

January, 2024

# Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment



**boston planning &  
development agency**



**utile**



**Allston Brighton**  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

**RIVERA ● ● ●**  
**CONSULTING INC**

# Acknowledgments

The Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment is the result of a collaborative effort between the dedicated members of the Allston-Brighton community, City and State offices and departments, and Boston Planning & Development Agency staff. This study would not be possible without their generous contribution of time and insight.

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## The Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA)

The Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) is the planning and economic development agency for the City of Boston. The BPDA plans and guides inclusive growth in our city—creating opportunities for everyone to live, work and connect. Through our future-focused, citywide lens, we engage communities, implement new solutions, partner for greater impact and track progress.

The information provided in this report is the best available at the time of its publication.

All or partial use of this report must be cited as "Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment, 2024, Boston Planning & Development Agency."

For more information about the Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment please visit <https://www.bostonplans.org/planning/planning-initiatives/allston-brighton-needs-assessment>

# Letter from the Chief of Planning

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Dear Neighbor,

The Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) is pleased to share with you the Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment Report. This Report is the result of ten months of research and engagement in uplifting and assessing the community's assets and needs across the neighborhoods of Allston and Brighton. The Needs Assessment began as a community request put forward by the Harvard Allston Task Force, and involved deep engagement with community members, community-based organizations, institutions, and City of Boston service providers. Documented within are the results of analyzing thousands of generously offered comments, hours of comprehensive interviews, and survey-informed research describing the rich spatial, planning, and demographic characteristics of Allston-Brighton.

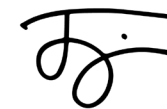
The vibrant community of Allston-Brighton is home to a diverse mix of longtime residents, students, small businesses, large institutions, and tireless advocates. This report builds on the narrative legacy of Allston-Brighton as a welcoming place for all with immigrant owned businesses, some of the world's most prestigious institutions, beautiful natural environments along the Charles River, and a legacy of affordable spaces to live, work, and create. This report identifies the gaps that do exist today, and how future development in Allston-Brighton provides significant opportunity if we work together to build partnerships across those gaps. These opportunities include: increased housing, accessible public outdoor spaces, cultural food providers, convenient transportation, improved elementary schools, institutional research opportunities, arts programming, and cultural gatherings for all ages.

This report will be a crucial tool in describing, advocating, and planning for an inclusive future in Allston-Brighton. Within, you will find extensive explorations of what makes Allston-Brighton unique, including emphasis on improving housing access and affordability; the strong network of well-connected and coordinated community organizations supporting food access and other needs; further focus in creating reliable transit solutions for seniors and youth; opportunities for partnership with large education institutions; and the need for investment in spaces of cultural exchange and community wellbeing that emphasize the diversity of Allston-Brighton. The narratives, analysis, and recommendations in this report provide a launching point for a comprehensive community plan.

Together, we will carry forward the community voices from the Needs Assessment and partner with residents, commuters, developers, institutions, and other stakeholders to shape the policies, zoning, and programming recommendations of the forthcoming Allston-Brighton Community Plan.

Thank you to the community members and service providers that dedicated their time to make this report possible.

Sincerely,



Arthur Jemison, Chief of Planning

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# 01. Introduction

Project Overview

Project Goals

Project Timeline and Engagement Activities

# Introduction

**The Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment (Needs Assessment) combines existing conditions analysis, prior neighborhood planning initiatives, a community-based quantitative survey, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and in-person resident community mapping exercises.**

These approaches are rooted in the project Needs Analysis Topic Table that focuses on the three primary categories of Basic Need, Access to Opportunity, and Community alongside 13 distinct subtopics to identify primary resident and community service provision needs. From that breadth of analysis and engagement, recommendations were formed to support upcoming planning, collaboration, and community benefit identification needs between the Boston Planning & Development Agency (“BPDA”), the City of Boston (“City”), residents, service providers, and neighborhood institutions. This report contains the following sections that are intended to be utilized in future planning efforts and community-based engagement opportunities across these constituencies:

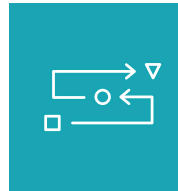


**Introduction:** An overview of the purpose and design of the assessment, including the primary Needs Analysis Topics, primary project goals, and the research and engagement activities and outputs. This is a good place to start if you are less familiar with the Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment process or want to understand the steps in more detail.



**Executive Summary:** A few findings and recommendations that are central to the Needs Assessment contained in a few short pages. Start here if you need a quick reference guide for what emerged out of the Needs Assessment, but don't forget to explore and reference the Topic Findings and Recommendations sections for a much more thorough description of the needs, assets, and recommendations.

**Accessibility:** In addition to the document including interactive links and language accessible to assistive readers, a text version of the document will be available once adopted on the project website at the following link. <https://www.bostonplans.org/planning/planning-initiatives/allston-brighton-needs-assessment>



**Methodology:** An overview of the quantitative and qualitative research approach to the Needs Assessment. This section explains how each task was completed in detail, including existing conditions and demographic analysis, service provider interviews, city agency and institutional focus groups, and the broader project community engagement strategy. There is also information about the survey and who responded to it.



**Topic Findings: Identifying Community Needs:** All elements of resident and small-scale service provision insight and analysis captured throughout the Needs Assessment. Use this section to understand and uplift community identified needs and assets across the three categories of Basic Needs, Access to Opportunity, and Community. Use this section in coordination with Recommendations to provide additional depth and nuance.



**Topic Findings: Large-scale Service Providers:** An overview of the qualitative research and analysis captured through four large group focus groups with key City of Boston offices and departments as well as Harvard University. This section is organized around the four core topics of programming, community engagement, collaboration, and resources and can be used together with the other sections to promote partnership.



**Recommendations:** Core recommendations centered around Basic Needs, Access to Opportunity, and Community, including a prioritization evaluation rubric and recommendations for collaboration touchpoints amongst city agencies, residents, service providers, and institutions. Use this section to build collaborative approaches to addressing current and emerging gaps in Allston-Brighton. Reference Topic Findings sections for detail.



**Conclusion and Action Steps:** Provides a summary and overview of lessons learned from the Needs Assessment community engagement processes. Use the frameworks and principles in this section to help shape equitable engagement and collaboration with City staff and community advocates in future Allston-Brighton planning initiatives.



**Appendix:** A separate document that includes reference materials, including a glossary of commonly used acronyms, additional data and analysis, facilitation guides and toolkits, and evaluation tables.

# Project Overview

## Central to the design of this assessment was the centering of direct, community-resident lived experience regarding assets and needs in the built environment of the neighborhood.

The Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment RFP emerged as part of the Harvard University Enterprise Research Campus (ERC) mitigation package. The Harvard Allston Task Force—the advisory body for Harvard’s institutional development—explicitly requested an Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment to identify community needs in response to this recent development. In particular, the Task Force posed the following guiding question listed in the project’s Request for Proposal: “Where are the services lacking, what infrastructure needs repair and improvement? Why are people hurting? Research and obtain valid and reliable community insight on the needs of our residents.”

The project team of Archipelago Strategies Group (ASG), Utile Design, Rivera Consulting (RC), and the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation (ABCDC), collectively known as AURA, designed multiple layers of mixed-method analysis and external community engagement to unearth both quantitative and qualitative lessons that capture both community insight and direct resident need. This approach and analysis are rooted in the three primary “Needs Analysis” topics of Basic Needs, Access to Opportunity, and Community. Within these three primary categories lie thirteen subtopics that aim to capture the areas of service provision and primary public realm that are critical to the everyday lives of Allston-Brighton residents.

**FIGURE 1**  
NEEDS ANALYSIS TOPICS TABLE

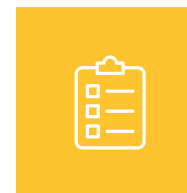
Category	Analysis Topics	Description
Basic Needs	Financial Security	Household salary, expenses, savings, etc. This topic serves as the basis to understand other needs.
	Food Security	Availability of food, access to food, and quality/nutrition of food.
	Safety	May include pedestrian safety, perception of crime, lighting in the public realm, etc.
	Health	Impacts of the built environment only, such as pollution, access to athletic facilities, etc.
Access to Opportunity	Housing	Supply and demand of housing. Housing type, cost, development pipeline, and projection. Displacement and resilience threats. Impact of planning and development.
	Education	Public and private schools. School seats availability and projected demand. School performances.
	Employment / Childcare	Employment rate, industry, job security, availability of childcare, trends, opportunities, and weaknesses. Local and minority owned businesses.
Community	Mobility	Transportation (vehicular + public), pedestrian connectivity, bike network, etc.
	Open Space	Open space network demand. Needed open space quantity and types.
	Arts and Culture	Support for artists, spaces for artist performance and display, accessibility of cultural space.
	Resilience	Climate resilience - heat, flooding, sustainability
	Civic Engagement and Social Cohesion	Participation in community organization, voting participation rate, etc. Community othering and belonging.
	Human Services	Ranges from laundromats and tailors (retail services accessibility), to Boston Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Boston Fire Department (BFD) coverage, and social worker availability.

**As an early foundational aspect of service provision gap identification, and community-rooted recommendations for the closure of those gaps, the project team conducted eleven in-depth interviews with the leadership of community-based organizations.**

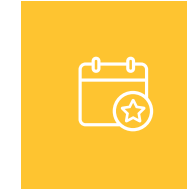
The community-based organizations (CBOs) interviewed serve priority equity residents throughout Allston-Brighton (seniors, low-income residents, youth, the underhoused, veterans, immigrant communities, English Language Learners, and residents with an increased threat to experience service provision gaps due to existing social determinants of health). This approach was complemented by additional demographic and socioeconomic analysis that built upon past neighborhood studies and existing data analysis provided by the BPDA. This analysis included mapping exercise analyses focused on the existing conditions of K-12 education, demographic realities, household income, and development/housing patterns.

Based on these data-informed, grassroots service provider findings, this initial assessment developed a research and community engagement framework to guide the techniques and strategies of broader resident and larger-scale service provision insight and feedback. This included the design of an equity engagement framework and project logic model that stated the key activities and outcomes associated with the overriding goals of resident engagement and participatory neighborhood planning within this assessment. This approach combined past findings to further refine the geographic targeting of neighborhood outreach to ensure a diverse chorus of voices would interact with outreach tools as part of this project. Those tools included multiple, mixed method approaches to further identifying community needs.

**FIGURE 2**  
NEEDS ASSESSMENT OUTREACH TOOLS



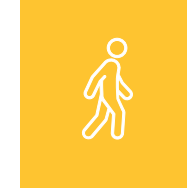
**A Survey** designed for residents and service populations in A-B based on the project's Needs Analysis Table framework.



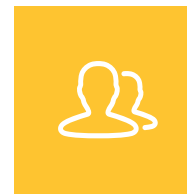
**Events** for the AURA Needs Assessment at places of neighborhood gathering to provide a public forum, share about the project, and gather feedback.



**Targeted neighborhood door-to-door outreach** in key sub neighborhoods most reliant upon municipal and nonprofit service provision to encourage survey participation.



**Community Walk** with residents over two hours including qualitative note taking by staff to support additional forms of data collection.



**Attendance at existing community events** utilizing both the survey and qualitative mapping exercises to capture resident voices.



**Interviews** with the leadership of community-based organizations focused in Allston-Brighton using guided, in-depth conversation.



**Tabling** at Boston Housing Authority sites, senior centers, and community centers with the goal of easing access to project survey participation.



**Focus Groups** with City offices and departments as well as Harvard University following the earlier interviews to supplement the findings.



# Project Goals

**At the outset, the BPDA identified three overriding project goals which were further refined by the project team throughout the Needs Assessment:**

**Prepare for the upcoming Allston-Brighton Neighborhood Plan.**

As the leaders of service and community-based organizations, it is critical that community partners shape the priorities of this upcoming neighborhood planning process. The ability to capture and prioritize these experiences and insights as part of research for this Needs Assessment was an important approach to long-term neighborhood development and resource allocation for municipal programs and community organization funding strategies. The analysis that follows should serve the Needs Assessment itself and be relied upon as a source of insight for further planning and collaboration with community-based organizations and residents in any future planning effort.

**Empower the community to make mitigation or community benefits requests from development projects.**

As part of this Needs Assessment process, community-based organizational leadership, BPDA staff, institutional voices, and residents identified strengths (assets), gaps (barriers), and potential future solutions (recommendations) for community resident needs. Many of these directly tie to the current impact of ongoing community development and the ways in which past and current development approaches have shaped the lived experience and built environment of residents. Several challenges and



Greetings from Allston Village by the Mayor's Mural Crew (Photo by Gregg Bernstein), <https://www.zone3westernave.com/project/favorite-murals-allston/>

recommendations identified in this report are pertinent for future mitigation and community benefit agreements for ongoing and future development projects.

**Provide City offices and departments and local non-profits with analysis to inform their decision-making.**

It is the goal of this analysis to capture the current strengths, needs, and opportunities of local non-profit entities and a multitude of City of Boston government offices and departments that address issues of Basic Needs, Access to Opportunity, Community, and Engagement within Allston-Brighton. Because of this holistic approach, findings and analysis exist upon a “ladder of engagement” that includes needs and recommendations regarding multiple intersectional municipal government agencies, non-profit entities, and community residents. The core recommendations provided within this analysis pull from all phases of this engagement that occurred across this Needs Assessment and the pairing of those recommendations with City of Boston agency departments best suited to either address those recommendations or collaborate on them with the BPDA.

# Project Timeline and Engagement Activities

**FIGURE 3**  
PROJECT TIMELINE



## Phase One: Service Provisions, Community Needs and Gap Analysis (April 2023 - July 2023)

### Primary Activities:

- Reviewed collateral and historical information provided by the BPDA and City of Boston, including prior and relevant neighborhood planning initiatives.
- Completed GIS neighborhood mapping analysis of K-12 education, demographic realities, household income, and development/housing patterns.
- Developed Task 2 Service Gap Analysis framework, including qualitative survey interview tool employed with small-scale grassroots service providers.
- Conducted in-depth interviews with small-scale grassroots service providers that addressed relevant topics and subtopics identified in the project Needs Analysis Table (figure 1).
- Completed qualitative coding analysis to inform the identified assets, barriers, and recommendations supplied by small-scale grassroots service providers.

### Primary Outputs:

- Existing conditions demographic and socioeconomic analysis.
- Qualitative asset-mapping service provision gap analysis rooted in 11 small-scale grassroots service provider interviews and existing conditions analysis.
- Codified goals and approaches for Engagement Strategy Framework, including techniques and tactics of employed outreach.
- Identification of key early themes, sub-neighborhoods of focus (see table 4 and figure 7 in the Methodology section), and priority equity users of municipal and nonprofit services to shape engagement collateral, including the project's public survey and accompanied in-person mapping exercises.

## Phase Two: AURA Community Engagement Preparation and Pilot

### Primary Activities:

- Developed a stakeholder matrix with the goal of defining broader constituencies and needs rooted in Phase One findings.
- Leveraged key relationships held within the neighborhood to expand the reach of outreach tactics, including relationship and trust building activities with small-scale service providers, grassroots neighborhood advocates, community resident leaders, and leadership at community centers, senior centers, and youth programming hubs.
- Conducted active training and capacity building approaches of neighborhood “Community Ambassadors” who served as key conduits between the project team and neighborhood residents. Community Ambassadors are residents who worked with AURA in the community to share and collect information.
- Developed and disseminated the public survey based on the project’s Needs Analysis Topics Table framework (figure 1).
- Targeted neighborhood door-to-door outreach in key sub-neighborhoods most reliant upon municipal and nonprofit service provision to encourage survey participation.
- Project team attended existing community events, pop-up tabling at primary areas of social gathering, AURA Allston-Brighton based events, and a two-hour community walk with residents.
- Conducted 4 large-group intensive focus groups that engaged with primary city agencies as well as Harvard University.

### Primary Outputs:

- Research and Engagement Framework pairing outreach tactics and activities across project tasks and workstreams.
- 863 resident survey responses, with 161 collected in-person from priority equity resident sub-neighborhoods.
- 318 qualitative post-it notes community responses collected in-person and rooted in the 13 core Needs Analysis topics (figure 1).
- Outreach materials shared with occupants of 473 units in mixed-use large-scale affordable housing properties in priority sub-neighborhoods.
- 54 events attended plus 6 organic, AURA community events.
- City offices and departments, BPDA, and institutional service provision opportunities and challenges identified via transcription and qualitative coding.



Photo of the Project Conclusion Community Meeting at the Josephine A. Fiorentino Community Center at Charlesview Residences

## Phase Three: Advancing Participatory Neighborhood Planning

### Primary Activities:

- Completed asset-mapping data analysis of all engagement data from Phase One and Phase Two.
- Analyzed qualitative, in-person resident mapping exercise insight and feedback.
- Core topic findings identified and organized centered on Needs Analysis topics and subtopics, as well as large-scale service provision and institutional priorities of Programming, Collaboration, Community Engagement, and Resource Allocation.
- Developed core recommendations to address identified community needs, organized around short and long-term priorities, interdepartmental collaboration needs, and external stakeholder collaboration strategies.

### Primary Outputs:

- Final Needs Assessment deliverable and analysis.
- Final public presentation with community stakeholders and neighborhood residents.
- Dissemination of Needs Assessment analysis to both small-scale and large-scale service providers, neighborhood advocates, community leaders, and residents.
- Use of Needs Assessment findings in upcoming BPDA Neighborhood planning process.
- Use of Needs Assessment findings in upcoming interdepartmental collaboration and policy prioritization decisions within municipal government.

