

# CHINATOWN DRAFT ZONING AMENDMENT SUMMARY

November 2024

## BACKGROUND

The [Chinatown Rezoning Process](#) is part of the larger [PLAN: Downtown](#) comprehensive strategy. Since the late 19th century, Chinatown has been a gateway for generations of immigrants and families, and the neighborhood continues to be a hub for housing, business and employment opportunities, education and resource sharing, and social and cultural connectivity. Chinatown has also been affected by a history of urban renewal, highway construction, the adult entertainment district, and more recently, concerns of displacement.

Informed by the feedback from the community, the proposed zoning changes are aimed at recognizing Chinatown's multifaceted identity as a neighborhood. We heard that:

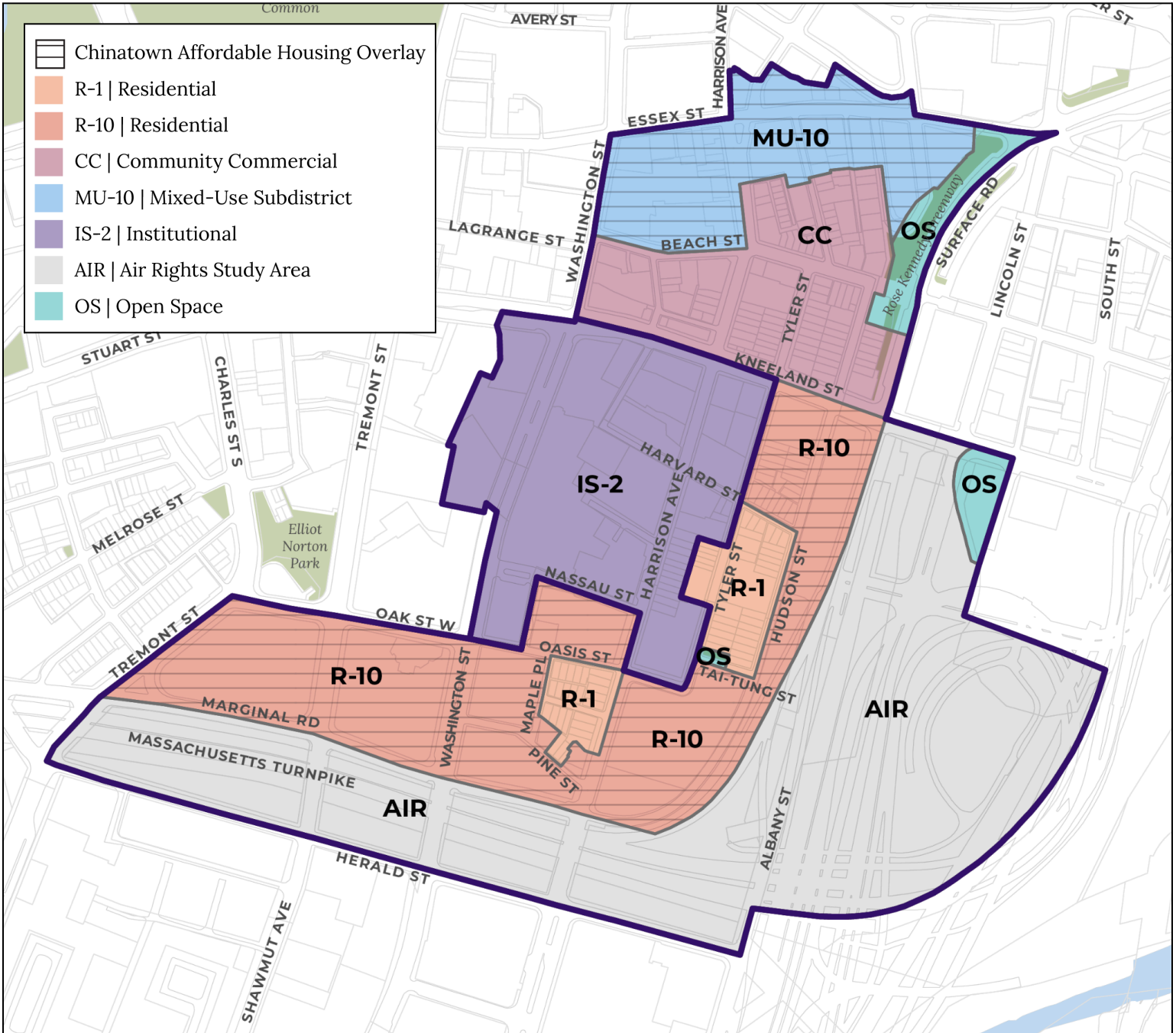
- Chinatown helps to support new immigrants, elders, low-income families and individuals;
- There is a need for more affordable housing and commercial spaces;
- Chinatown is a commercial place that needs to serve both residents and visitors for the neighborhood to stay competitive with other places that offer similar goods and services, particularly to the regional diasporic community; and
- There should be more housing opportunities for middle-income households who have strong cultural identity and affinity with Chinatown.

