographies and recommendations that can be implemented within 5-10 years.

The locations selected for Squares + Streets plans are based on a number of factors, including areas proximal to transportation options (inclusive of subway stops, high-frequency bus routes, commuter rail stops, and active shared use paths), existing commercial uses, Main Streets districts, and existing public facilities (libraries, schools, BCYF facilities, etc.). Additional criteria include low population density near existing transit, rent burden, limited supply of income-restricted units, extreme heat and limited tree canopy, concentrations of historically marginalized populations, and limited recent planning initiatives. Staff looked at existing City capital investment commitments and City-owned parcels to align Squares + Streets planning work with existing implementation pathways.

Rooted in the values of resilience, affordability, and equity, Squares + Streets will seek to achieve the following goals:

1. **Update zoning** to support mixed-use development and better allow for a diverse range of housing and commercial opportunities
2. **Preserve, enhance, and produce affordable housing, retail, and cultural spaces** through policy, design, and funding resources
3. **Coordinate local transportation and public space improvements** to increase accessibility and promote active forms of transportation
4. **Identify capital and program investments** across City departments to signal coordinated investment in these geographies
5. **Identify specific design interventions** to expand tree coverage, mitigate heat, prepare for an electric future, and otherwise advance climate resilience

[Reforming zoning regulations](#) is an essential element of Squares + Streets. At its core, zoning is a set of laws that dictates how land can be used and what size structures can be built on any given parcel. Defining zoning rules is one tool that can be specifically used to facilitate housing production and diversify community amenities.

For Squares + Streets, staff have developed a flexible menu of mixed-use zoning districts that support a range of building uses and heights. These zoning districts have been created based on analysis of existing development trends, modernization of land uses within the Zoning Code, and feedback provided through public engagement. Rezoning for each neighborhood square or main street will be determined through conversations with the public and an analysis of the context of each place.

## PHASE 1: FALL 2023 ENGAGEMENT

The Phase 1 Fall engagement process, which took place between September and December 2023, focused on informing residents and stakeholders about what Squares + Streets is and what the planning process seeks to achieve. A summary of findings has been published on the BPDA website - [Fall 2023 engagement report](#).

In the planning survey, which was conducted as part of the Fall engagement, 140 of 762 participants were from Roslindale. The following themes emerged from the survey and conversations with Roslindale stakeholders, residents, and organizations include the following:

- **Activating Roslindale Square:** A number of residents noted they would like to have more cafes, restaurants for families, entertainment spaces, service establishments, and places to gather in Roslindale Square.
- **Producing more housing near accessible transit:** Many residents are in support of building more housing, particularly near transit, as it would bring additional investment into the community, provide more housing options for growing families, and encourage non-vehicular modes of transportation.
- **Preserving open space:** Roslindale Square has a limited amount of public open space and residents feel strongly that it should be preserved, enhanced and expanded.



Adams Park in Roslindale Square

# PLANNING CONTEXT & HISTORY

## ROSLINDALE SQUARE HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Roslindale Square, also known as Roslindale Village, operated as an important commercial center for southwest Boston until suburbanization in the mid-20th century drew customers and residents to larger shopping plazas and homes outside of the city. In the 1970s, Roslindale Square - like many urban districts across the city - faced decline but was eventually stabilized by an influx of Greek immigrants. In 1985, then-City Councilor Thomas M. Menino brought the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program to Roslindale, establishing **one of the first urban Main Street districts in the nation.**<sup>1</sup> Through a series of technical assistance and small grants from the city, the new Roslindale Village Main Street program assisted with 33 façade projects, 43 commercial building rehabilitations, 29 net new businesses, and 132 net job gains - totaling over \$5 million in new investments over five years.<sup>2</sup> Still functioning as the heart of Roslindale today, there are several commercial and civic uses surrounding the Square, including the Roslindale branch of the Boston Public Library, the Roslindale Substation (pictured right), and the Roslindale Community Center.