## 02. **Executive Summary**

Central Findings

Key Recommendations

# Central Findings

**Central findings are prepared based on a synthesis of data collected from 5 primary research methods highlighted below, as well as secondary research done as part of the past plan review and demographic analysis of Allston-Brighton.**

**TABLE 1**  
CENTRAL FINDINGS

Method	What Did We Do?	Key Guiding Questions	Why Did We Do This?
Survey	863 responses from residents and the service population in Allston-Brighton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do people access services?</li> <li>• Which services are better utilized in the neighborhood?</li> <li>• What are the most pressing challenges?</li> </ul>	To reach a wide representative demographic and quantify assets, barriers, and needs across the resident and service population.
Engagement Events	60 community events, community spaces, project-based pop-up events attended by project team members to collect survey responses and conduct mapping exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are areas of work that the community wants the study to prioritize?</li> <li>• What are the sentiments about this assessment and planning within the neighborhood?</li> <li>• What are concerns that are not identified by the study at various stages?</li> </ul>	To attend and develop forums for the public to engage with the study and shape it while providing direct in-person insight on Needs Analysis Topics (see figure 1). To collect qualitative community responses via in-person surveys, mappings, and post-it notes rooted in the 13 Needs Analysis topics.
Small Service Provider Interviews	11 in-depth interviews with small-scale service providers in the neighborhood, including CBOs, coalitions, and advocacy organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do service providers understand key issues of their target audience?</li> <li>• What are the gaps in service delivery organizations try to fill?</li> <li>• How do different providers work together?</li> </ul>	To understand existing conditions in the neighborhood and various on-ground efforts that prove to be effective models of service delivery, especially for priority equity residents such as seniors, children, and immigrants.

Method	What Did We Do?	Key Guiding Questions	Why Did We Do This?
Large Service Provider Interviews	4 focus group discussions with large institutional service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do service gaps continue to exist in Allston-Brighton? And what is the institutional understanding of them?</li> <li>• What are systemic bottlenecks that impact service delivery?</li> <li>• What are opportunities for large service providers to collaborate with each other and smaller providers?</li> </ul>	To build a systemic lens into the study as a way of finding points of interventions likely to create extensive positive spillovers and impact.
Neighborhood Walk	A 2.5 hour walk with residents and community ambassadors covering arterial roads and small lanes from Packard's Corner to Oak Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you experience a "sense of place" in Allston-Brighton?</li> <li>• How can experiential attributes of a place inform our understanding of service provision?</li> </ul>	To uncover a more micro, experiential point of view on the service experience in the neighborhood through a more embodied approach.

# Central Findings

## 1. Housing access in the neighborhood is not only an affordability issue, but also an issue of accessing acceptable quality housing.

### Historical Information and Past Plan Review

- As of July 2020, Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation indicated that there was a waiting list of 17,000 applicants waiting for up to five years to get an affordable housing unit (ABCDC)
- The share of households that pay a rent of more than \$1500 in Allston-Brighton increased from 43.4% to 64.4% between 2014 and 2019 (2019 BostonPads, Boston Apartment Rental Market Report<sup>1</sup>).
- Average rent for a 2-bedroom unit increased more than 10% in a two-year period from 2017-2019. This was the fifth highest increase amongst 22 Boston neighborhoods (2019 Boston Apartment Rental Report).
- Housing accounts for 70% of new growth in the Boston Planning & Development Agency, Allston-Brighton Mobility Plan<sup>2</sup> (A-B Mobility Plan).

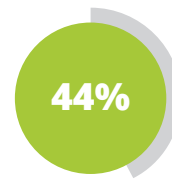
<sup>1</sup> <https://bostonpads.com/blog/boston-rental-market/2019-boston-apartment-rental-market-report/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bostonplans.org/planning/planning-initiatives/allston-brighton-mobility-plan>

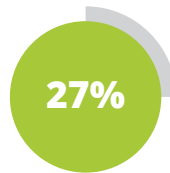
### Survey Analysis



53% of survey respondents identified housing affordability as a serious concern.



44% responded that there were "very few or no options" for affordable housing in their neighborhood.



27% responded that there were "very few or no options" for quality housing in their neighborhood.

### Qualitative Responses from Engagement Events

- 23 of the 50 responses concerning housing requested more affordable units, with some requesting caps on the production of luxury units, rent control, or increased requirements placed on developers.
- Participants promoted supply-side solutions to the housing crisis, recommending an end to parking minimums, relaxation of zoning rules, and other measures to increase housing production in the neighborhood.

### Qualitative Research with Service Providers

- Rising housing costs is viewed as an intersectional issue that impacts all other Needs Analysis topics in an outsized way. Food affordability, nutrition, access to educational services and various other factors that intersect with the primary need for housing are all impacted by a rise in the cost of housing.
- As housing development increases in the neighborhood, various interconnected services such as health services, food retail, and emergency management and public safety capacities need to adapt to a larger resident population.
- Rapid development in surrounding sub-neighborhoods is viewed as a constant threat of displacement, especially for community members who are in affordable housing units. Trust building with community becomes a bigger challenge for service providers such as the Boston Housing Authority in lieu of this threat.

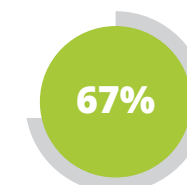
## 2. A network of well-connected and coordinated organizations is unique to Allston-Brighton and is proven to be a key asset for delivering better food security to community members.

### Existing Conditions and Past Plan Review

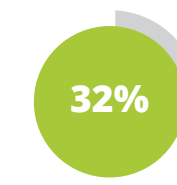
- As per The Allston Brighton Health Collaborative (ABHC), Understanding Food Access in Allston Brighton<sup>1</sup> (2020, Understanding Food Access), all 5 major grocery stores in Allston-Brighton accept SNAP/HIP vouchers as well as 9 of 12 neighborhood markets and 19 of 31 convenience stores.
- 45% of survey respondents for the 2020 ABHC Understanding Food Access said affordability was a major barrier to food access.
- 49% of respondents wanted to see more food access points, increased by 13 percentage points from the 2015 study as noted in the 2020 ABHC Understanding Food Access.

<sup>1</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yjjFdyjNHjUT0uNVZJEjqXUVBigJhp4/view>

### Survey Analysis



67% of the survey respondents used general markets and supermarkets at least once per week.



32% claimed "affordability" as a major barrier to access. Supermarkets are also the food security resource with the highest proportion of users.

### Qualitative Responses from Engagement Events

- In all 17 topic-related responses, residents felt strongly about having closer grocery stores which many referenced as too far away to access by bus or train, food pantries to supplement food needs, and more affordable groceries.
- Although several respondents remarked that Allston-Brighton has adequate food security via non-profit food services, a consistent theme has been that these programs can be inconsistently funded and only sometimes healthy.

### Qualitative Research with Service Providers

- There exists a robust and organized ecosystem of nonprofit small-scale service providers in Allston-Brighton dedicated to the access and provision of healthy and affordable food. Community initiatives such as the farmer’s market and the Brighton food pantry are viewed as critical healthy food sources and have seen an uptick in the demand for their services.
- For those that rely upon food vouchers, the combination of grocery retail and smaller community-based food options is available, however seniors and other priority resident groups require increased connectivity and culturally relevant and competent options that meet the diverse neighborhood population.

### 3. Need for reliable transit solutions is a foundational barrier that affects service delivery and service utilization, especially in accessing healthcare services and affordable food sources for seniors and other priority residents. It was also a notable concern for youth to access after-school programming as a majority of school-goers in Allston-Brighton live outside the neighborhood and are dependent upon multiple forms of public transportation.

### Existing Conditions and Past Plan Review

- In the Allston Brighton Community Survey Needs Assessment<sup>1</sup> (2008 Needs Assessment) which was focused on the development of the Harvard Master Plan for Campus Development and not the entirety of Allston-Brighton, 86% of survey respondents wanted better maintenance of streets and sidewalks and 85% wanted improvements to pedestrian safety.
- Improvements to the pedestrian crossing were proposed and planned for along the Western Avenue corridor in the A-B Mobility Plan (2021).
- 22% of real estate and property growth in the neighborhood comes from the development of labs and offices, with 7% from institutional development as described in the A-B Mobility Plan (2021).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bostonplans.org/documents/planning/downtown-neighborhood-planning/allston-brighton/allston-brighton-community-needs-research-task-for>

### Survey Analysis

Survey respondents favored personal cars as their personal transportation option when commuting within Allston-Brighton (54% of the 57 respondents that said they lived and worked in Allston-Brighton compared to 47% of the same population who walked). For commute trips to other neighborhoods in Boston or adjacent towns, the bus, and rail-based public transportation options were favored over personal cars (45.5% and 39% of a sample size of 44 respondents who said that they lived in Allston-Brighton and worked outside of Boston).

Perceived reliance on personal cars for trips within Allston-Brighton versus for traveling outside of the neighborhoods is clear when comparing survey response data with the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year estimates for Allston-Brighton. The ACS recorded that only 42% of Allston-Brighton residents used a personal car or carpool to commute, 33% used public transport (bus or rail), and 25% walked or used a non-motorized mode<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> “Zip Code Tabulation Areas” (ZCTAs) 02134, 02135



Interviews with small service providers highlighted that a pain point with public transport is often regarding reliability and the frequency or timeliness of bus transit and the habitual service disruption on the green line of the T.



Survey respondents claim that mobility is a predominant barrier in accessing childcare services within the neighborhood.

### Qualitative Responses from Engagement Events

- Mobility had the largest request from residents, from fixing potholes, better public transportation, longer walking signals, and free city parking.
- Several residents suggested expanding T services, including the creation of an ‘A’ line, increased frequency in the bus schedule, and expanded bus infrastructure. During a neighborhood walk with residents, many pointed out that main streets such as North Beacon Street and Allston Street have bus lanes but not enough bus shelters.
- The top three requests were for lower/free public transit costs along with a change in the stops (too long of a walk for many residents), an increase in the amount and the safety of bike lanes, and better pedestrian crossings.

### Qualitative Research with Service Providers

- For priority equity users such as seniors, children, and physically impaired residents, mobility and transit accessibility remain a primary challenge in navigating Allston-Brighton. Pedestrian crossings are often damaged with cracks or potholes that make them inaccessible to wheelchairs. Access to green line stations along Commonwealth Avenue present challenging pedestrian connectivity and safety issues, such as the intersection featuring the Warren Street station.
- Several recommendations by service providers point to new service delivery solutions such as a mobile van — similar to existing solutions such as Fresh Truck — but for essential resources like medicines or a point pick-up service for seniors to access the Brighton food pantry and healthcare services.

## 4. There is a plethora of opportunities to connect large-scale service providers in the education industry with small-scale service providers and schools.

### Existing Conditions and Past Plan Review

- Harvard’s Enterprise Research Campus (ERC) is located on the south of Western Ave. Phase A is a 900,000 sq ft mixed use development project. The Harvard ERC District and Greenway Plan<sup>1</sup>, a BPDA initiative, will plan the area outside of Phase A and B.
- Similar to the sentiments in this Needs Assessment, the 2008 Needs Assessment recorded that 82% of respondents wanted to prioritize high school student programming to connect students to accessible economic opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bostonplans.org/planning/planning-initiatives/harvard-erc-district-and-greenway-plan>

### Survey Analysis



Survey responses show high school education is the most frequented education service amongst residents. After school programs show lower frequency of use, yet they are of significant importance to families.

### Qualitative Responses from Engagement Events

- The biggest request by far (13 out of 26 responses) was for ESOL classes (English for Speakers of Other Languages). According to the responses, there are not enough classes to meet demand in the community, with residents struggling to source and apply to the ESOL courses that do exist.

- Several responses focused on adult education, requesting more opportunities for adult education to increase their skills or complete their basic education.
- To provide services for children within a half-hour commute, respondents suggested investing in high quality and affordable after school programs, youth sports, and programs for teens, as well as improving existing K-12 facilities for local families.

### Qualitative Research with Service Providers

- Partnerships developed amongst small scale service providers and larger scale institutions in the realm of youth and adult education is likely the strongest example of collaboration found within the neighborhood.
- Youth travel from both within Allston-Brighton and outside the neighborhood to access various programs and employment pathways available in Allston-Brighton, but do not have reliable transportation options to travel between resources, especially to after school programs.
- These partnerships with higher education universities and labs however need to become more sustainable with an equal amount of investment in existing school infrastructure such as technological infrastructure and laboratories so that learning can be more applicable.
- There is a big opportunity within Allston-Brighton to strengthen the role of youth workers in the neighborhood, connecting high school students with mentors from local institutions. The goal of engagements in this area is to connect youth to more accessible employment pathways.

## 5. In a neighborhood going through a heightened stage of development, there is persistent and rapid change in the built environment and the population residing in the area. With the repurposing of cultural hubs such as the Jackson Mann, there is a need for the neighborhood plan to envision spaces of cultural exchange and community wellbeing that also emphasize the diversity of Allston-Brighton in the programming.

### Existing Conditions and Past Plan Review

- The 2021 Placekeeping report highlights a key concern that development pressures and changes to the demographics in the neighborhood are accelerating a loss of artists and creative spaces in the neighborhood.
- While new developments in Allston Village and Union Square include public art and creative space elements, similar benefits are not provide in lower income sub-neighborhoods such as Packard’s Corner and Aberdeen.



### Survey Analysis



About half of the survey respondents use parks and recreation spaces at least once per week.



Bars, restaurants, and entertainment spaces are the most frequented of all the categories.



Civic spaces and squares see lower frequency of use with respondents claiming that they mostly use these spaces once a month.

### Qualitative Responses from Engagement Events

- Community members felt that there needed to be more diverse representation and more engagement with community members. Specifically, around development and providing a safe space for community members to express their feelings (through protest or community meetings).
- 11 of the 24 community responses expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of open space, whether in the form of dedicated parks or green space in general.
- Two notes singled out Ringer Park as a location that needs improvement in design and general cleanliness, which is feedback that has been common in the verbal conversations that the outreach team has had with residents throughout the Needs Assessment process.

### Qualitative Research with Service Providers

- Community centers serve as important sites for ideation of new programmatic efforts and the implementation of existing programs that ensure neighborhood progress.
- While prevalent in the neighborhood, irregular maintenance and surrounding construction has made open space infrastructure less accessible for residents in high-development areas of the neighborhood.
- The expansion of space at the Brighton Library, increased access to spaces within Harvard University, and service providers such as the Boston Housing Authority opening their office space to community members present several opportunities to provide space and other resources to community members and integrate new third spaces in the neighborhood.

# Key Recommendations

**Please refer to the Recommendations section on page 119 of this document for a complete list and description of recommendations. A summary of key recommendations is presented here including the following information and metrics.**

**TABLE 2**  
RECOMMENDATION METRICS

Project Goals	Priority Level	Impact	Engagement Points	Dependencies	Key Agencies
Neighborhood Planning Inter-agency Planning and Service Delivery Community Benefits and Mitigation	High, Moderate and Low priority based on project evaluation rubric	Quantified based on demographic analysis or qualified based on contextual qualitative data collection	What were the project engagement points the recommendation was referred from?	The level of structural dependencies that would influence implementation	City offices and departments and large stakeholders who may hold the expertise and resources to drive implementation <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the Appendix for a glossary of acronyms

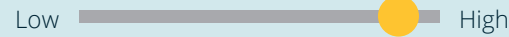
## BASIC NEEDS RECOMMENDATIONS

### HOUSING

#### Community Benefits & Mitigations

There is a scope to reallocate and repurpose linkage funds to fuel affordable housing development. Charlesview interviewees anecdotally referenced prior analysis of the utilization of linkage funds in A-B.

#### Priority



#### Impact

Immediate impact on current low-income groups

#### Dependencies

High - Requires a policy level shift and buy-in from multiple city agencies

#### Engagement Points

Small and Large Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

BPDA + Boston Housing Authority (BHA) + Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH)

#### Community Benefits & Mitigations

Streamlining the process a developer goes through for accepting and facilitating housing voucher utilization, including as part of IDP when applicable.

#### Priority



#### Impact

Estimated 20,300 residents below poverty line

#### Dependencies

Low-Moderate - Already a key consideration across departments

#### Engagement Points

All Engagement Touch-points

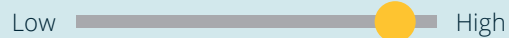
#### Key Agencies

BPDA + BHA + MOH + Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion (OEI)

#### Inter-agency Planning & Service Delivery

Activate communication channels with developers, advocacy organizations, and residents to explain that IDP units are available to a broad range of households.

#### Priority



#### Impact

Estimated 20,300 residents below poverty line

#### Dependencies

Since A-B has a lower average income than other neighborhoods, changes will impact a wider population

#### Engagement Points

Small Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

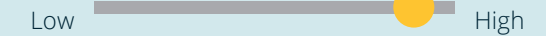
BPDA + BHA + MOH

### FOOD SECURITY

#### Neighborhood Planning

Expanding ground level retail locations for small food service providers that are culturally competent and able to accept food vouchers

#### Priority



#### Impact

Sub-neighborhoods such as Aberdeen, Brighton Center, Oak Square, which have institutionally owned land will reach populations in need of utilizing higher public assistance

#### Dependencies

Low - Moderate - A known priority area for years in the neighborhood, neighborhood planning process can accelerate service provision

#### Engagement Points

All Engagement Touchpoints

#### Key Agencies

Department of Small Business Development, in OEI + Mayor's Office of Food Justice (OFJ) + BPDA

#### Community Benefits & Mitigation

Reinvest in small-scale food coupon programs that are managed and run by local community centers that hold the institutional partnerships to manage low-budget high-impact programs.

#### Priority



#### Impact

Use of food security public assistance is prevalent, service providers expressed that there are limited existing pathways for utilizing SNAP and HIP vouchers

#### Dependencies

Low - Requires sustainable sources of investment in order to be a resource, but level of overall capital investment is minimal

#### Engagement Points

All Engagement Touchpoints

#### Key Agencies

Developers + OFJ

### HEALTHCARE

#### Inter-agency Planning & Service Delivery

Revamp and develop accessible channels for mental health services; build off the system developed by Boston EMS to connect mental health patients to service providers directly and avoid wait time in emergency rooms.

#### Priority



#### Impact

With a persistent uptick in demand for mental health services, faster service provision will affect high in-need population within the neighborhood

#### Dependencies

Low - Efforts are already underway and the model for faster service provision is scalable

#### Engagement Points

Survey, Small and Large Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

Department of Small Business Development, in OEI + OFJ + BPDA

## PUBLIC SAFETY

### Neighborhood Planning

Proactive emergency management public safety land-use planning. Utilize neighborhood planning to identify future physical space or service needs for Boston Fire Department (BFD) and Boston Emergency Medical Services (EMS), especially associated with areas of current and future development, like in North Allston and surrounding the future Beacon Park Yard (BPY) area.