**Thus, the proposed new zoning promotes affordable housing, emphasizes the significance of small businesses and cultural spaces, and continues to highlight Chinatown's unique character.**



## MAP AMENDMENT SUMMARY

Map amendments are changes in the geographic location of the specific zoning rules outlined in Zoning Articles. The current Zoning Map that regulates Chinatown is “Map 1G Chinatown District.” The boundaries of different zoning areas, or zoning “subdistricts”, are shown on this map and refer back to Chinatown’s Article 43. The official Zoning Maps contain a lot of information and may be difficult to read, so a simplified version is available below:



## NEW ZONING SUBDISTRICTS

### FOR ALL SUBDISTRICTS

Zoning in Chinatown currently only regulates building dimensions by Height in Feet and Floor Area Ratio (FAR), a ratio of the building square footage compared to the size of the property. **New dimensional regulations will make future building construction more predictable than they are today.** New metrics include: rear, side, and front yard minimums; maximum building lot coverage; minimum permeable area of lot; and several others.

Chinatown's existing land uses are grouped into broad categories, which leads to detailed and often confusing footnotes and exceptions. **New land uses and definitions for those land uses help to clarify ambiguous categories and explicitly include new land uses to make permitting easier, especially for small businesses.** Some land uses also have different size categories, which can encourage small business spaces and limit larger, outsized, and impactful land uses.

### R-1 | RESIDENTIAL

R-1 is mapped in the historic row house areas of the neighborhood, including the Johnny Court area and between Tyler Street and Hudson Street. The R-1 Subdistrict downzones existing row house areas areas to protect low-rise, small-scale residential properties that are historically and culturally significant.

#### Land Use Highlights

- Maximum of 14 dwelling units
- Small commercial uses conditionally allowed on the ground floor

#### Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- Maximum height reduced from 80 feet to 45 feet
- Rear yard minimums at 10' to allow for some small additions

### R-10 | RESIDENTIAL

R-10 is mapped along the southern and eastern portions of the neighborhood where there are currently larger apartment buildings along Hudson Street and between Oak Street and Marginal Road. The R-10 Subdistrict reflects the higher-density residential areas of the neighborhood, including recent developments, and includes a height bonus for affordable housing developments.



### Land Use Highlights

- Any number of residential units are allowed
- Civic uses, like community centers, and social clubs are allowed
- Small commercial spaces and grocery stores allowed on the ground floor of buildings

### Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- Requiring a minimum amount of outdoor amenity space for residents and visitors
- Requiring a minimum area of the lot to be permeable surfaces that can let water filter through the ground and encourage more green space
- Chinatown Affordable Housing Overlay lets Affordable Housing Projects build to 350'
- Maximum building height of 150' for all other buildings

## **CC | COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL**

CC is mapped in the heart of Chinatown's commercial area, primarily along Tyler Street, Hudson Street, Beach Street, and Harrison Ave. The CC Subdistrict preserves the small-scale nature of this area and sets regulations to encourage similar-looking buildings.

### Land Use Highlights

- Commercial uses allowed on all floors of buildings
- Residential uses are allowed on upper floors, but require case-by-case approval when located on the ground floor
- Larger commercial uses like large retail and large service establishments require case-by-case approval
- Small hotels require case-by-case approval

### Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- Higher maximum lot coverage to recognize existing patterns of buildings
- Smaller building floor plates to maintain small-scale character
- No changes to maximum building height; maximum set to current height limit of 80 feet



## **MU-10 | MIXED-USE**

The MU-10 Subdistrict is a growth area for Chinatown as a neighborhood and cultural tourism destination, centered on Essex Street.

