

Designing for a Diverse Boston

BOSTON *Design Vision*

DRAFT REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OCTOBER 2024





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Boston Planning Department's Urban Design Division engaged with hundreds of Bostonians about what they love most about their neighborhoods to better understand what "good design" means to the people who call Boston home.

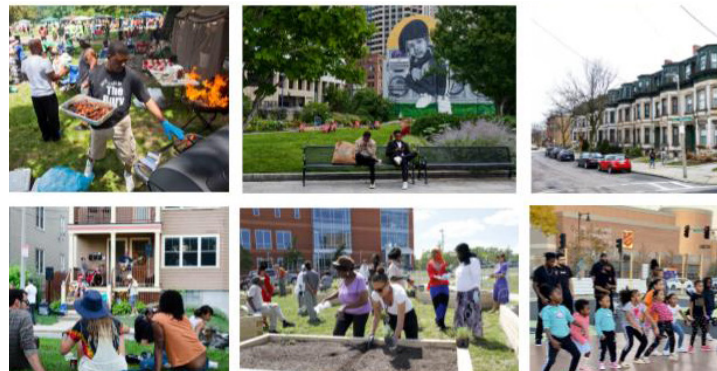
The Design Vision is a statement of the principles we commit to uphold as design professionals working on behalf of every Bostonian to elevate the quality of design in our city. These principles guide design decision-making at the City of Boston.

Urban design is all around us. At its core, urban design is the art of making places for people. It is a mix of memorable, symbolic moments and meaningful, everyday experiences.

Neighborhoods in Boston do not have equal access to good urban design. We are committed to expanding design quality across our city in a fair, transparent, and inclusive way.

We aim to shape public and private projects that will:

- relate to their unique context and reflect the diversity of Boston's communities,
- ensure the sustainability and resiliency of our communities, and
- contribute positively to the world around them.



DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The places and spaces we design are a reflection of our values.

The design principles are a set of values that guide good design outcomes for the built environment of Boston's neighborhoods.

They aim to anchor elements of the built environment that support culture, place, and identity, focusing on the ways spaces look, feel, and empower people to move through them with agency and choice. They are meant to help us build what we value, center people, and uplift diverse lived experiences in Boston.

PRINCIPLE ONE

DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

Understanding a place is more than just observing its physical characteristics.

It requires connecting with the community to understand its unique context, the lived experiences of the community, and its values. We strive to design from understanding people and place, using tools like engagement and observation. For example, the Neighborhood Character Analysis—coming soon to developers, architects, designers, and residents—was developed through this project.

PRINCIPLE THREE

DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Every project impacts and in turn, is impacted by the world around it.

We "zoom out" to understand how a project contributes to its broader context. It is important that in any design solution, we understand how sidewalks, open spaces, and streets are impacted. We design for more than just a building.

PRINCIPLE TWO

DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

The things we build today and tomorrow should ensure Boston and our communities thrive long into the future.

Green building designs focus on the use of renewable resources, cut carbon emissions and reduce environmental impacts, support people's health, and prepare our built environment for future climate challenges like extreme heat, heavy rain, and rising sea-levels.

PRINCIPLE FOUR

DESIGN THE DETAILS

Good design works to center culture and identity to inform design outcomes that anchor a sense of belonging.

Design elements provide the greatest value to residents when they relate to their everyday experiences. Details such as color, pattern, texture, and materials should be used to respond to the culture of a place.