Impact	Dependencies	Engagement Points	Key Agencies
Impacts 14,500 current residents surrounding the BPY area as well as potential future BPY residents	High - requires prioritization within agencies in order to make space and capital available	Large Service Provider Interviews, Engagement Events	BPDA + EMS + BFD + OEM



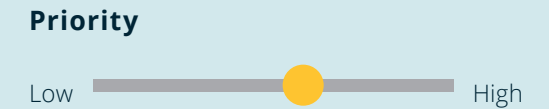
Photo of Boston Fire Department Engine 51 in Oak Square

## ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES RECOMMENDATIONS

### EMPLOYMENT

#### Community Benefits & Mitigation

Roles and employment pathways of part-time youth workers need to be re-evaluated; neighborhood job security and financial stability of neighborhood families are often dependent on this additional income stream.



Impact	Dependencies	Engagement Points	Key Agencies
Directly impacts close to 2000 high school kids in Allston-Brighton and those not attending school	Moderate - High - Needs complete revamp of roles and benefits starting from a policy level	Small and Large Service Provider Interviews	Office of Workforce Development (OWD) + BPS + Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (YEO) + Higher Ed.

#### Neighborhood Planning

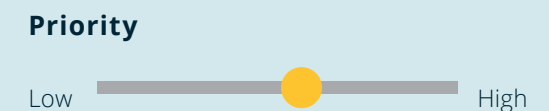
Formalize public messaging and support small family care providers by making it easier to create child care facilities aligned with the childcare zoning text amendment.



Impact	Dependencies	Engagement Points	Key Agencies
A-B has a higher than average population with incomes below poverty level. Accessible childcare services can restore the economic capacities of working families	Moderate - Neighborhood plan is an opportunity to formalize and build capacity of family care services	All Engagement Touchpoints	The Mayor's Office of Early Childhood (Early Childhood) + BPDA + OEM

#### Community Benefits & Mitigation

Invest in incentives for large-scale technical assistance programs amongst neighborhood institutions, nonprofit entities, and local small businesses, especially in the realm of project, data, and budgetary management.



Impact	Dependencies	Engagement Points	Key Agencies
Health care & social assistance, leisure & hospitality, and retail trade are big sectors for small businesses in the neighborhood along with business and professional services. High impact potential	Moderate - Programmatic recommendation that can be implemented but will need a thorough outreach strategy in order to see an uptick in its use	Small Service Provider Interviews	Department of Small Business Development, in OEM + Developers + BPDA

## EDUCATION

### Community Benefits & Mitigation

Utilize upcoming lab infrastructure to connect communities through scholarship programs or extra-curricular offerings that can connect local population to better opportunities.

#### Impact

2000 high school kids and two key high schools in Allston-Brighton will be directly impacted. As well as close to 6,000 school-aged children

#### Dependencies

High - Can be lowered if capital investment in school infrastructure is part of community benefits conversations

#### Priority



#### Engagement Points

Small and Large Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

BPDA + BHA + MOH + BPS

## MOBILITY

### Neighborhood Planning

Upgrade pedestrian crossing across high traffic intersection such as the Commonwealth Ave and Warren St intersection. Crossings need to be made apparent and they need to be wheelchair friendly.

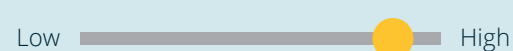
#### Impact

A-B has multiple high traffic arterial roads which need improvement; prioritize crossings in areas impacting people with disabilities

#### Dependencies

Low - Service delivery improvement versus a policy change or a recommendation that is more systemic

#### Priority



#### Engagement Points

Neighborhood Walk, Engagement events

#### Key Agencies

BPDA + BTD

### Inter-agency Planning & Service Delivery

Offer alternative forms of after school transportation options and programming to students in Allston-Brighton as majority travel from outside the neighborhood and find public transport unreliable for youth programming opportunities.

#### Impact

2,800 BPS school children in Allston-Brighton, including the 95% that come from outside the neighborhood

#### Dependencies

High - Requires coordination between multiple city agencies and needs capital reallocation

#### Priority



#### Engagement Points

Survey, Small and Large Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

BTD + BPS

## MISCELLANEOUS

### Inter-agency Planning & Service Delivery

Formalize channels of peer capacity building; identify city departments likely to have programmatic overlaps and schedule regular peer capacity building gatherings to share research and methods.

#### Impact

A critical leverage point, one that will impact multiple programmatic areas and foster new process efficiencies for service delivery

#### Dependencies

Medium - Less bureaucratic but more dependent on coordination between multiple offices and departments

#### Priority



#### Engagement Points

Small Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

Multiple City Offices and Departments, Department of Innovation and Technology (DOIT) + PAC



Photo of the Honan-Allston Branch Library

## COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

### OPEN SPACE & SOCIAL COHESION

#### Community Benefits & Mitigation

Telford St. pedestrian bridge that connects residents to the Artesani Playground was named an “unsafe and deteriorating” piece of infrastructure that is a key connection point for seniors, families, and youth alike. There is immediate opportunity to repair and restore access to an open space.

#### Priority



#### Impact

Directly impacts quality of life of over 5000 residents in surrounding areas

#### Dependencies

Low - Moderate - Significantly lowers dependencies if it is part of a mitigation conversation for new development in an area

#### Engagement Points

Small Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

Boston Parks and Recreation Department (Parks and Recreation) + Developers + BPDA + Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

#### Community Benefits & Mitigation

Prioritize completing open space renovation; residents expect communication when important infrastructure such as the Ringer Playground and the McKinney Park can be made more accessible.

#### Priority



#### Impact

Parks are often in proximity to affordable housing units and immediate maintenance efforts can significantly improve quality of life for low-income residents

#### Dependencies

Moderate - High - Dependencies can be reduced if efforts are materialized as part of community benefits and mitigation

#### Engagement Points

Small and Large Service Provider Interviews, Engagement Events, Neighborhood Walk

#### Key Agencies

Parks and Recreation + A-B Institutions of Higher Education + BPDA

#### Inter-agency Planning & Service Delivery

Access within parks needs to be thought of more expansively, how easy or difficult it is for people to sit on tables, to access areas within the park and more.

#### Priority



#### Impact

Direct impact reaching priority residents; seniors and people with disabilities

#### Dependencies

Moderate - Requires a thorough research study and application of universal design principles

#### Engagement Points

Large Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

Parks and Recreation + A-B Institutions of Higher Education + BPDA

## HUMAN SERVICES

#### Inter-agency Planning & Service Delivery

Office of Early Childhood Development has developed family engagement avenues such as the Parent Advisory Committee to center caregiver voices in the development of policies. Similar frameworks can be replicated to center the voices of a target audience in different areas of work.

#### Priority



#### Impact

High impact focused on new mechanisms that improve the operations behind service delivery

#### Dependencies

Moderate - Requires inter-departmental coordination

#### Engagement Points

Large Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

Multiple City Agencies

#### Community Benefits & Mitigation

Alternative and longer-term financing is needed for programs that bridge digital divide especially in multi-cultural neighborhoods such as A-B.

#### Priority



#### Impact

High impact for a neighborhood with transient populations and often seeing an inflow of new immigrants needing connectivity and resources

#### Dependencies

Moderate - Dependencies can be reduced if it is prioritized as a mitigation conversation in development projects

#### Engagement Points

Large Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

BPL + Institutions + Developers

## RESILIENCY

#### Inter-agency Planning & Service Delivery

Build public facing messaging and conversation about climate adaptation strategies within development projects such that it becomes a shared priority.

#### Priority



#### Impact

Large-scale impact that can generate a movement towards sustainable transitions within the neighborhood

#### Dependencies

Low - Moderate - Setting new shared values with communities can be part of neighborhood planning

#### Engagement Points

Small and Large Service Provider Interviews

#### Key Agencies

BPDA

# 03. Methodology

Prior Plan Review

Demographic Analysis Approach and Overview

Interviews and Focus Groups Overview

Small Service Provider Interviews

Large Service Provider Focus Groups

Community Engagement Strategy

Survey Participant Overview

Survey Topics

# Methodology

**The research approach for the Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment employed a layered, mixed-methods approach that combines 1) existing conditions and prior plan review, 2) quantitative demographic census analysis, 3) qualitative small and large-scale service provider interviews and focus groups, 4) quantitative resident survey deployment, and 5) in-person qualitative resident mapping exercises.**

Each of these approaches and frameworks are rooted in the project Needs Analysis Topic Table that organized issues of community need around the larger categories of Basic Need, Access to Opportunity, and Community (see figure 1). In addition, qualitative interviews with small and large-scale service providers focused on the opportunities and challenges related to techniques of broader community engagement strategies that service providers implement to identify and address identified community needs.



Aerial photo above Brighton High School looking east towards Downtown with Franciscan Children’s Hospital to the left.



Photo of people boarding the Green Line to Government Center at Packards Corner.

# Prior Plan Review

Various past research and plans were reviewed to connect new findings with established trends in Allston-Brighton. The review provided the project team with foundational information about the neighborhoods, pressures of development, and the related implications across the Needs Assessment topic areas. In particular, a review of the Allston Brighton Community Survey Needs Assessment (2008 Needs Assessment)<sup>1</sup> revealed that the top tier need areas today are different to the needs highlighted 15 years ago. While the previous needs assessment was meant to inform Harvard, the City, and the Harvard Allston Task Force in the development of the Harvard Master Plan for Campus Development the current assessment is meant to inform policies, planning practices and service experience across city stakeholder groups across all of Allston-Brighton. This difference in geographic scope and audience focus contributes to the differences in the top tier need areas.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bostonplans.org/documents/planning/downtown-neighborhood-planning/allston-brighton/allston-brighton-community-needs-research-task-for>

**TABLE 3**  
NEEDS ASSESSMENT COMPARISONS 2008 - 2023

Top Tier Need Areas (2008)	Top Tier Need Areas (2023)
Education	<b>Housing</b>
Health	<b>Transportation and Mobility</b>
Public Realm/Public Space	<b>Employment Pathways</b>
Transportation and Mobility	<b>Food Security</b>

Allston-Brighton has witnessed an unprecedented rate of development, with over three million sq ft of proposed development under review in the neighborhood as of 2021. The pressure of new development is multi-fold. Over the past 15 years, the steady rise in population has put a strain on transit solutions, rental prices, and a persistent repurposing of land. This has amplified key basic needs and access to opportunity criteria in this Needs Assessment. The interconnectedness of urban issues led to the review of other key plans such as the A-B Mobility Plan (2021, BPDA), the Mayor’s Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC) Allston-Brighton Arts, Culture and Placekeeping Report (2021, Placekeeping Report)<sup>1</sup>, Understanding Food Access (2020, ABHC), and the Allston-Brighton Mobility Study, Existing Conditions Report (2019, BPDA and City)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.boston.gov/departments/arts-and-culture/allston-brighton-arts-culture-and-placekeeping>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/6ecb9005-ce62-4f37-9126-0d6d43723f79>

# Demographic Analysis Approach and Overview

**The initial demographic analysis focused on identifying broad demographic trends throughout Allston-Brighton. The analysis compared Allston-Brighton to other Boston neighborhoods and to Boston overall.**

The analysis also looked at neighborhoods within Allston-Brighton to capture differences from place-to-place with as much detail as possible. Data were primarily collected from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Topics explored included income, employment, race and ethnicity, education, housing characteristics, housing costs, age, self-reported disabilities, rates of public assistance program enrollment, family and household structure, in addition to several other topic areas.

The initial data analysis provided the AURA team with a baseline knowledge of potential opportunities and service gaps throughout Allston-Brighton. For example, an analysis of renter versus homeownership rates within A-B helped the AURA team understand which areas of the community could be more vulnerable to displacement from rent increases or other housing costs. In addition,

researchers reviewed comparable, adjacent neighborhood geographies within Boston that face similar development pressure and diverse socioeconomic populations such as Fenway/Kenmore and Mission Hill. Finally, prior plan review and retroactive demographic and socioeconomic analysis was conducted following interviews with small-scale service providers to validate and inform the project team's initial findings. This supported the development of further engagement efforts throughout the course of the assessment. However, data analysis at such a scale tells only one story at a macro level. The AURA team recognized that such analysis could not solely account for the lived experiences of community members. The following community engagement strategies aimed to fill these gaps in community knowledge with on-the-ground experience from those who live, work and play in Allston-Brighton's many neighborhoods.

# Service Provider Interviews and Focus Groups Overview

RC, in collaboration with the broader AURA project team, layered intensive service provider one-on-one interviews and focus groups into both Phase One and Phase Two of this assessment. In Phase One of the project, researchers spoke with 11 smaller service providers that are located within Allston-Brighton and work directly with priority equity residents most relevant to this Needs Assessment. In Phase Two, researchers organized 3 focus groups with relevant City of Boston Departmental staff that regularly collaborate with the BPDA and address the multitude of intersectional policy issues of which this Needs Assessment is analyzing. In addition, a fourth focus group with Harvard University Planning and Design staff was held as an important case study to explore the role and opportunities held by larger non-government institutions within Allston-Brighton in addressing community needs.



The Factory (Photo by Gregg Bernstein and the Mayor's Mural Crew), <https://www.zone3westernave.com/project/favorite-murals-allston/>

Phase One and Phase Two qualitative research efforts employed distinct research frameworks that spoke to the lived experience and knowledge of interview and focus group participants. In both cases, data from these 11 interviews and 4 focus groups were qualitatively coded and analyzed to serve as the foundational data basis for analyses that follows in this report. The coding themes and analytical quantities for both Phase One and Phase Two stakeholder engagement work can be found in the Appendix of this report, as well as the research frameworks and facilitation guides that shaped these conversations.



# Small Service Provider Interview Research Approach

## Organizational Interview Participants

- 2Life Communities
- 35 Fidelis Way/Commonwealth Tenants Association
- Allston-Brighton Health Collaborative
- Brighton Marine
- Brazilian Women's Group
- Chinese Progressive Association
- Josephine Fiorentino Community Center at Charlesview
- Presentation School Foundation Community Center
- Sisters of St Joseph of Boston
- Veronica Smith Senior Center
- West End House

## Central Research Questions

- What do community-based organizations and residents think about the values, norms, and/or practices that contribute to repairing and/or addressing past harm?
- What are the existing community strengths (assets) within Allston-Brighton that are currently addressing the primary Needs Analysis Topics? How can those strengths be uplifted, supported, and amplified through targeted policy initiatives, resource allocation, or increased community engagement efforts?
- What are the key challenges and gaps (barriers) faced by community-based organizations and residents alike when addressing issues of community need?
- What are the most pressing topics and challenges to health and well-being of Allston-Brighton residents through a lens of community need and social determinants of health?
- What internal constraints are present for community-based organizations in addressing these challenges or connecting residents to needed resources or services?
- Based on the expertise and lived experience of community leaders in Allston-Brighton, what policy initiatives, programmatic reforms, or investments are required to address these challenges or gaps in service provision for residents?
- What forms of broader community engagement and insight are required to shape and target these reforms?

## Research Approach

This qualitative service gap identification and asset mapping engagement centered community participation and equity through the use of one-on-one stakeholder asset-mapping interviews to provide a qualitative case study foundation to identify gaps in service provision. These interviews served to collectively identify and name existing strengths (assets) of community-based organizations within Allston-Brighton based on community needs, while identifying key existing constraints (barriers) of these organizations due to both internal operations and external ecosystem dynamics within the community. To embed reparative planning, we also explored learning topics related to harm reduction, equity, and the need to begin the physical and figurative space required for the cultivation of trust among BPDA and the consultant team.

Lastly, these interviews served to collect recommendations to address existing internal or external barriers to providing key resident services while unearthing the unique and specific challenges faced by Allston-Brighton residents. This generative inquiry tool was focused upon identifying the norms, values, practices, and challenges faced by hard-to-reach or often ignored residents like homebound elders, youth, or night shift workers as well as communities within our civic ecosystem, including people of color, low-income residents, immigrant populations, and those that speak English as a second language.

## Recruitment

Community leaders and organizations were identified and engaged with the intent of providing insight into the lived experience and current needs of these residents, while also capturing the strengths, challenges, and recommendations held by these critical community-rooted service providers in Allston-Brighton.

A list of potential community partner interview participants was cultivated in partnership by both ASG and ABCDC to support RC in creating a holistic and inclusive universe of asset mapping participants. This list was constructed with the purpose of ensuring a wide swath of service provider

expertise and lived experience that aligns with the Needs Analysis Topic Table that serves as the foundation of the Needs Assessment research framework. This includes organizations located in both Allston as well as Brighton, with entities that either serve specific priority sub-neighborhoods or populations of priority equity residents that experience increased threats to basic needs, access to opportunity, and community cohesion due to gaps in service provision.

## Facilitation

All interviews with community partners were conducted via Zoom. Rivera Consulting shared both the research framework and interview questionnaire with community partners in advance of the interview itself to ensure both consent and understanding of the questions posed to the interviewee. Interviews were recorded and transcribed via a real-time AI transcription service. All interviewees provided their consent to be recorded and transcribed. With the exception of one interview that included three community partner participants, all conversations were done one-on-one between the consultant and community partner participant.

## Analysis

Each interview was transcribed and qualitatively analyzed using an asset-mapping coding approach. Qualitative codes were developed through a review of all transcripts, which yielded 118 distinct topics discussed across the 11 community partner conversations. Each transcript was then coded according to these topics, with codes applied to highlight references in each group.

Codes were also grouped analytically along two dimensions. First, each code was designated according to one of four broad topics to facilitate analysis:

- Basic Need:** Insight on issues such as access to healthy food, community safety in the public realm, the impact neighborhood design has on healthy outcomes for residents, and the current state of housing amenities for all different types of folks throughout the neighborhood.
  - includes issues of parks and open space, support and space for artists and cultural leaders, climate resiliency, civic engagement, and human service availability and accessibility, be it retail store services or social services such as social workers or emergency response services.
- Access to Opportunity:** Community topics that increase both short and long term economic opportunity, including equitable educational student outcomes, employment pipelines, childcare availability and access, and transit mobility concerns.
  - Engagement:** The tactics and strategies employed by both service providers and municipal government actors to build trust and relationships to connect residents with programmatic opportunities and critical resources. This includes the strengths, gaps, and future-facing recommendations to intentional collaboration and planning amongst nonprofit, public, private, and large-scale institutional entities.
- Community:** Different types of social fabric that exist to support residents in creating a thriving and vibrant neighborhood and civic culture. This
  - engagement challenges that reinforce these gaps. Example: Inadequate Employment Resources and Opportunities (Access to Opportunity Barrier).