### Land Use Highlights

- 9+ residential units allowed; buildings with less than 9 units require case-by-case approval
- Commercial and tourism-related uses (like hotels and medium-scale entertainment/events) are allowed
- Research labs forbidden

### Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- Chinatown Affordable Housing Overlay lets Affordable Housing Projects build to 350'
- Maximum building height of 150' for all other buildings
- Buildings are able to take up a large amount of space on their lots, but need to have outdoor amenity space on the ground floors like plazas, outdoor dining, and small parks

## **IS-2 | INSTITUTIONAL**

IS-2 is a new institutional subdistrict that best aligns with medical institutions; it is established as a citywide district, meaning it can be applied in other places outside of Chinatown. This serves as an update to the existing institutional district and is mapped under the Tufts IMP area.

### Land Use Highlights

- Higher education and health care uses are allowed
- Restaurants, small grocery stores, retail stores, and service establishments allowed as they are supportive uses to institutions
- Hotels and small/medium offices are conditionally allowed; these are often supportive to institutions, but require additional review
- Residential uses are forbidden

### Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- High building lot coverage maximum to affirm urban setting and the built form of medical institutions like Tufts



- Floor Area Ratio maximum set to 4, which is lower than most of the surrounding area and the institutions themselves

## **AIR | AIR RIGHTS STUDY AREA**

The AIR subdistrict covers parts of the highway and the tangle of on- and off-ramps; regulations here are the same as the neighboring R-10, to help stitch together both sides of the highway. Planned Development Areas (PDAs) are allowed here, because projects over major infrastructure, particularly when not located on terra firma, require new parcelization and new infrastructure best accommodated in a PDA.,

## **OTHER CHANGES**

### **ARTICLE 43: CHINATOWN NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT**

Changing the name from “Chinatown District” to “Chinatown Neighborhood District.”

Removing the Adult Entertainment District from the Chinatown Neighborhood District because there are no adult entertainment establishments here today and they are better situated in other parts of Downtown.

### **ARTICLE 2: DEFINITIONS**

Adding a definition for “Affordable Housing Project”, to be applied for the Chinatown Affordable Housing Overlay.

### **ARTICLE 23: OFF-STREET PARKING**

Stating that there are no minimum parking requirements for projects in Chinatown; projects are still welcome to provide parking, provided they comply with the Parking Freeze and are subject to the Restricted Parking District.