(Source: Roslindale Historical Society)



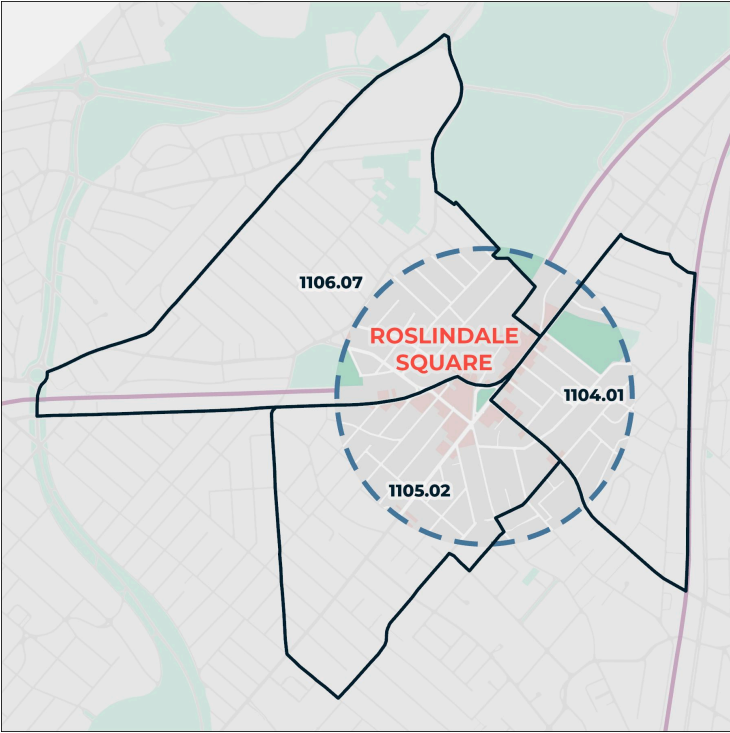
Roslindale Substation

## ROSLINDALE SQUARE STUDY AREA

The geographic radius of the Roslindale plan area will be  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a mile around the main intersection in Roslindale Square, South Street and Poplar Street. This area includes the main commercial area adjacent to the transit station. The map below on the right depicts the census tracts for which at least 25% of the area is within the  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile buffer area, forming the basis of existing conditions data.

<sup>1</sup> "Historic Boston's Commercial Casebook: Profile on Roslindale Village." Historic Boston Inc (HBI), June 15, 2010.

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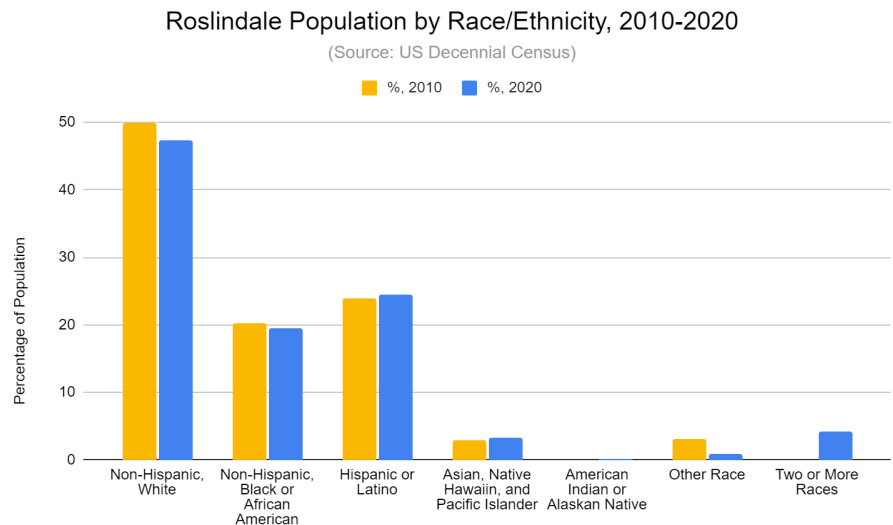
## WHY ROSLINDALE SQUARE?