Photo of the Community Kick-off Event at the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation

Then, each code was designated as an asset, barrier, or recommendation:

- Assets:** Conversation topics reflecting strengths held in neighborhood service provision and resident lived experience, including both areas where it aligned with Needs Analysis topics and additional engagement tactics and strengths. Example: Healthy Community Food Sources (Basic Need Asset).
  - Recommendations:** Potential future-facing strategies, programming, and public realm design and policy initiatives to build upon existing community strengths and mitigate the impact of current service provision gaps or harmful large-scale macro development or economic trends. This includes collaboration opportunities identified by nonprofit community partners involving municipal actors, small and large nonprofit entities, as well as local neighborhood residents. Example: Invest in Accessible Green Space (Community Recommendation).
- Barriers:** Conversation topics reflecting service gaps or existing challenges for both service providers and Allston-Brighton residents as it pertains to service provider operations, resource allocation and access, programmatic implementation, the impact of public realm design and development strategies, as well existing
  - engagement challenges that reinforce these gaps. Example: Inadequate Employment Resources and Opportunities (Access to Opportunity Barrier).

On the whole, this approach to facilitation and analysis sought to maximize the insights provided by open-ended qualitative research by providing community partner leaders with the opportunity to address the topics which are most important to them, and by providing a systematic methodology for capturing and analyzing these insights for future policy analysis and engagement opportunities.

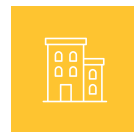
# Large Service Provider Focus Groups Research Approach

## Focus Group Themes and Agency/Institutional Participants



### Education, Childcare, and Community Opportunities

- Boston Public Library (BPL)
- Boston Public Schools, Capital Planning (BPS)
- Mayor's Office of Early Childhood Education (Early Childhood)



### Housing and Economic Development

- Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion (OEIOI)
- Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH)
- Boston Housing Authority (BHA)



### Public Safety

- Boston Police Department (BPD)
- Boston Fire Department (BFD)
- Boston Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
- Office of Emergency Management (OEM)



### Institutional Case Study (Harvard University)

- Planning and Design Staff
- Public Affairs & Communications Staff
- Community Engagement Staff

## Central Research Questions

- What do city and institutional actors think about the values, norms, and/or practices that contribute to repairing and/or addressing past harm?
- What are the existing operational and programmatic strengths (assets) within these agencies and institutions that are currently addressing the primary Needs Analysis Topics? How can those strengths be uplifted, supported, and amplified through targeted policy initiatives, resource allocation, or increased community engagement efforts?
- What are the key challenges and gaps (barriers) faced by city and institutional actors when addressing issues of community need?
- What are the most pressing topics and challenges to health and well-being of Allston-Brighton residents through a lens of community need and social determinants of health?
- What internal constraints are present for city and institutional actors in addressing these challenges or connecting residents to needed resources or services?
- Based on the expertise and lived experience of these city and institutional actors, what policy initiatives, programmatic reforms, or investments are required to address these challenges or gaps in service provision for residents?
- What forms of broader community engagement and collaborative planning are required to shape and target these reforms?

## Research Approach

This phase of engagement centered community participation and equity through the use of group stakeholder asset-mapping focus groups to provide a qualitative case study foundation for overall project findings that build upon earlier asset, barrier, and recommendation analysis. These focus groups served to collectively identify and name existing strengths (assets) of city service departments and city agencies that directly interact with the key topics of this Needs Assessment. In addition, RC conducted a focus group directly with stakeholders from Harvard University that work closely with city agencies, small nonprofit service providers, and neighborhood residents. In addition to asset identification, these conversations identified existing constraints (barriers) due to both internal operations and external ecosystem dynamics that hamper potential points of collaboration, planning, and service provisions. Lastly, these interviews served to collect key recommendations that address existing internal or external barriers to providing key resident services while unearthing the unique and specific challenges faced by Allston-Brighton residents.

## Recruitment

RC and the BPDA collaborated to identify interdepartmental and institutional representatives that were able to speak directly to earlier project findings unearthed in Phase One project engagement. The project team grouped participants together based on pertinent shared themes and service provision goals with the aim of sparking collaboration and problem solving recommendations. If departmental leadership was unavailable due to scheduling constraints, researchers relied upon the recommendation of department staff for the individual best suited to participate.

## Facilitation

All interviews with community partners were conducted via Zoom. Rivera Consulting shared both the research framework and interview questionnaire with participants in advance of the interview itself to ensure both consent and understanding of the questions posed to the interviewee. Interviews were recorded and transcribed via a real-time AI transcription service. All interviewees provided their consent to be recorded and transcribed.

## Analysis

The analysis framework in the Phase One small-scale service provider interviews placed the focus on understanding community needs from four different thematic categories. In the Phase Two interviews, the focus was placed on why service gaps exist and how service provision in the neighborhood takes place from the point of view of large service providers. This led to the development of a new analysis framework to guide conversations with service providers and fill in gaps to ensure well-rounded research and analysis about existing and future conditions in Allston-Brighton.

Each interview was transcribed and qualitatively analyzed using an asset-mapping coding approach. Qualitative codes were developed through a review of all transcripts, which yielded 60 distinct asset and barrier topics discussed across the 11 community partner conversations. Each transcript was then coded according to these topics, with codes applied to highlight references in each group. In addition, recommendations were coded and grouped based on the four overall themes of the research framework.

Codes were also grouped analytically along two dimensions. First, each code was designated according to one of four broad topics to facilitate analysis:

- Programming:** Understanding what large service providers view as the primary challenges faced by Allston-Brighton residents as it pertains to the original Needs Analysis Table. Existing programming and activities that large service providers utilize on a day-to-day basis to address these challenges.
- Community Engagement:** Ways in which service providers directly interact with residents and community-based organizations in order to better understand community needs and gaps in services. This can include dedicated community engagement staff, attending existing community events, direct conversations with smaller service providers or community advocates, and the ways in which that engagement shapes the services provided.
- Collaboration:** Identifying when and how service providers collaborate internally and with other agencies or offices within your institution. Collaborations should include methods of engaging key external partners within the neighborhood (community-based organizations and smaller nonprofit service providers). Discussion can further include key internal and external collaborators, dedicated spaces and frameworks for planning and collaboration, and the strategies for addressing community needs through collaborative planning across multiple types of high-level stakeholders.
- Resources:** Includes the inputs, technology, and tools at the service provider's disposal that are utilized in order to better serve neighborhood residents and connect them to key services. This could include different types of internal staffing roles, technology-based or online platforms to capture community need and insight, or physical community spaces that are utilized to connect residents to key services or helpful knowledge.

Then, each code was designated as an asset, barrier, or recommendation:

- Assets:** Conversation topics that refer to the strengths in large service provider capacities, programming strategies, execution and methods for understanding community needs. There are multiple assets for each of the four thematic areas.
  - Example: Collaboration Asset: Culture of Collaboration Across City.
- Barriers:** The persistent and emerging barriers to service provision, from an operational, bureaucratic and systemic point of view. These codes elevate what dampens the efficacy of programming efforts, collaboration, resource provision and utilization amongst others.
  - Example: Programming Barrier: Lack of Emergency Management Planning.
- Recommendations:** Well informed suggestions based on experiences of interviewees with the neighborhood itself as well as their work and area of practice. Suggestions made are based on the current conditions in the neighborhood as well future facing concerns and thinking. Recommendations for this set of interactions are grouped by programming, engagement, collaboration and resource recommendations.
  - Example: Programming Barrier: Lack of Emergency Management Planning.

## Community Engagement Strategy

**ASG, in partnership with ABCDC, designed a community engagement strategy that leveraged the data analysis and research undertaken as part of the initial phases of the project.**

The vision behind the strategy was one of inclusion and access, with multiple access points created for people to participate in the Needs Assessment. The aim was to cast a wide net to ensure that everyone in the community had the opportunity to engage in one way or another, with a particular focus on reaching the groups who are traditionally underrepresented in larger studies such as these, e.g. those whose first language is not English, and those with other barriers. ABCDC activated and managed a team of Community Ambassadors tasked with lowering the barrier to accessing critical information in targeted languages of Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Cantonese/ Mandarin. The ambassadors hired by ABCDC were also residents of the Allston-Brighton community; they provided vital on-the-ground knowledge of how to best reach targeted community hubs. Having local ambassadors was a key point in the strategy to help develop a sense of trust between the Allston-Brighton community and this project. Overall, the strategy can be broken down into 4 points: stakeholder identification, community hubs, collaboration, and outreach and communication.



Photo of the tabling at Allston-Brighton Open Streets

**FIGURE 4**  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



**STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION**

Identify Key Stakeholders: The community hubs, non-profits, and community health centers that played a significant role in Allston-Brighton were identified as key stakeholders. ABCDC developed a stakeholder matrix that contained an extensive list of organizations that operate within Allston-Brighton. See the Appendix to this report under section 14 for the stakeholder matrix developed in full.



**COMMUNITY HUBS**

Engage Community Hubs: The team worked closely with community hubs such as local health centers, local schools, libraries, and cultural centers to provide spaces for community gatherings and events.



**COLLABORATION**

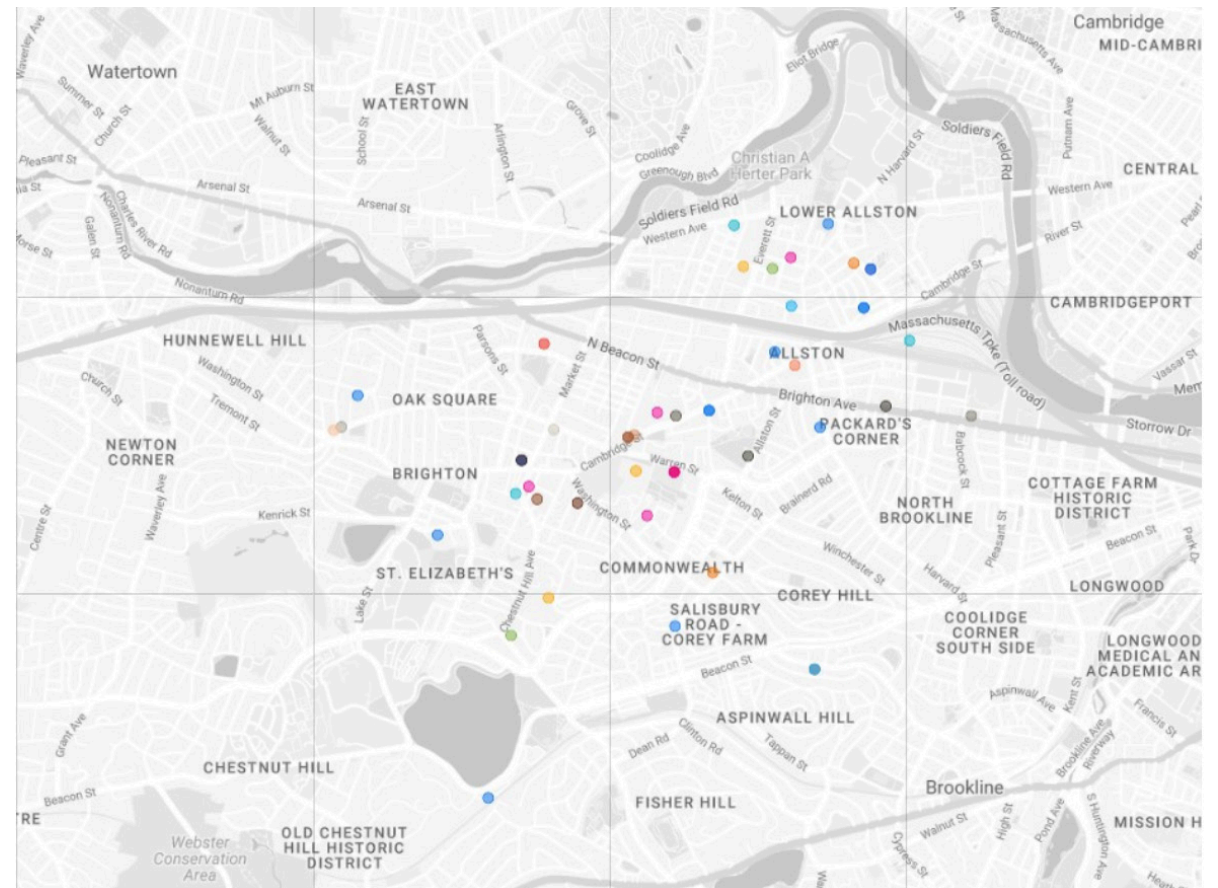
Form Partnerships: The team collaborated with community hubs, non-profits, and health centers to build a strong network of organizations working towards a common goal of spreading awareness about the Needs Assessment outreach, including the survey.



**OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION**

Community Outreach: The team developed a communication plan to keep the community informed about upcoming events, resources, and opportunities for providing feedback. AURA committed to weekly assessments to adapt the plan and address changing needs and priorities for the success of this project. Lastly, it is important to remember that community engagement is an ongoing process and building trust within the community takes time and consistency.

**FIGURE 5**  
COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATION MAP

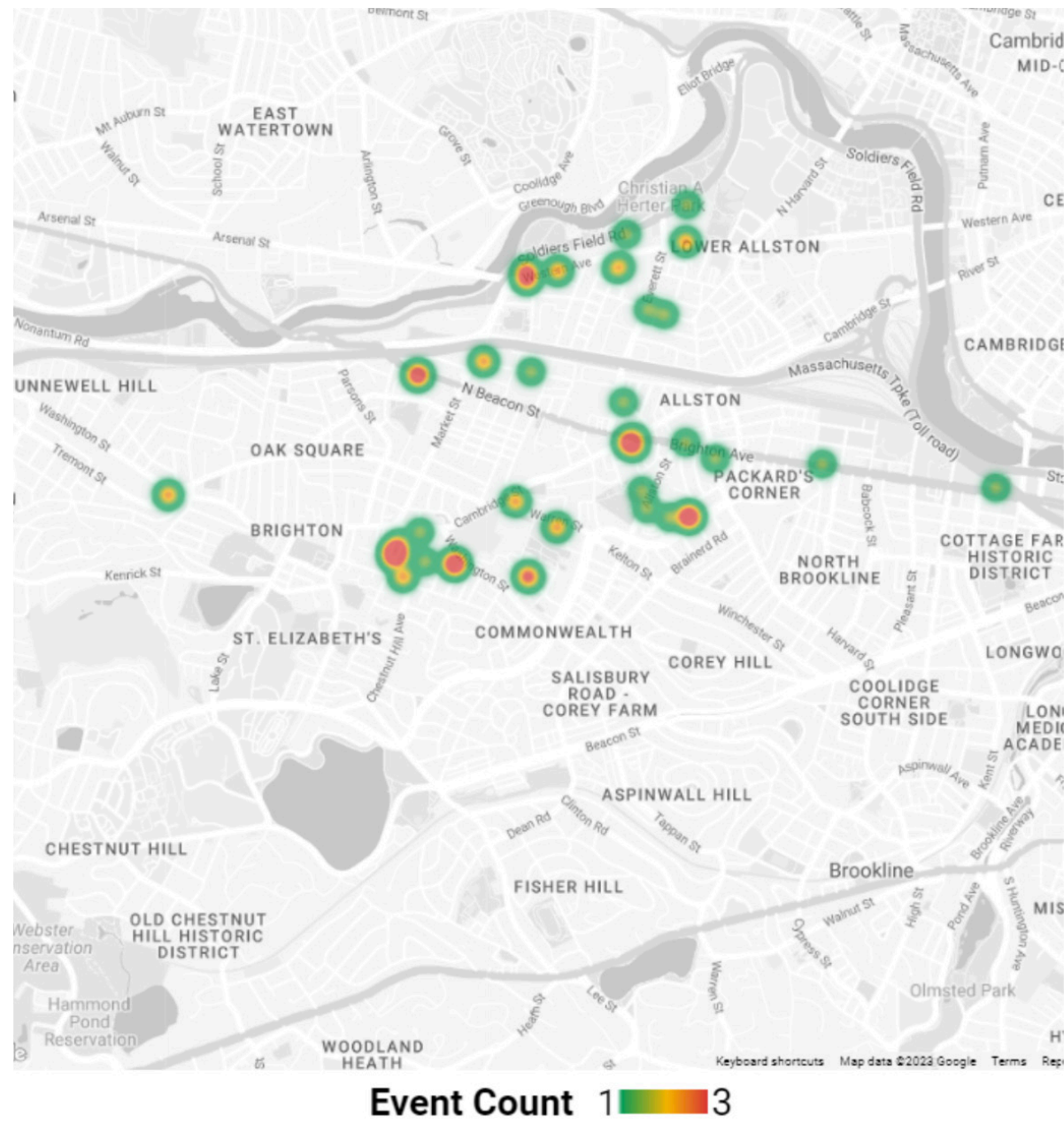


Focus/Issue Area

- Faith
- Sexual Advocacy & Support
- Adult Education (ESOL)
- Arts
- Immigrant & Women's Rights Organizing
- Faith Education
- Health
- Food Pantry
- Library
- Disability Advocacy & Support
- Environment
- Community Health & Wellness
- Small Business Support
- Tenant Organization
- Education
- Advocacy
- Senior Programs
- Civic Participation
- Immigration