### **ARTICLE 33: OPEN SPACE SUBDISTRICTS**

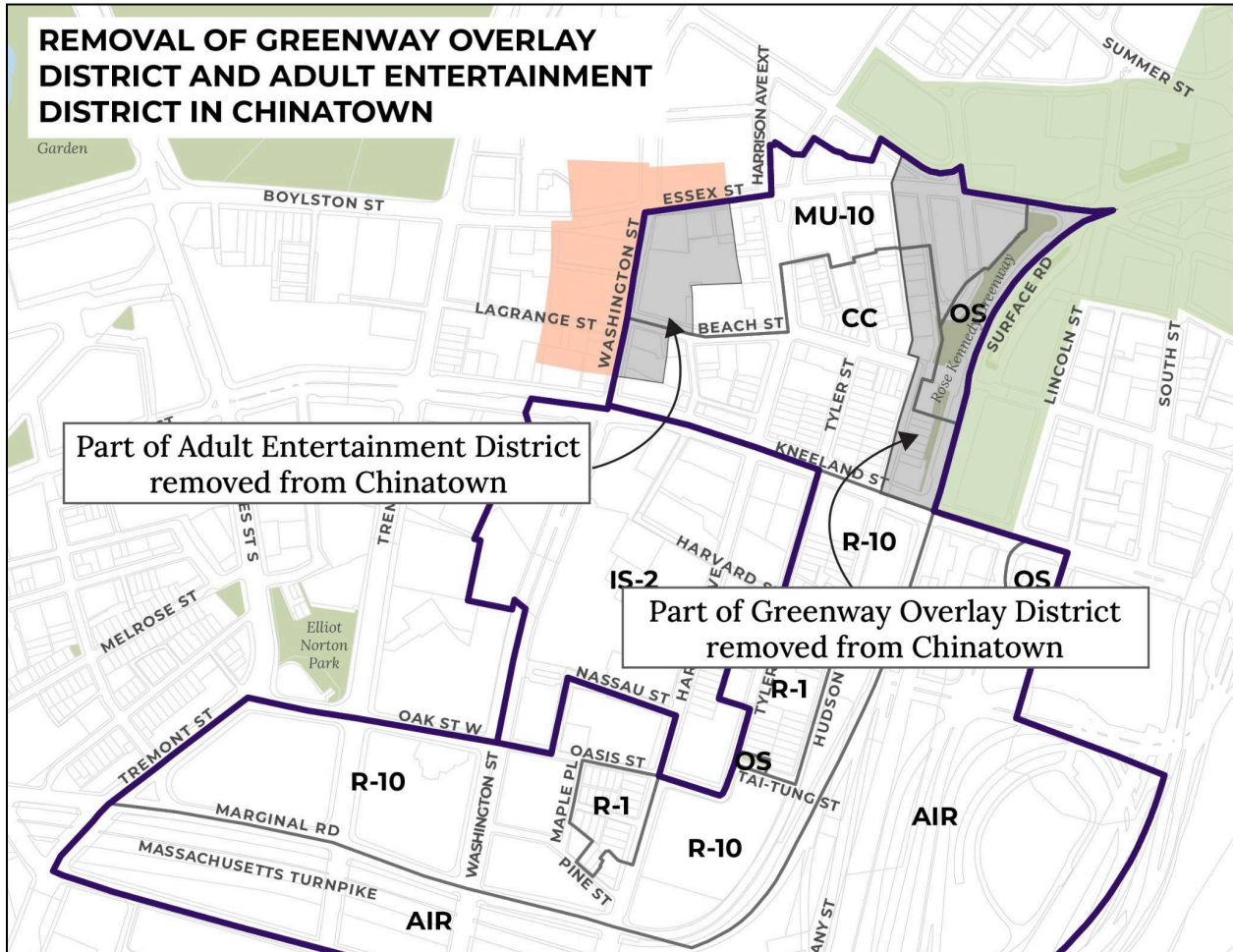
Designating the Gateway Park and Expansion Area, Pagoda Park, and Tai Tung Park as Open Space Subdistricts within Article 33, rather than within the Chinatown Neighborhood Article.

### **ARTICLE 49A: GREENWAY OVERLAY DISTRICT**

Removing the Greenway Overlay District from Chinatown, which covers portions of the Rose Kennedy Greenway. The Greenway Overlay District is intended to



encourage activated public realm surrounding the greenway and encourage land uses that contribute positively to the greenway. The SKY-1 and CC subdistricts proposed for the area encourage active ground floor uses, and any project that reaches an impactful scale would go through design review in the Article 80 process that effectively reviews projects for compatibility with the greenway.



## COMPONENTS OF THE TEXT AMENDMENT

Text amendments are changes in the written text of the Zoning Code that become new or updated rules for land use and development. The current Zoning Article that regulates Chinatown is Article 43. Article 43 is the primary Zoning Article with proposed changes, but other Zoning Articles also need to be updated to ensure consistency in cross-references and definitions. Brief summary of each proposed Article:

### Substantial Changes:

Article 43: Chinatown Neighborhood Article (replacing existing Article 43) including new zoning subdistricts, dimensional regulations, and a new Chinatown Affordable Housing Overlay.

Article 34: New Institutional District Article that includes a new subdistrict to be mapped in institutional areas of Chinatown.

Article 8: Regulation of Uses Article that holds the land use allowances for each Chinatown Subdistrict and the new Institutional District.

### Supportive Changes

Article 2: Definitions Article that holds definitions referenced throughout the Zoning Code.

Article 3: Establishment of Zoning Districts Article.

Article 23: Off-Street Parking Article that regulates parking requirements.

Article 33: Open Space Subdistricts Article that designates some open spaces.

Article 49A: Greenway Overlay District Article that sets regulations for where the overlay district is mapped.