Roslindale Square is situated approximately six miles south of Downtown Boston, two miles southwest of Forest Hills, and is bisected by several major streets, including Washington Street running north to south and Belgrade Avenue and Cummins Highway running east to west.

This area presents an opportunity to leverage existing commercial uses and transportation assets such as the Roslindale Village commuter rail station and high-frequency bus service so that the benefits of rapid transit, walkable stores and services, and open spaces are made available to more households.



There are currently 1,965 occupied households within the Roslindale Square study area, comprising 4,721 individuals, or approximately 16% of Roslindale’s total population (29,586 residents). As shown in the chart, the neighborhood is less than half non-Hispanic White, with a sizable population of Black or African American and Hispanic/Latino residents. The racial split of the neighborhood has remained relatively stable since 2010, with moderate growth in Hispanic/Latino and Asian residents between 2010 and 2020. Note that Other Race was combined with Two or More Races in 2010.



Within the Roslindale Square planning area 35.2% of buildings are commercial uses, 57.6% percent are residential, 0.2% is industrial and 7% is exempt, meaning the building may be a religious institution or City of Boston Property and does not pay taxes. Although over half of the planning area’s building stock is residential, most residential uses are located surrounding the commercial core of Roslindale Square.

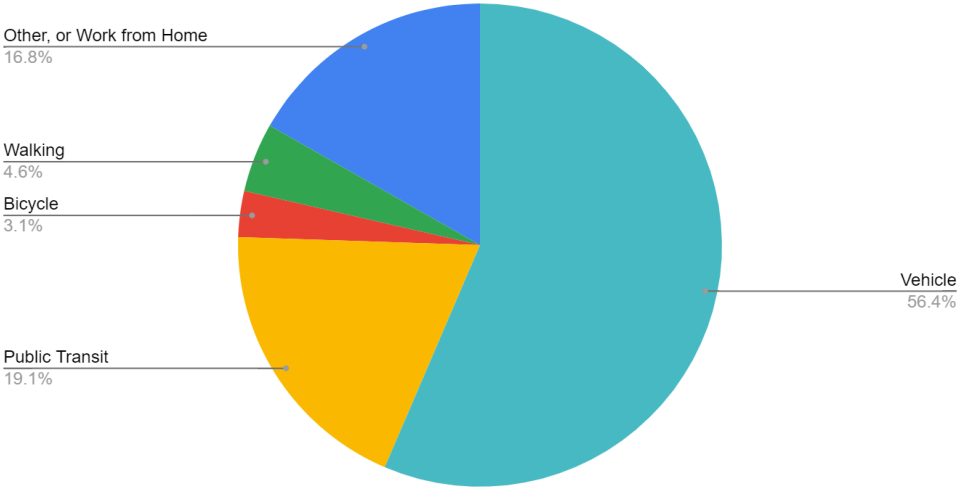
Housing data is also indicative of a need to plan for housing production and stabilization. Median rental and sales prices over time indicate a high demand for more housing in Roslindale, reflective of the growth projected for the city of Boston as a whole. The median condo sales price in 2022 was \$606,500, up 9.3% percent from 2021. Rental prices demonstrate the same trend, but slightly heightened. The **median rental price in Roslindale in 2022 was \$2,418**, up 12% from 2012, which would be affordable to approximately half of Roslindale households without becoming rent-burdened. Rent burden is defined as spending more than 30% of household income on rental costs.

Currently, 34% of Roslindale residents spend 35% or more of their household income on rent, indicating a **high level of rent burden**. As of 2022, Roslindale only had enough income-restricted units (1,381) to house 62% of households that may qualify. These statistics indicate a demand for more income-restricted housing in Roslindale.

Access to frequent service, high-quality transit is a key asset of Roslindale Square. **All of the households within the Roslindale Square planning area are within a ¼ mile or less of a bus stop.** Access to high frequency buses is important for the planning area, as the nearest rapid transit station at Forest Hills is more than 1 mile from the center of the planning area around Adams Park. Additionally, 73% of households are within ¼ mile of the commuter retail station at Roslindale Village. Although the travel mode for commuting to work in the Roslindale Square planning area is

predominantly by vehicular travel (56.4% of commuters), approximately 19% of commuters take public transit, and **12.4% of all households in the planning area, do not have access to a vehicle**, reflecting the need for strong transit and active transportation connections to and from Roslindale Square.