# Survey Participant Overview

**FIGURE 6**  
EVENT OUTREACH MAP



**AURA identified 863 responses to the survey that meet criteria for inclusion in the Needs Assessment analysis.**

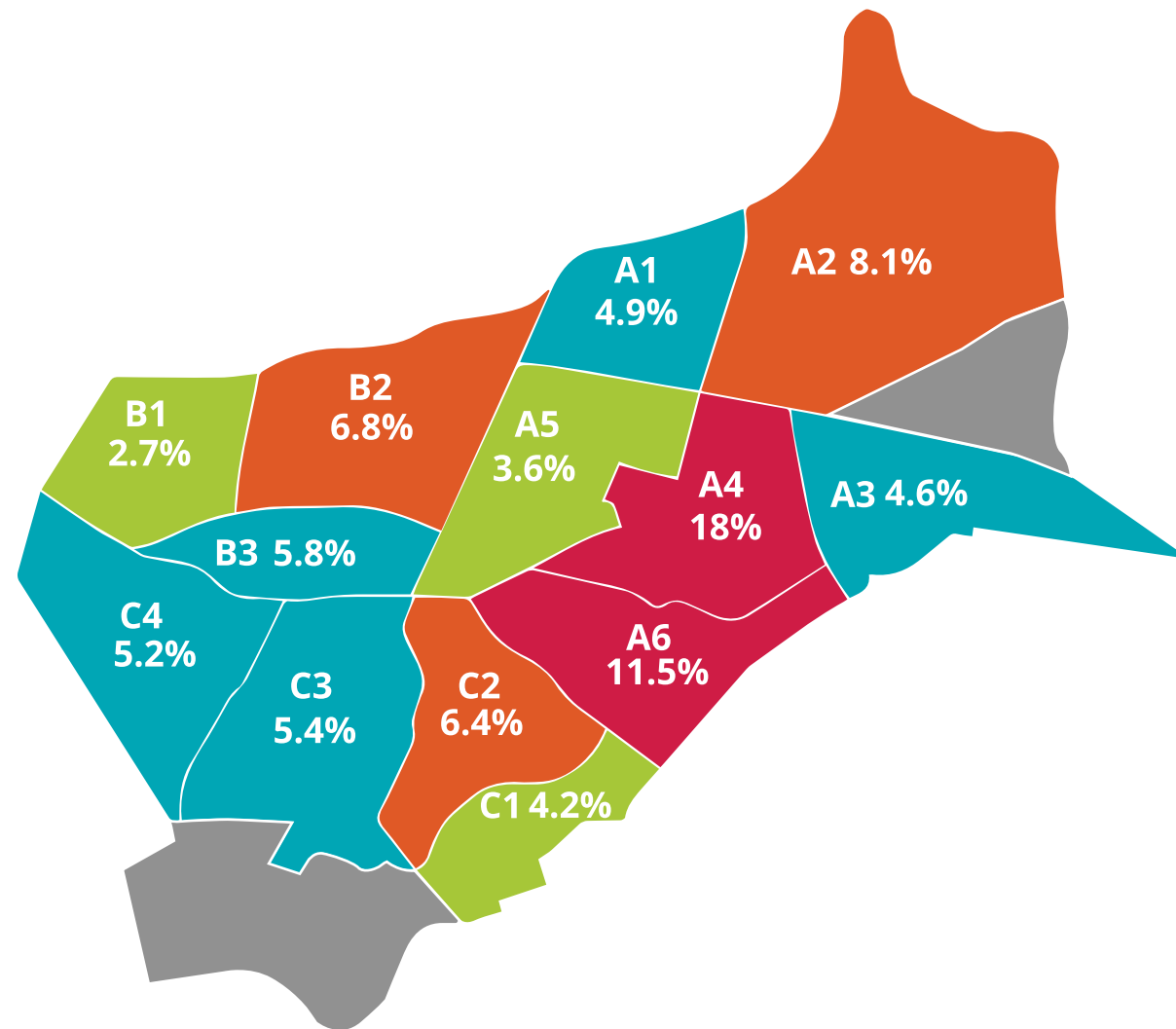
702 responses came from the “online survey” used by community engagement representatives and posted online at the BPDA’s project website. Another 161 responses come from the “protected survey”, an identical survey instrument used by community ambassadors and partners for intercept canvassing and for collecting responses in group settings and/or community meetings. Demographic information on all 863 survey respondents can be found in the Appendix to this report.

Residents of Allston-Brighton were directed to answer questions on the “resident survey”. 804 unique responses to the resident survey were received. Each respondent chose which sections and questions to complete creating variety in the focus of responses and number of responses for each question. The sample size of respondents to each question is provided for reference throughout the narrative, figures, and tables where relevant. Table 5 provides an overview of the number of respondents who filled out at least one question of the relevant subsection.

Survey takers who reported that they were not a resident of Allston-Brighton were directed to take a dedicated “non-resident survey”. This survey was shorter as some questions would not be relevant to non-residents, but it did include key questions about service usage frequency, access mode, and barriers to access for each of the survey subsections. 59 responses to the non-resident survey were received. These can also be found in the Appendix.

The online survey was targeted by survey spammers soon after public release. This spam attack was most likely triggered by the offer of a \$20 gift card for each completed survey. As a result, there were over 20,000 individual responses via the publicly posted survey link, the vast majority of which were designated as spam based upon certain criteria such as foreign IP address, email structure (most often randomly generated letters), identical blocks of survey responses, and time of survey response. Great efforts were taken to review and verify each survey response to ensure sufficient cleaning of survey data and prioritization of legitimate responses.

**FIGURE 7**  
SUB-NEIGHBORHOOD MAP BY SURVEY RESPONSE RATE

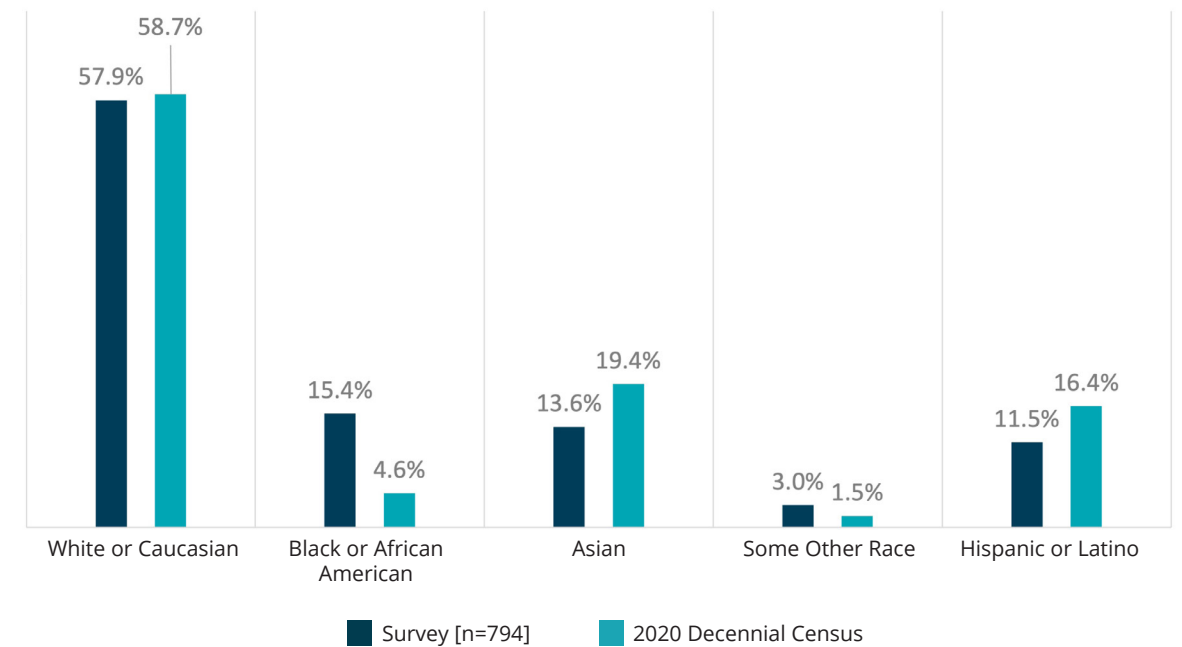


With a larger, non-white, and transient population than many other nearby neighborhoods experiencing high levels of development, it was imperative for the research approach to adopt a multi-lingual design across different stages. This was foundational in diversifying survey responses and creating a more equitable analysis within an outreach tool that can favor more traditional, civically engaged voices. AURA implemented a multilingual approach to the community survey, making it available in five languages online, and with in-person ambassadors equipped to assist participants in their own language at all community events and public meetings. The five languages were Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Brazilian Portuguese and Russian. 91% of surveys were taken in English, 3% in Simplified Chinese, 6% in Spanish, and <1% in Portuguese. 70.3% of respondents spoke only English at home; 11% spoke English and another language at home or with their household. 11.5% of respondents spoke a language other than English at home or with their household.

53.4% of survey respondents were over the age 35, while 46.7% were 35 or younger. The remainder of respondents did not provide an age. 58% of respondents identified themselves as women, 35% as men, and 4.4% as non-binary, trans-man, or trans-woman. 55% of responses came from self-identified Caucasians, 14.6% from Black/African Americans, 13% from self-identified Asians. 19.2% of survey respondents identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino and 1.2% as Brazilian.

**FIGURE 8**  
SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

**SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY RACE, ETHNICITY COMPARED TO 2020 DECENNIAL CENSUS ESTIMATES FOR ZIP CODES: 02134 (ALLSTON) AND 02135 (BRIGHTON)**



**Survey Respondent Demographic Profile**

From the outset of this assessment, AURA's approach to engaging with residents was rooted in both the City of Boston's equity principles and the project team's equity lens. Both approaches prioritized equity over equality, with an upfront acknowledgment and understanding of the priority residents within Allston-Brighton that rely upon and interact with both the municipal and organizational service provision programming analyzed within this assessment.

Future research in diverse pockets such as Allston-Brighton should consider building a multilingual model before reaching stages of active outreach. This would ensure that the research is taking an equitable approach, seeking to engage diverse voices at multiple stages and engagement touch points.

### Survey Respondent Geographic Profile

The resident survey allowed respondents to identify their residence within Allston-Brighton by sharing their full or partial address or by selecting from one of thirteen “sub-neighborhoods”, defined generally by major, north-south or east-west streets. See table 4 and figure 7 for an overview of the sub-neighborhoods and responses received ordered by geographic location and level of specificity of geographic origin:

**TABLE 4**  
RESPONSE BY SUBDISTRICT

Subdistrict	Sub-neighborhood by Name	Total Responses	Full Address	Selected from Map	% of Total Responses
A1	North Brighton	42	28	14	4.9%
A2	Lower Allston	70	43	27	8.1%
A3	Packard’s Corner	40	19	21	4.6%
A4	Allston	155	122	33	18.0%
A5	Gardena / Etna Street	31	15	16	3.6%
A6	Commonwealth Ave / Corey Hill	99	77	22	11.5%
B1	Oak Sq. / Hunnewell Hill	23	7	16	2.7%
B2	Faneuil	59	32	27	6.8%
B3	Oak Sq. / Washington St / Brighton Center	50	24	26	5.8%

Subdistrict	Sub-neighborhood by Name	Total Responses	Full Address	Selected from Map	% of Total Responses
C1	Cleveland Circle	36	21	15	4.2%
C2	Aberdeen	55	29	26	6.4%
C3	Lake St / Boston College	47	26	21	5.4%
C4	Oak Sq. South / Boston College	45	22	23	5.2%
	resident survey / no location provided	52			3.6%
	non-resident survey	59			6.8%



# Survey Topics

The Needs Assessment survey included demographic questions and six “subsections” that feature more in-depth questions about the following topic areas: Food Security, Housing, Employment, Education, Public Space and Community Life, and Healthcare and Public Health. The topics covered by these survey subsections align with the Needs Assessment categories and analysis topics developed by Rivera Consulting from the Needs Analysis Topics Table (see figure 1):

- “Basic Needs”: Food Security, Housing, and Healthcare and Public Health
- “Access to Opportunity”: Employment and Education
- “Community Life”: Public Space and Community Life

Community Ambassadors were instructed to recommend an individual select 2-3 survey subsections, though survey takers could select more or less as desired. Table 5 below provides a breakdown of Allston-Brighton residents who responded to at least one question in the survey subsections.



Photo of Famous Joes by the Mayor’s Mural Crew (Photo by Gregg Bernstein), <https://www.zone3westernave.com/project/favorite-murals-allston/>

**TABLE 5:**  
SURVEY RESPONSES PER NEEDS ANALYSIS TOPIC

Needs Analysis Topic Area	At least one Answer	Percentage*
Housing	588	73.1%
Public Space & Community Life	426	53.0%
Food Security & Access	329	40.9%
Healthcare & Public Health	204	25.4%
Opportunity (Employment)	125	15.5%
Opportunity (Education)	108	13.4%

\*Percentage corresponds to the number of resident survey respondents (804) who filled out at least one answer to the relevant survey subsections, the total will be above 100%

There are over 300 distinct questions in the survey, as a whole. Each section of the resident survey included at least one iteration of a “key” question; most sections included more than one such question. This allows for comparison across topic areas for certain areas of investigation. **Key questions touched on how often people used a kind of service (e.g., supermarkets), how many services were in their neighborhood, how they traveled to these services, and what kinds of barriers they faced in using or accessing a service.** Each section also had questions specific to that question. The Housing section used the same framework as the key questions, but with modified response options to align more closely with housing issues.

## 04. **Topic Findings: Identifying Community Needs**

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Basic Needs & Overall Narratives

Access to Opportunity & Overall Narratives

Community & Overall Narratives

# Topic Findings: Identifying Community Needs

Each of the three topic findings sections concludes with an overall narrative and neighborhood map summarizing the key insights from the analysis.

## Topic Findings: Basic Needs

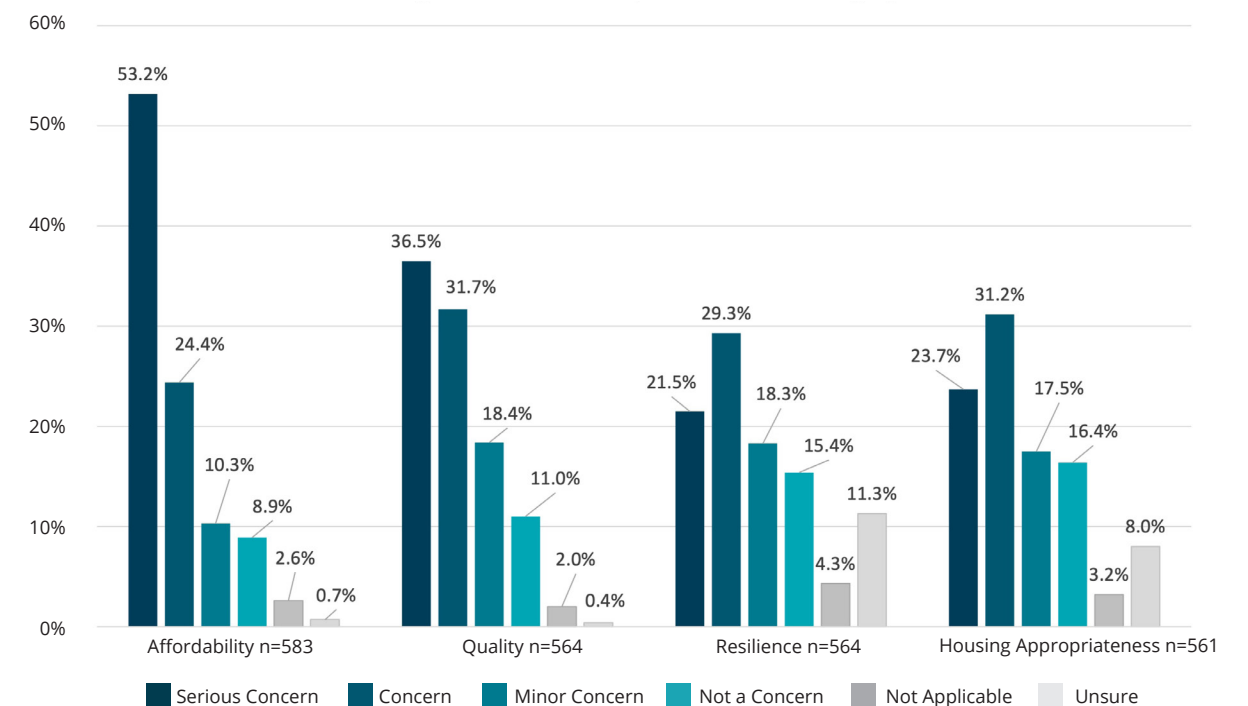
### Housing Access and Affordability Remains a Primary Concern as Allston-Brighton Experiences Heightened Development.

Housing affordability was a “serious concern” for over 53% of the housing subsection respondents. 43.6% of subsection respondents also noted that there were “very few or no options” for affordable housing within their neighborhood; 34.5% of subsection respondents noted that there were options, but that they were limited.



Photo of Charlesview Residences at sunset

**FIGURE 10:**  
BARRIERS TO HOUSING ACCESS

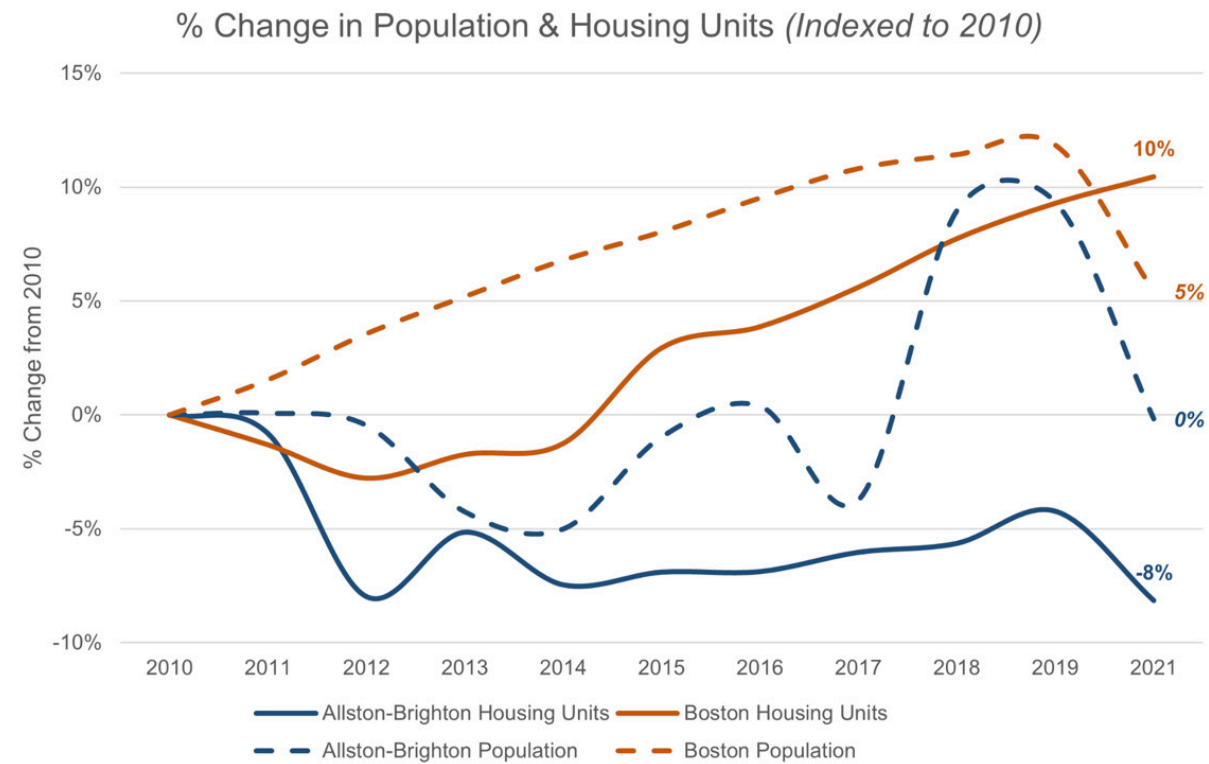


Housing quality is the other major concern for Allston-Brighton residents. 68% of respondents identified either “serious concern” or “concern” for Lack of Options/quality of their home. Furthermore, good Mobility/Transportation was Accessed/Apply for most within Affordability neighborhood. Almost half of survey takers Service Quality at Physical Condition, but limited options” for No Barriers to Access; another 27% claimed that there were Other no options for high-quality housing in their home Unsure neighborhood.