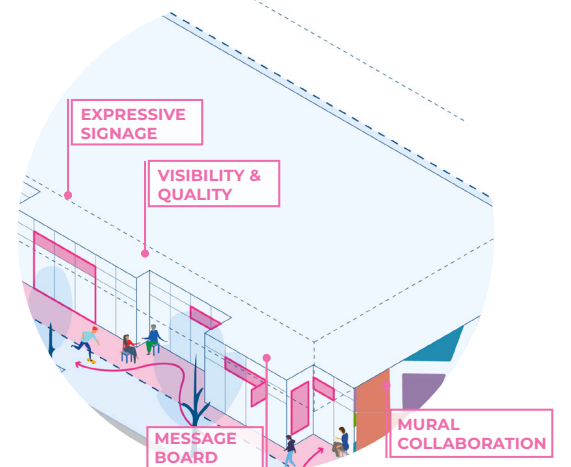
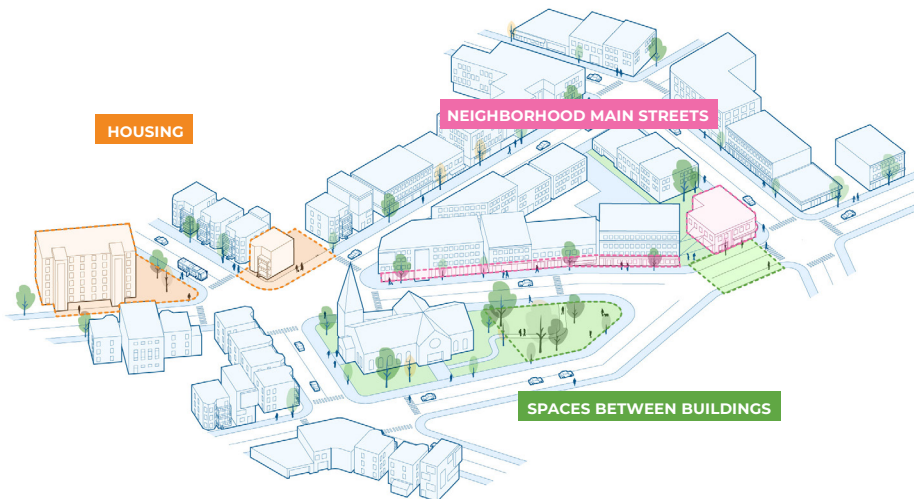
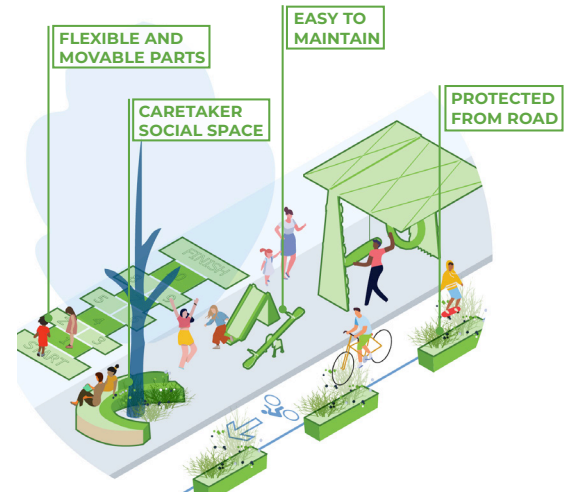


DESIGN IDEAS

The Design Vision affirms the diverse character of buildings and outdoor spaces in Boston.

Through character analysis of Boston's neighborhoods, engaging with community residents, City staff and leadership, and professional developers and designers in a design dialogue, we identified place-specific opportunities in which the Design Vision principles can contribute to good design outcomes through spaces between buildings, housing, and neighborhood main streets.

As precursors, these ideas will inform future design guidelines for housing, retail signage, and complete streets, which are currently underway. For now, they serve as inspiration for how we can re imagine our neighborhoods.



WHAT'S NEXT

The Design Vision's five year implementation roadmap is framed by project, policy, and process recommendations to address a range of city-making aspects and scales that influence the built environment.

The intent of the next steps is to bring people into conversation, communicate and operationalize design value, and collect and share information. Implementation will be grounded by the participation of community members, developers and designers, and city staff and leadership.

We see the recommendations to be of the most value to the following groups:

Community Members

- Peoples Planning & Design Academy
- Urban Design Glossary
- Neighborhood Character Analysis

Developers and Designers

- Design Principles
- Design Guidelines
- Neighborhood Character Analysis

City Staff and Leadership

- Design Review Process Reform
- Neighborhood Character Analysis
- Database of Community and Cultural Assets
- Case Study Research

2025

2030

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Key design priorities for development projects undergoing Article 80 review.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS REFORM

Reforming the design review process to provide more predictable and constructive design feedback.

DATABASE OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL ASSETS

A database to capture the landscape of assets valued by Boston's communities including privately-owned public art and important community buildings and places.

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Case study research to evaluate the impact and value of approved and constructed projects on diverse communities', quality of life.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER ANALYSIS

An analysis tool and process guidance for developers, designers, planners, and community members can develop better understanding of key defining elements of place.

URBAN DESIGN GLOSSARY

A handout that you, the community member, can take with you to your next public meeting. Language is power!

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Guidelines on designing of built environment elements such as buildings, streets, and open spaces to reflect diverse community needs and enhance quality of life.

PEOPLES PLANNING & DESIGN ACADEMY

An academy to empower Bostonians to take a more effective and active role in shaping the future of their neighborhoods.

KEY

- PROJECT
- POLICY
- PROCESS