Mode of Transportation to Work in Roslindale Square  
 (Source: 2018-2022 ACS)



Current economic data indicates that Roslindale Square is a thriving commercial center, even throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and can be further supported with planning and zoning tools that encourage growth and retention of the small business economy. **Notably, there were no retail or office vacancies in Roslindale Square in Q3 2023 according to Co-Star data, indicating possible demand for additional retail space.** Median commercial rent per square foot (sf) as of Q3 2023 were \$37.56/sf, up from a steady \$24/sf the previous year.

**Consumer spending in the Roslindale Square commercial area was not significantly impacted by Covid-19.** Compared to 2019 spending levels, which represents the pre-covid time period, spending was actually higher from 2020 to 2023, especially in the food and grocery sector. The reason for this speaks not only to the successful commercial landscape of Roslindale Square, but also higher prices overall due to sharp increases in the price of goods, especially food, in the last 4 years.

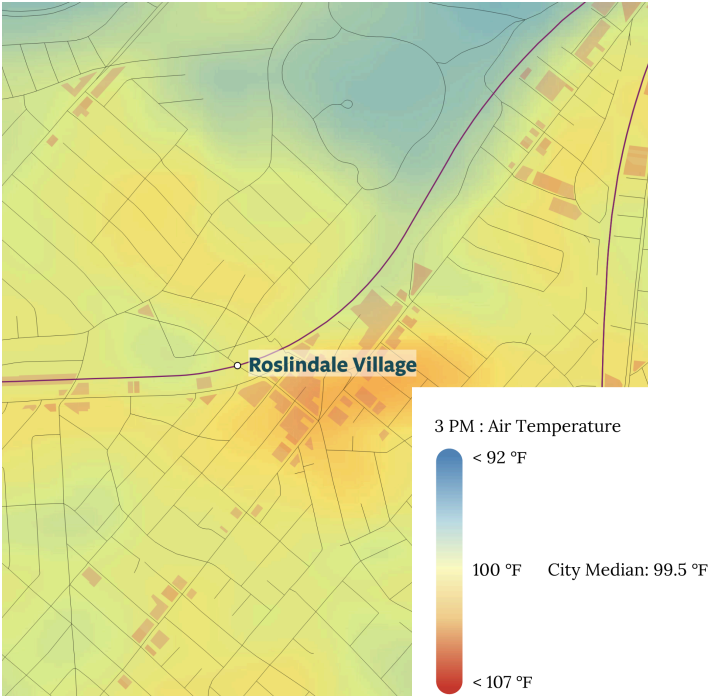
**Ratio of Consumer Spending in Roslindale Square to 2019 Levels**

	2020	2021	2022	2023*
Overall Retail Spending	106%	115%	117%	109%
Eating Places	96%	108%	116%	112%

Grocery and Food Stores	148%	129%	136%	119%
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\*For January through September 2023 compared to January through September 2019, inclusive to accommodate data availability at time of analysis Source: MasterCard, BPDA Research Division Analysis

Relatedly, access to essential retail and services such as grocery stores, health centers, and community centers is within **less than ¼ mile** for the average household in the Roslindale Square planning area. While this distance is walkable for many individuals, the ambient conditions in the planning area indicate heightened levels of Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect that may limit if and how far one is able to walk to reach these and other essential goods and services. The map to the right depicts the average ambient temperature in Roslindale Square at 3 pm during a modeled heat wave, showing a **much hotter ambient temperature in the center of Roslindale Square compared to the City median**.