The demographic analysis of the neighborhood conducted early on in the project engagement further validates the survey results. Allston-Brighton’s population was nearly the same in 2021 as it was in 2010 (approximately 68,000 people), but the overall housing stock has shrunk by 8%. Meanwhile, Boston’s overall population increased by 5% and the number of housing units increased citywide by 10% during the same 11 year period. These trends indicate that Allston-Brighton’s housing stock has not kept pace with its population level.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25001

**FIGURE 11:** PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN POPULATION AND HOUSING SUPPLY IN ALLSTON-BRIGHTON AND CITY-WIDE



Qualitative interviews highlighted that the impact of rising housing costs upon priority equity residents such as low-income families, immigrant families, and senior citizens is greatly amplified. For suppliers of affordable housing opportunities and nonprofit strategic connectors of available resources, decade-long waitlists pervade while demand skyrockets amongst service provider constituencies.

The pipeline from renting to ownership for those living in existing subsidized neighborhood housing is not only viewed as an overwhelmingly complicated process, but economically infeasible. Many residents currently living in affordable housing units cannot afford to purchase property, while others understand the likely prohibitive cost of paying for water, gas, and other utilities once property is owned. This is creating a backlog of residents in affordable units who may be able to economically afford to own property at

the margins but remain long-term in subsidized units to save money. Because of this, waitlist time periods for affordable housing units are reaching ten years in length for many applicants.

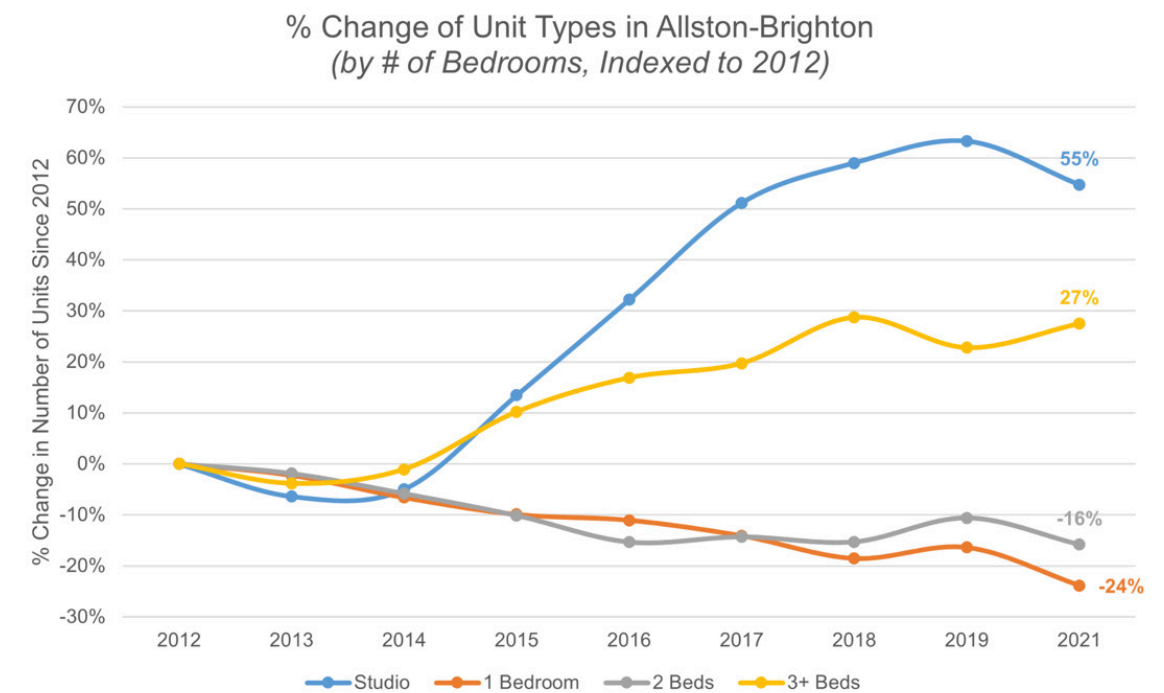
The survey further substantiates that the most commonly identified basic housing needs that were not present (or significantly degraded) in respondents' homes were "natural light" or proper ventilation. Roughly one-fourth of people who identified the presence of housing quality issues did so in reference to natural light or ventilation—responses that should probably be viewed as inherently linked. Environmental pollution and the lack of private/semi-private outdoor space appear as the most common factors contributing to housing situations that limit or constrain health outcomes for residents' households. Interior living space is also a significant issue for over

29.7% of those who identified an issue with their home's appropriateness. In terms of pollution, the most significant types were, in order, Noise (54.5% of question respondents), Air/Environmental (41%), and Light (25%).

Recent development efforts along Western Avenue were a popular topic of concern, with several interviewees noting the rapid ascent of change along

the corridor as being a prime example of family-oriented housing being eliminated for residents. There is a sense of powerlessness amongst service providers to alleviate the concerns of residents who view luxury housing development and dedicated lab space as an inevitable product of development processes regardless of community engagement efforts.

**FIGURE 12:** PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN THE UNIT TYPE OF HOUSING DEVELOPED



Since 2012, the number of studio units in Allston-Brighton has grown by 55%. The number of 3+ bedroom units has grown by 27%. Meanwhile, units with 1 and 2 bedrooms shrunk. 1- and 2-bedroom units decreased in absolute numbers over the same time period.<sup>1</sup>

The survey also asked community members if affordable and high-quality housing was available, would that make them more or less likely to remain in Allston-Brighton. 57% of respondents said that they would be "significantly" more likely to remain in Allston-Brighton, including "much more likely" responses, the total rises to 82% of respondents. This indicates satisfaction with the community, but narrow dissatisfaction with the ability to fulfill basic housing needs.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B20541

There is likely no bigger strength held amongst service providers in supporting the goal of basic housing needs, and no greater challenge faced among them daily. The goals of finding affordable housing options, responding to threats of eviction, and addressing issues of housing quality is a weekly occurrence for service providers regardless of organizational mission, and a daily occurrence

for those that either provide housing or housing-related services. Existing relationships with City of Boston departments and staff are deeply valued in addressing these concerns, especially for those organizations that do not hold expertise in this regard. Both non-English speakers and the elderly rely deeply upon local service providers to navigate government processes to ultimately find alternative and affordable forms of shelter.

**Food Retail Infrastructure Needs to Grow Stronger to Enable Residents to Utilize their Food Security Benefits.**

There exists a robust and organized service provision ecosystem in Allston-Brighton dedicated to the access and provision of healthy and affordable food. This web of interconnecting programs serves a critical need in both creating programming in which government food vouchers such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) can be utilized locally. The 2020 ABHC Understanding Food Access also noted this networked effect as a key asset for the neighborhood with all five major grocery stores accepting SNAP/HIP vouchers along with 19 of 31 convenience stores and 9 of 12 neighborhood markets. More and more, this programming is also serving a broader base of residents that do not qualify for government assistance but are finding it challenging to afford basic food needs in light of the increasing cost of housing and the cost of living overall. There exists a wide array of service-based organizations that participate in minimizing this critical gap in food provision, be it for immigrant families, senior citizens, or low-income families with young children.

The Food Security subsection of the survey distinguished between: general markets / supermarkets, specialty food markets, cultural and ethnic food markets, minimarkets, and late-nite [sic.] / 24-hour markets. All of these services are used routinely by residents: over 50% of subsection respondents visited each service category regularly (at least weekly or monthly) excluding late-nite, which only 38% of respondents utilized weekly or monthly. General Markets and Supermarkets, the most commonly utilized resource, are used weekly by 66.5% of survey respondents, with another 30% utilizing the service at least once a month. Mini-Markets also stand out as a frequently utilized resource, though with less intensity than General/ Supermarkets. Mini-Market usage is most likely linked to the number and proximity of these services to most neighborhood residents. 59% of survey respondents noted that there was “more than one” Mini-Market within a 15-minute walk from their home.

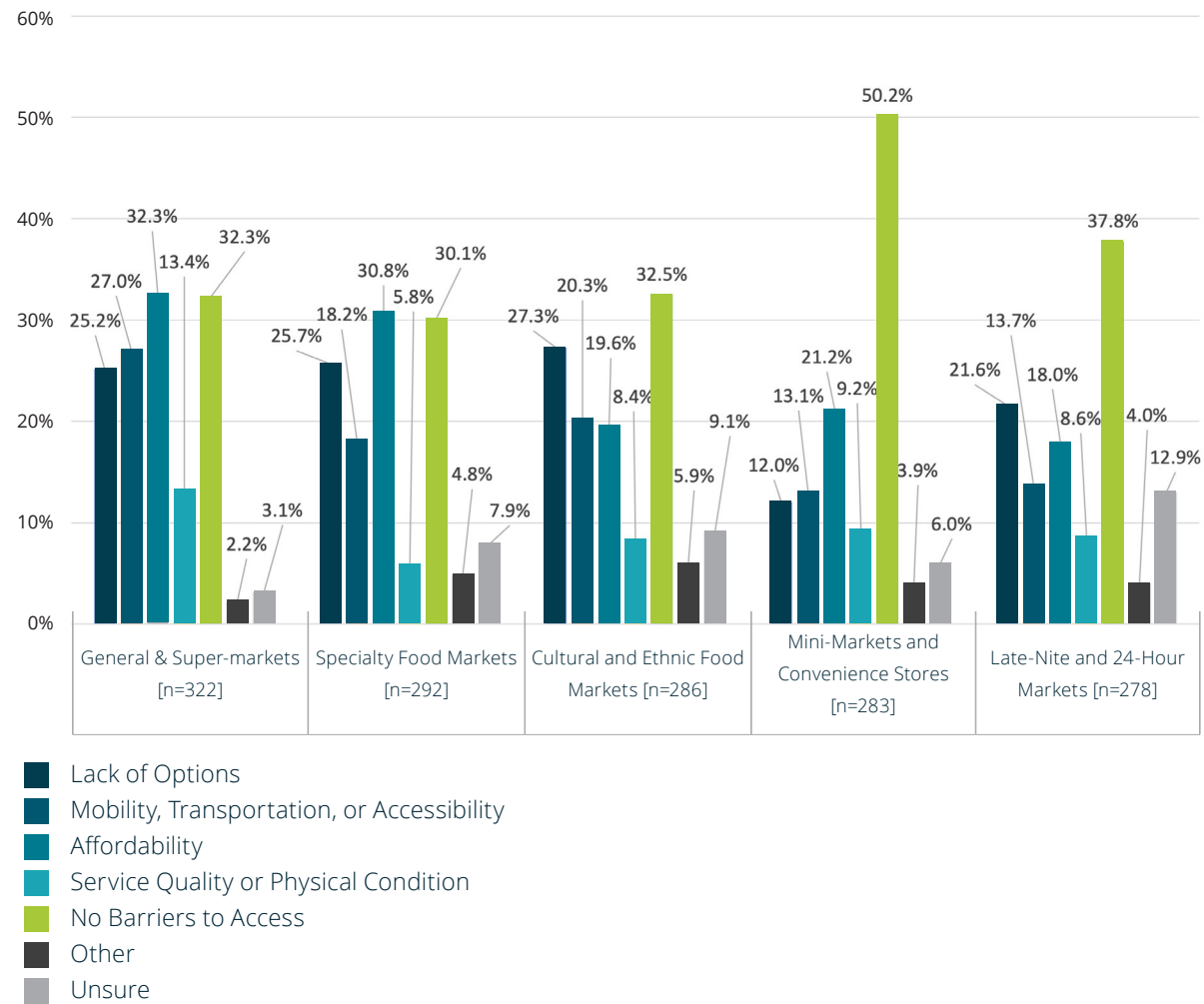
**FIGURE 13:**  
SURVEY RESPONSES RELATED TO FOOD ACCESS



Number of Options (Magnitude) and Proximity for General Markets and Supermarkets

- **Red:** No Options or Option but not with 15 minutes
- **Blue/Teal:** At least One Option or Multiple Options within 15 minutes
- **Gray:** No Response to Survey Question

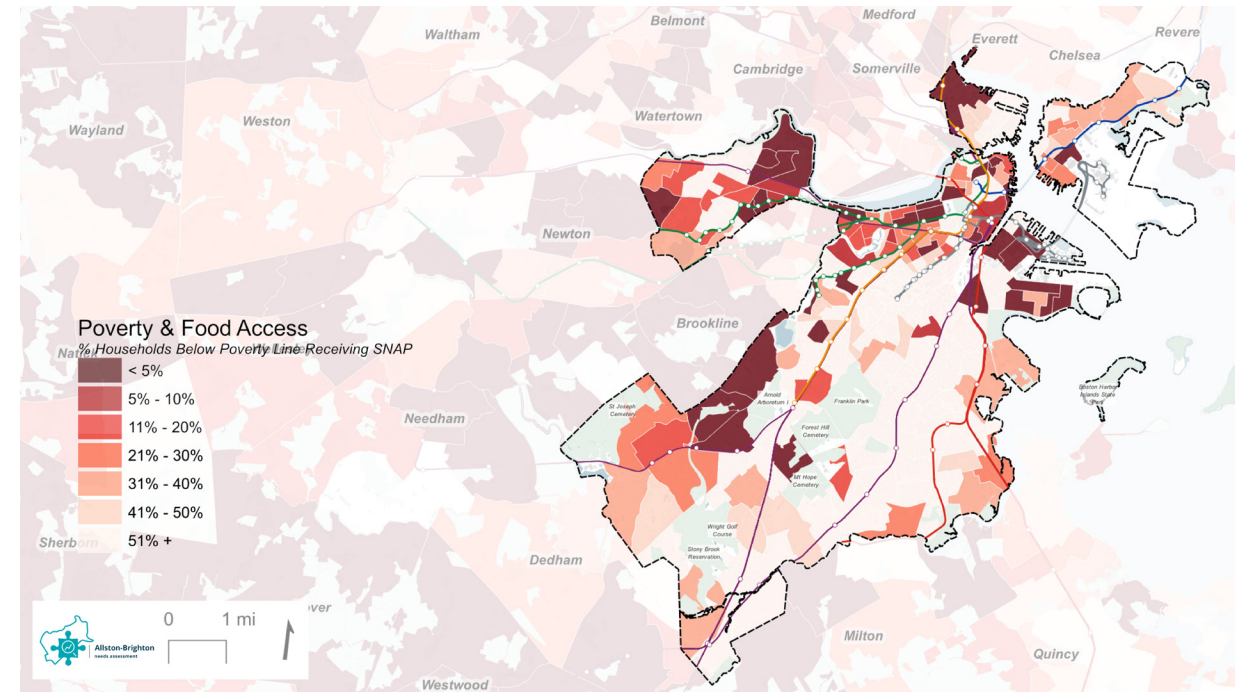
**FIGURE 14:**  
BARRIERS TO AFFORDABLE FOOD ACCESS



Access to food services generally favored walking, an access mode identified by one third of respondents, followed by driving and public transit (bus and rail combined, bus more prominent). Despite the robust food ecosystem, issues of food insecurity pervade for priority equity residents that face overall increases to cost of living in the neighborhood. Especially in areas that serve senior citizens or those that utilize affordable housing units, a lack of affordable grocery stores or markets was named as a primary concern. More upscale stores or smaller luxury markets are not matching the need and demand of these residents, forcing complicated transit connectivity

strategies to align residents with economically feasible options. Some service providers have gone to the lengths of partnering with private corporations to provide weekly transit to their respective grocery store, with the store providing buses that pick up and drop off residents in order to shop in affordable locations not accessible otherwise. Large increases in local construction along Western Avenue or Brighton Center complicates access for many, increasing transit times or physically impeding pedestrian access in a manner that is inhibitive for those who are physically challenged.

**FIGURE 15:**  
FOOD ACCESS IN RELATION TO INCOME LEVELS



The demographic analysis highlighted that there are large gaps in the number of households living below the poverty line who receive food assistance through the SNAP<sup>1</sup>. While possessing an income below the poverty line does not automatically make a household eligible for SNAP, this metric can be used as a proxy to diagnose where unmet food needs may be highest<sup>2</sup>. A few areas near Commonwealth Avenue have high rates of SNAP assistance, though there appears to be considerable room for SNAP expansion throughout most of Allston-Brighton<sup>3</sup>. This analysis also reveals a need to understand the existing network of formal and informal food assistance programs and providers throughout the neighborhood.

Conversations in qualitative interviews further highlighted that there exist adequate options for markets that accept SNAP or HIP benefits, with the local community-driven farmer’s markets being one of the more accessible options. Service providers of all types reflected upon the realities unearthed amid the COVID pandemic. For many, there was a lack of understanding of the depths of food insecurity that existed within the neighborhood. That issue has only persisted further, and reinvesting in programs that enable residents to utilize food vouchers is becoming a salient and critical topic to address this existing economic gap.

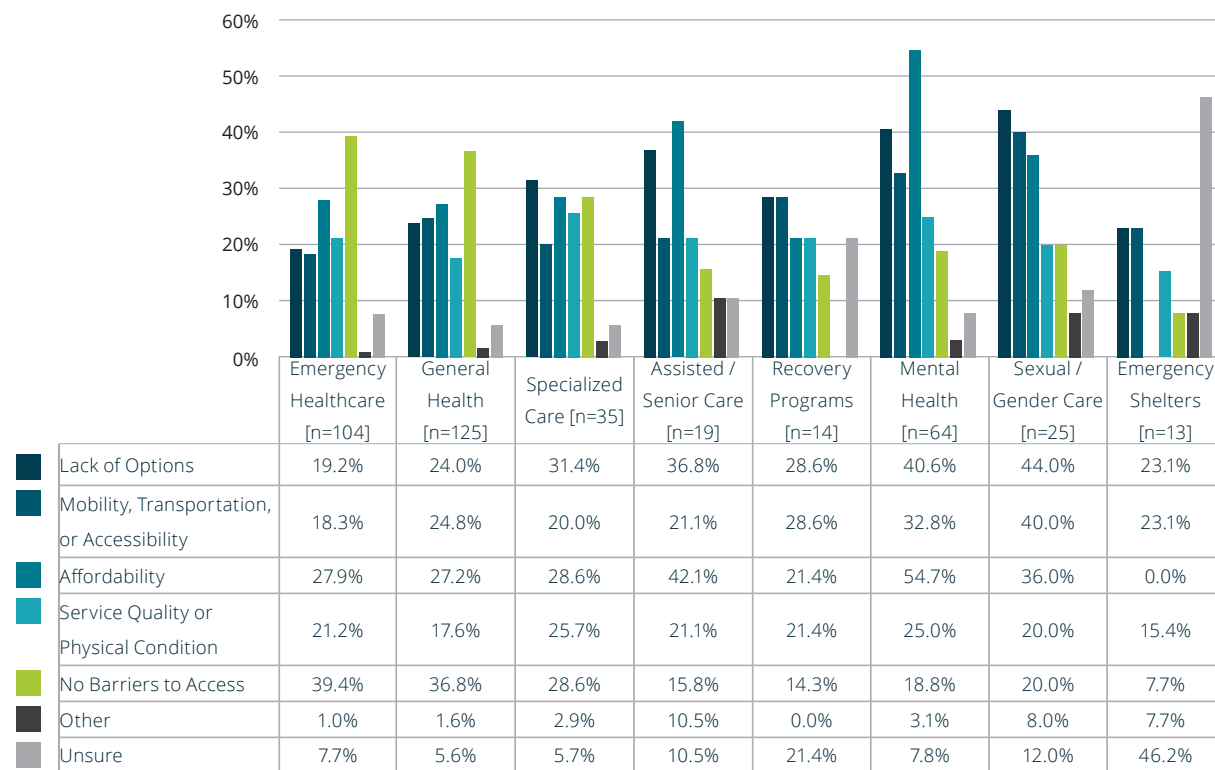
1 U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B22003  
 2 <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-snap-benefits-food-stamps>  
 3 ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates, Table B22003

### While Health Services are Expanding, Telehealth Services and Mental Health Services Remain Under-Resourced for Multilingual Population.

Survey respondents identified “no barrier to access” to Emergency (39%) and General Healthcare (37%) services. For those that did identify a barrier to access for these service types, the most common was

affordability, followed by lack of options, access, and service quality. Barriers were much more commonly identified for more specialized health care services.

**FIGURE 16:**  
ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN ALLSTON-BRIGHTON



In particular, access to “mental health services” was clearly restricted by its cost (55% of respondents identified “affordability” as a barrier) and lack of options (41% of respondents). This is the most significant healthcare category where people were far more likely to identify barriers to access than no barrier. Importantly, mental health services constitute the only service category where both frequent (once and week) and regular usage (once a month or more) exceed periodic usage (once a year or more). Only General Healthcare services can claim a significant portion of regular users. Survey respondents indicated a clear lack of affordable care, total options, and ‘close’ options related to mental health.

In a neighborhood as diverse as Allston-Brighton, access to basic needs including healthcare services is often restricted because of language barriers. Service providers identified the lack of a centralized system of best practices and approaches to securing government assistance for priority residents. Many service providers must learn in real time or develop their own government relationships over the course of many years of service. This is of particular concern for the vast majority of service providers that support immigrant families and English Language Learners. If a municipal or state government department — be it in housing, health, or food justice — does not speak the language of the resident in question, the process of serving as a conduit is labor intensive. This is viewed as a critical gap in service provision that is limiting access to available Basic Needs resources.

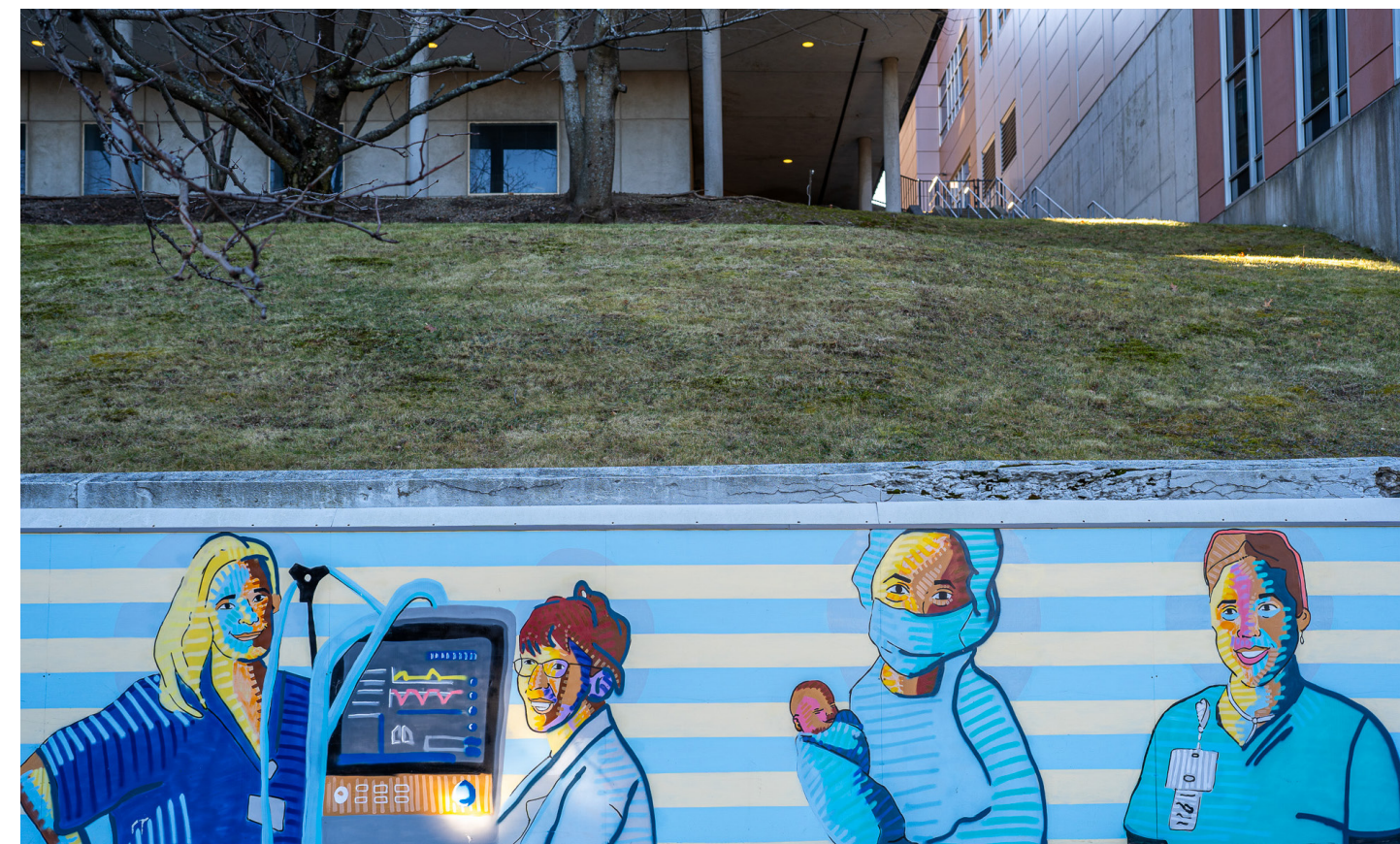


Photo of a mural in front of St. Elizabeth's Medical Center

# Overall Neighborhood Level Narratives

## Basic Needs: Housing affordability and access is a more dominant concern in areas seeing rapid large-scale housing and infrastructural development—in particular Lower Allston.

Institutional development brings with it significant upgrades to the infrastructure, but the style of high-rise, smaller, more expensive housing options seen in many contemporary development projects is viewed as pushing prices higher across the neighborhood. On an emotional level, residents of all types are expressing fear of displacement amid increased development.

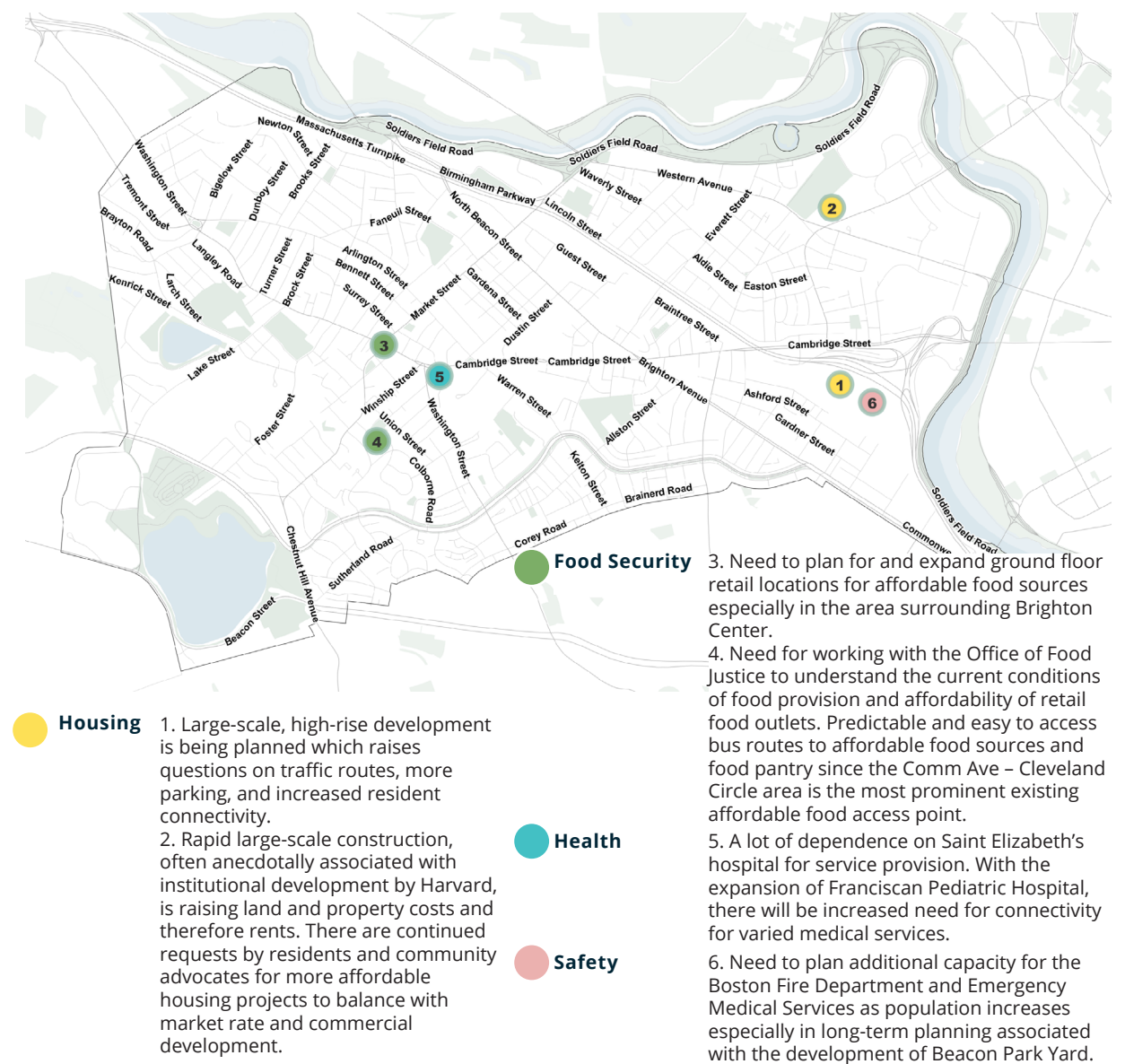
The neighborhood walk conducted with long term residents in Allston-Brighton highlighted that key health facilities such as the Saint Elizabeth’s Hospital and Franciscan Pediatric Hospital are significant resources for the neighborhood. With recent expansion of services, these centers serve a deeper purpose in the neighborhood. There is concern however that residents are not able to easily access holistic medical services, especially priority residents such as seniors. Starting with these critical needs will highlight opportunities to improve service and access for all residents.

As the population of Allston-Brighton increases, various services are likely to be strained and new capacities need to be planned for, starting with the upcoming neighborhood plan. In particular, there is concern that development of expensive housing is outpacing the production of affordable housing and causing increased strain.

Conversely, food security, for example, becomes more of a priority in key sub-neighborhoods closer to Brighton. Residents are pushing for small-scale ground level food retail to be more prevalent and culturally competent.

Public safety services on the other hand need planning to determine capacity or service expansion needs in areas such as Lower Allston and around the future Beacon Park Yard development, a way of proactive emergency management for a growing resident population.

**FIGURE 17:**  
SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF BASIC NEEDS (QUALITATIVE)



- Housing**
  1. Large-scale, high-rise development is being planned which raises questions on traffic routes, more parking, and increased resident connectivity.
  2. Rapid large-scale construction, often anecdotally associated with institutional development by Harvard, is raising land and property costs and therefore rents. There are continued requests by residents and community advocates for more affordable housing projects to balance with market rate and commercial development.

- Health**
  5. A lot of dependence on Saint Elizabeth’s hospital for service provision. With the expansion of Franciscan Pediatric Hospital, there will be increased need for connectivity for varied medical services.
- Safety**
  6. Need to plan additional capacity for the Boston Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services as population increases especially in long-term planning associated with the development of Beacon Park Yard.

- Food Security**
  3. Need to plan for and expand ground floor retail locations for affordable food sources especially in the area surrounding Brighton Center.
  4. Need for working with the Office of Food Justice to understand the current conditions of food provision and affordability of retail food outlets. Predictable and easy access bus routes to affordable food sources and food pantry since the Comm Ave - Cleveland Circle area is the most prominent existing affordable food access point.



# Topic Findings: Access to Opportunity

## Schools have Several Untapped Opportunities for Local Partnerships as a Way of Promoting Critical Socio-Economic Infrastructure.

Access to educational services provides an interesting outlook at mobility based on resident survey data. For educational services relevant to young infants up to 13-year-olds, “personal car” is the most common mode of access to a given service than any other transportation mode. This is despite the relative magnitude of close-by options for general education services.

Respondents only indicated significant preferences for “walk”, “bicycle”, or “bus transit” for high-school, after-school, and English language learning services. “Rail transit” is the least popular amongst respondents in regard to accessing elementary and high-school education (1.6% of

respondents). However, rail transit remains a key mode for community members who need to access educational services that are less likely to be located nearby. For example, 8.3% of section respondents indicated they use rail to access “special education services”. The “School Bus”, as a mobility option, is particularly relevant for elementary education. 21% of respondents indicated that they or their children use the school bus to access elementary-level education. This is the highest share for the “school bus” of any educational service. Respondents made, on average, 30 minutes to an hour round trip daily to accommodate educational needs of those in their household/care.