## ZONING CONTEXT

Zoning for Roslindale Square is regulated as part of the Roslindale Neighborhood District, Article 67 in the Boston Zoning Code. A range of zoning sub districts and other regulations are found throughout the neighborhood, but Roslindale Square is zoned for commercial uses. The Community Commercial 1 & 2 (CC-1 and CC-2) and Neighborhood Shopping (NS) subdistricts encourage goods and services for the larger neighborhood, as depicted in the image of Roslindale Square businesses to the right. The areas surrounding the commercial heart of Roslindale Square are primarily zoned for lower-scale 1-, 2-, and 3-family residential uses. These subdistricts include 2F-5000 and 3F-4000. The prefix (2F- or 3F-) indicates the predominant type of housing allowed in these subdistricts, either



Roslindale Square businesses



2-family or 3-family, and the suffix (5000 or 4000) indicates the minimum lot area per dwelling unit on a parcel.

Although many residential uses surrounding Roslindale Square are low-density, single- to 3-family structures, several residential parcels are non-conforming with zoning requirements. As demonstrated in the chart, 56.8% of parcels do not conform with Zoning Code requirements for the number of units allowed on a parcel of land. 83.5% of parcels are nonconforming with Floor Area Ratio (FAR) regulations and 25% of parcels are nonconforming with the lot size regulations permitted by zoning. These numbers highlight the critical need for updated planning and zoning in

the Roslindale Square Planning Area through Squares + Streets that allows what is existing by-right and allows for additional growth where appropriate.

There are also zoning overlays that cover Roslindale Square, including a Neighborhood Design Overlay District (NDOD), which indicate a historically significant streetscape or buildings and may require special design review for new development or rehabilitations. Related to this overlay, there are historical inventoried properties by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) within Roslindale Square, which merit review by the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) in cases of significant rehabilitation or demolition.

## EXISTING PLAN REVIEW

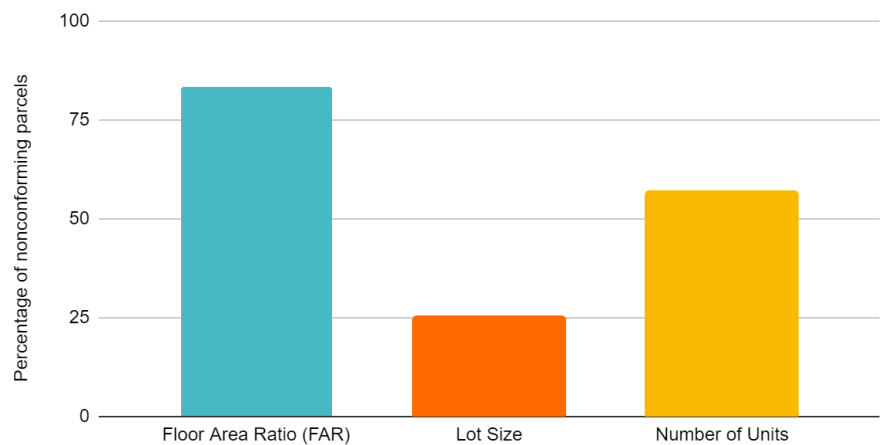
### ROSLINDALE NEIGHBORHOOD STRATEGIC PLAN (2007)

The Roslindale Neighborhood Strategic Plan, commissioned and conducted by the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), is a neighborhood plan adopted in September 2007. The plan speaks to a number of planning and zoning recommendations designed to make Roslindale an “attractive, safe, family-friendly and (economically and ethnically) diverse neighborhood.” The BPDA and Roslindale community identified the following goals to achieve this vision:

- 1) Provide a wide range of housing options (including unit sizes, building types and pricing) for new and existing residents.

### Nonconforming Parcels by Dimensional Regulation

(Source: Boston FY23 Assessing)



- 2) Preserve the historic resources and existing “village” character.
- 3) Support Roslindale Square as a vibrant commercial district that provides a wide variety of services, shopping and entertainment opportunities that have local character and also are attractive to patrons from outside the neighborhood.
- 4) Promote protection of open space resources, additional tree planting and improved connections to open spaces.
- 5) Provide improved transportation options: transit, pedestrian, bicycle and automobile.
- 6) Encourage “green” development standards.

### **SOUTHWEST BOSTON TRANSIT ACTION PLAN (ONGOING)**

The City of Boston Transportation Department is conducting a transit-focused analysis and action plan for Hyde Park, West Roxbury, and Roslindale to improve transportation options in Southwest Boston. These areas often have transit goals that align, especially when it comes to bus service. Most of the bus routes in these neighborhoods look to quickly and efficiently ferry riders to the rapid transit network or commuter rail. The City wants to ensure that getting to connections or other key neighborhood locations is as quick and seamless as possible.

### **ROSLINDALE PARKING AND CURB ACCESS PLAN (2023)**

To improve the traffic flow and function in Roslindale Square, the City of Boston Transportation Department (BTD) published the Roslindale Square Parking and Curb Access Plan in March 2023 (updated in May 2023). The Plan recommendations include the following curbside regulations:

- 15 Minute Pick-Up/Drop-Off and Delivery Zones
- Two Hour Metered Parking
- Regulating unrestricted parking
- Parking restrictions in effect Monday-Saturday 8am-6pm
- Unmetered four hour parking
- Additional ADA accessible parking

The plan recommendations are based on findings from the [Roslindale Parking Study](#) and [Roslindale Business Survey](#) which are summarized below.

### **ROSLINDALE PARKING STUDY**

The Roslindale Parking study helped us understand how much parking is available and how the parking is being used within Roslindale Square. The parking study boundaries were identified by analyzing the existing main streets district, the commercial core along Washington Street, and areas within ¼ of a mile of that commercial core. The study found that:

- Blocks within the ‘commercial core’, including portions of Belgrade Avenue, Corinth Street, Birch Street, and Washington Street were at or near 100% occupancy for much of the data collection periods;

- Drivers parking in 2-hour time-limited spaces are staying beyond 2 hours;
- Drivers are parking their vehicles for longer durations on unrestricted blocks, and on Saturdays when most parking is unrestricted;
- Most off-street parking lots had an abundance of unused parking.

### **ROSLINDALE BUSINESS SURVEY**

The Roslindale Business Survey engaged employers, business owners, employees, and commercial property owners located within the Roslindale Square. The survey found that:

- The majority of respondents were busiest during the day on both weekdays and weekends.
- More than half of respondents indicated customers spent 1 hour or less at their business, and one third indicated 30 minutes or less.
- Respondents indicated that most customers arrived to their business by car;
- The majority of respondents indicated support for adding additional parking, extending the time limit in the municipal parking lot to 4 hours or more, installing additional accessible parking spaces (ADA), and installing parking meters to better manage parking.
- The majority of respondents did not support extending parking restrictions until 8pm.
- Most respondents did not support extending parking restrictions to include Saturday, however, when asked what would improve parking and transportation access in the area, extending regulations to include Saturday was one of the top choices.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### **SQUARES + STREETS ENGAGEMENT**

A Squares + Streets Engagement Plan Template was developed to guide engagement activities for all plans. Public engagement will occur throughout the 6-9 month planning process during which the team will host both in-person and virtual activities. Some of the activities will include surveys, community walks, visioning workshops, and an on-site engagement lab.

All major documents and public meetings will offer translation services in the threshold language(s) for the study area. In addition, the project team will discuss with key area stakeholders what language(s) beyond those demonstrated through census data should be offered translation services. At this time, the two languages that will be translated for Roslindale Square are Spanish and Haitian Creole.

### **GET IN CONTACT**

We encourage you to look at the Roslindale Square web page for upcoming events and engagement activities. The kick-off public meeting for the Roslindale Square Plan will occur in mid- to late-February, with the date, time, and location to be determined. Contact the Squares + Streets project team by emailing [squaresandstreets@boston.gov](mailto:squaresandstreets@boston.gov) or by reaching out directly to the Roslindale Square Plan Project Manager, Eileen Michaud, at [eileen.michaud@boston.gov](mailto:eileen.michaud@boston.gov).