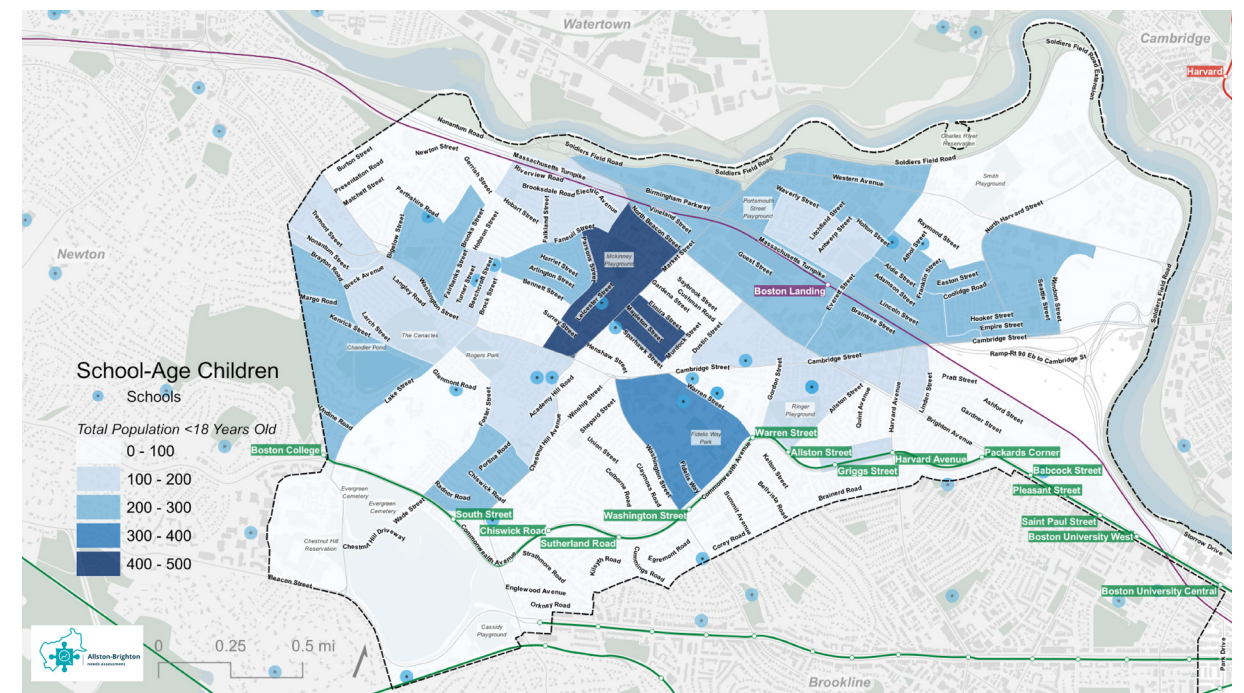


Photo of Blue Bikes docked in front of the Jackson Mann Community Center



Photo of the Oak Square YMCA

**FIGURE 18:**  
SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN AND SCHOOLS IN THE AREA

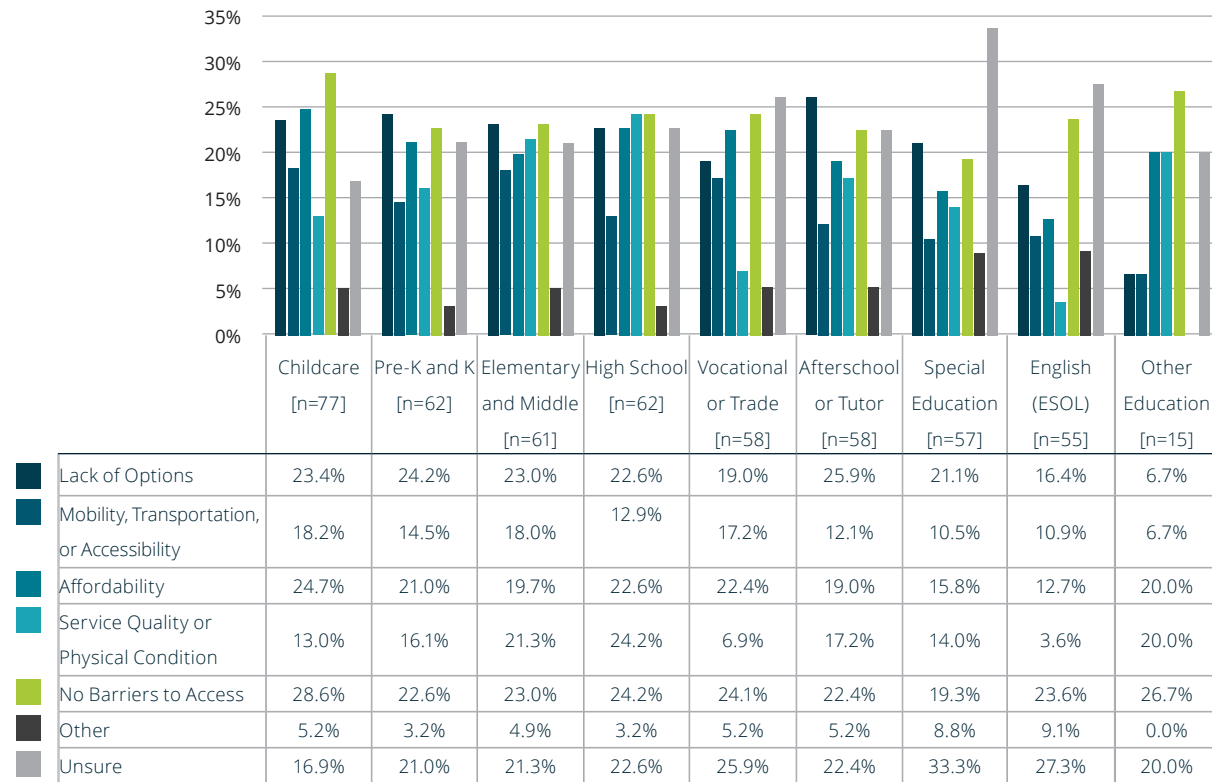


For immigrant families, English Language Learners, and lower-middle income residents, gaps in language access and intentional public-community partnerships are impacting access to available public resources. While a strong infrastructure exists amongst community-based organizations, the challenge of connecting families to available education and employment/childcare public-nonprofit resources is a daily barrier for local service providers.

The multilingual nature of Allston-Brighton presents an inherent strain on service providers that often lack the capacity to promote critical economic opportunity pathways, be it youth job announcements, childcare resources, and job training initiatives. In particular,

for students and families, there still exists large gaps in the level of parent knowledge and access to educational opportunities for the children of immigrant families in which English is not the primary language in the household. The June 2022 closure of the Jackson Mann School was cited multiple times in conversations as an example in which immigrant and lower-income families were left unaware of their options. Anecdotes in interviews with small service providers working with immigrant families highlighted that non-English communication about the school shutting down was limited leaving some families unaccounted for and in a state of confusion as the process neared its conclusion.

**FIGURE 19:**  
BARRIERS TO EDUCATION SERVICES



Affordability remains a consistent barrier across education service types as, particularly for early-age education and supplemental educational services and programming. When affordability declines as a barrier, “service quality” tends to increase. Service quality is a particularly acute barrier for “elementary” and “high school” educational services.

Additionally, community partners who were interviewed noted a number of unrealized partnerships amongst key institutions, nonprofit service providers, and residents that could address these challenges. For example, the 35 Fidelis Way Boston Housing Authority site is directly adjacent to Brighton High School. Despite this immediate proximity, a community interview noted no personal knowledge of any formal programming or partnerships that exists between the school and

housing resident programming. As one of the priority equity residential sites in Brighton for youth, this lack of a formal partnership is viewed as an example of missed collaboration that is common amongst immigrant and lower-income families within Allston-Brighton.

**With New, High-education Jobs Being Added into the Local Economy, Pathways to Accessible Employment is Critical.**

Over 48% of survey respondents noted that “lack of options in Allston-Brighton” was a barrier to accessing “employment in [their] desired field”, whereas “lack of options anywhere” was a barrier for only 27% of respondents when considering employment in their desired field. The jobs exist, just not in Allston-Brighton.

Within Allston-Brighton, the highest unemployment rates are in areas along Commonwealth Avenue corridor and on Harvard University-owned land adjacent to the Charles River. While students are generally not classified as part of the labor force (and therefore, should not be included in the definition of “unemployed”), it is possible that high student populations are skewing the unemployment statistics in institutionally owned areas of Allston-Brighton.

10.7 % of employed Allston-Brighton residents work and live within the neighborhood. 89.3% of employed Allston-Brighton residents commute outside the neighborhood to get to work. On the average workday, over 29,000 Allston-Brighton residents commute out of the neighborhood while nearly 35,000 people commute into Allston-Brighton for work. These commuting patterns are similar to those of other neighborhoods that have a large institutional and college-age presence, such as Fenway and Mission Hill. 97.1% of Fenway residents and 86.4% of Mission Hill residents commute out of the neighborhood to get to work.<sup>1</sup> Allston-Brighton has a growing service population with the addition of large-scale employers, yet information on the service population and their needs from the neighborhood should be further explored during the neighborhood plan development.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2020; Neighborhoods defined by census tracts.

According to community partners that were interviewed, the turnover of small businesses amid the recovery from the pandemic has placed a strain on consistent employment pathway development for youth and families. This is exacerbated by the lack of locally devoted community job centers, placing a large amount of responsibility on existing large-scale institutions in the “Eds and Meds” sector to fill this workforce development gap.

Local immigrant advocacy organizations that support the diverse residents of Allston-Brighton have found that for immigrant families, particularly those with undocumented family members, the post-pandemic economy is a primary issue. The pathway to both live and work for those without a college degree in the neighborhood has shrunk dramatically following the pandemic. The proliferation of life sciences and research labs in the neighborhood is impacting job opportunities in the neighborhood and intensifying the need for more employment opportunities that are accessible to current residents without a college degree and workforce training to bridge from current to new industries for those with high school and associate level degrees. Furthermore, the prevalence of the college student population increases challenges for young parents to access more fluid employment opportunities as there is increased competition for part-time work.

### Reliable Modes of Transit is a Key Leverage Point to Improve Service Delivery Across Areas of Work.

The 2021 A-B Mobility Plan had nine key goals, two of which focused on transit sustainability and managing local and regional growth through transit options. With a large service population and 22% of its future growth coming from labs and offices, Allston-Brighton’s transit needs continue to stretch and resident need for reliable transportation networks in the area grows. The 2021 A-B Mobility Plan proposed to upgrade key intersections across the Western Avenue corridors. Various collected data points in interviews as part of the 2023 Needs Assessment point to much needed updates to pedestrian crossings not only along Western Avenue but also Commonwealth Avenue, Brighton Avenue, and Cambridge Street. Recommendations given by small service providers such as providing private transit options to healthcare services, grocery stores, and more are a reaction to what is seen as an unreliable and often unpredictable public transit system which adversely affects priority equity resident groups.

Of respondents to the Employment survey subsection, almost 54% of survey respondents commute to work at least once a week; 34% do so every day. A small subset of respondents commute least regularly, 20% do so in a hybrid remote/commute paradigm; and 23% work remotely or mostly remote. The segment of mostly remote workers displayed a general preference for working

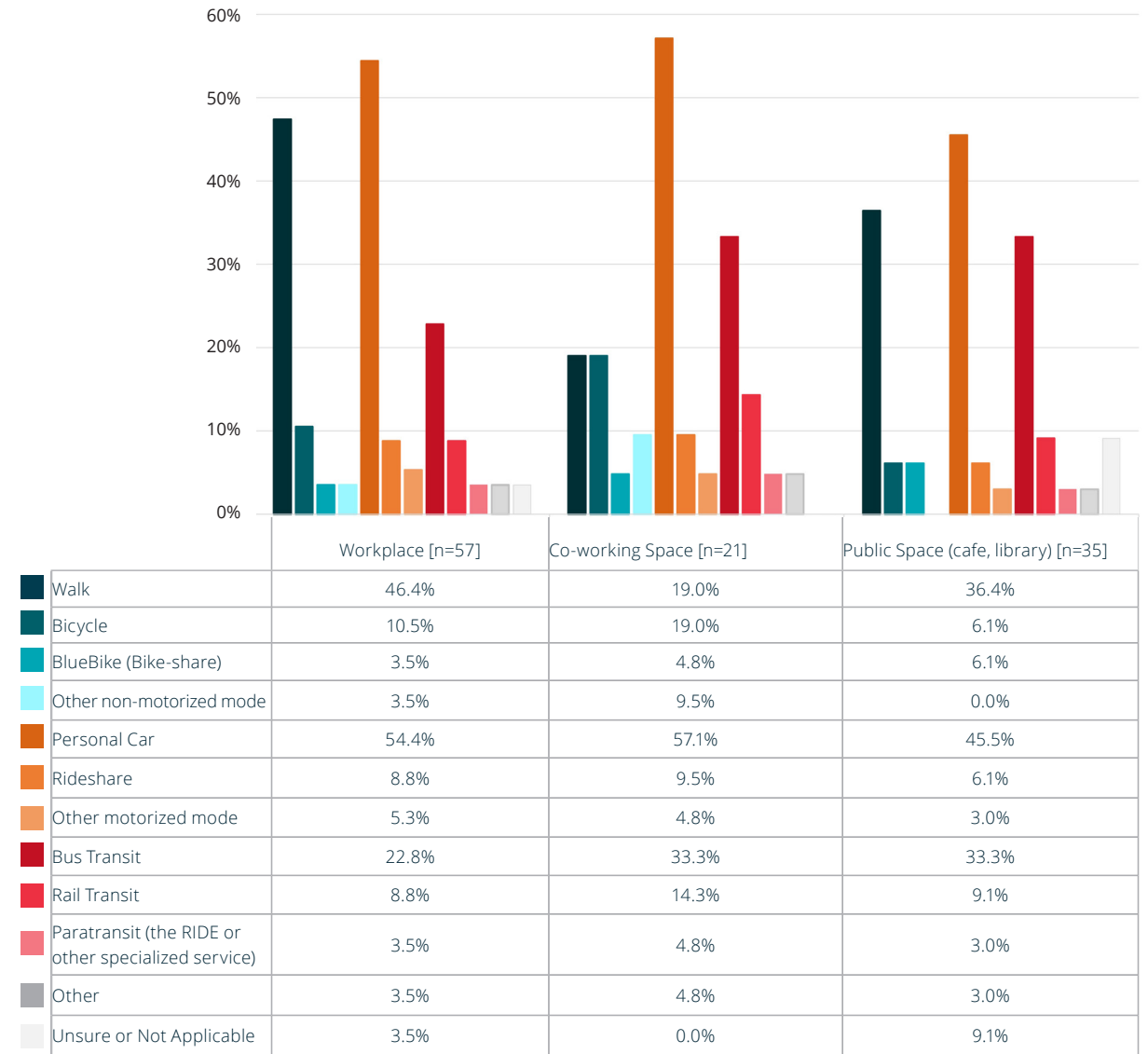
from their home (or another private residential space). However, 29% of people who responded that they work remotely at least some of the time noted that they occasionally work from a public space like a café or library; 16% noted that they occasionally use membership-based (“Co-Working”) space. Those residents who worked in public spaces (outside of their private residence) preferred to remain in Allston-Brighton (55%) rather than an adjacent community (27%) or other town (6%). This highlights that both commuters and those that work mostly remote would benefit from improved access through the public realm in Allston-Brighton.

Overall, survey respondents to the Employment section defined the location of their workplace as Allston-Brighton (48%), Adjacent community (30%)<sup>1</sup>, or Other town (7%). “In-community” employment was more commonly identified by survey takers than census figures suggest. According to the most recent census 10.7 % of Allston-Brighton residents work and live within the neighborhood while 89.3% of employed Allston-Brighton residents commute outside the neighborhood to get to work.

Personal cars were most frequently identified as a mode of transit for those respondents who both lived and worked in Allston-Brighton. Together, walking and transit ridership account for half of transportation modes identified by respondents for accessing workplaces inside the neighborhood. This shows that the population has a dependency on using personal vehicles for transportation, even for short distances within the neighborhood.

<sup>1</sup> Adjacent neighborhoods defined as Boston outside of Allston-Brighton, Brookline, Newton, Watertown, Cambridge.

**FIGURE 20:** SURVEY RESPONDENTS MODE OF ACCESS TO WORKPLACE INSIDE ALLSTON-BRIGHTON



**FIGURE 21:**  
MODE OF ACCESS TO WORKPLACE OUTSIDE ALLSTON-BRIGHTON



For those traveling outside of Allston-Brighton to their workplace, bus (45.5%) and rail (39%) transit are the most frequently identified transport modes (respondents could identify multiple modes), followed by a personal car (34.1%). Bicycle transportation (25%) is also a relevant mode for those who leave the neighborhood routinely to work. For those accessing a co-working or public space outside

Allston-Brighton (a sample of 18 respondents), 31% of respondents used a personal car, and a total of 68% of respondents used some or a combination of bus transit, rail transit, walking, and bicycling.

2021 ACS 5-Year “means of transportation to work” (S0802) estimates for Allston-Brighton (ZCTAs 02134 and 02135) put car and carpool usage at 42%, public transportation (bus and rail) at 33%, and other/non-

motorized modes like walking or by bicycle at 25%. Survey results reflect the differing behaviors for intra- and inter-neighborhood travels that are not clearly distinguishable from ACS data including continued reliance on cars for mid-length trips and increased flexibility in modes for longer commuting travel.

This is testament to the impact of the investment made in critical transit points such as the Boston Landing Commuter Rail station and the bus lanes added to Brighton Ave that connect routes from Newton, Needham and surrounding areas. As highlighted by the 2021 A-B Mobility Plan, investment in the Allston-Brighton Transportation Management Association will also strategize transportation shuttle services for the service population in Allston-Brighton. Survey respondents reported personal car usage for those within the neighborhood most likely reflects both the comparative ease of finding parking at their workplace (unlike for downtown offices) and the lack of transit options for those accessing workplaces that are not located along the (mainly) residential areas with significant transit service quality.

Qualitative interviews emphasized and confirmed priority equity user findings around transit accessibility. Despite robust MBTA offerings that include light rail trains, buses, and the RIDE<sup>1</sup>, connectivity to basic need services, educational programming, and employment opportunities is inconsistent and operationally onerous. For seniors, acute access challenges pervade daily life. The ability to reach transit access points presents distinct challenges near senior housing facilities, and uneven sidewalks near high-traffic access points as defined by small-scale service providers near critical areas of community gathering are difficult to navigate for those that require mobility assistance devices. According to small-scale service providers focused

<sup>1</sup> The RIDE paratransit service provides door-to-door, shared-ride public transportation for people with a disability. <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/the-ride>

on service provision and mobility needs for seniors, the MBTA’s “The RIDE” is overwhelmed with requests on a daily basis for the residents they support. These same providers feel as though the service as currently constituted is unreliable for seniors and the physically impaired when attempting to access critical medical care appointments. Temporary pandemic programs that connected elderly housing authority residents to local grocery stores have been paused, and accessing nearby options via walking is proving challenging amid increased levels of neighborhood construction.

For youth that travel to Brighton High School from neighborhoods such as Roxbury and Dorchester, a local transit system that is viewed amongst residents and providers as complicated and inconsistent is limiting their ability to participate in afterschool activities and in local cultural activities. For those who travel from Allston-Brighton to city schools outside the neighborhood, a similar problem persists. Additionally, youth from low-income families are relying upon public transit to access after school employment, and these operational challenges are a strain on those efforts.

Lastly, pedestrian connectivity such as incomplete sidewalk connectivity, increased construction and development blockades, and inconsistent crosswalk signal provision to public amenities such as public parks and open space for residents of all types persists as a challenge. Crossing Soldier’s Field Road or Western Avenue safely is top of mind as a primary mobility challenge, especially in areas with high levels of development and construction. For example, the Telford St. pedestrian bridge that connects residents to the Artesani Playground was named as an unsafe and deteriorating piece of infrastructure. This concern was further emphasized on a neighborhood walk with residents of Allston-Brighton. The bridge is a key connection point for seniors, families, and youth. Other frequented crossings are in need of improvement such as Warren Street at Commonwealth Avenue.

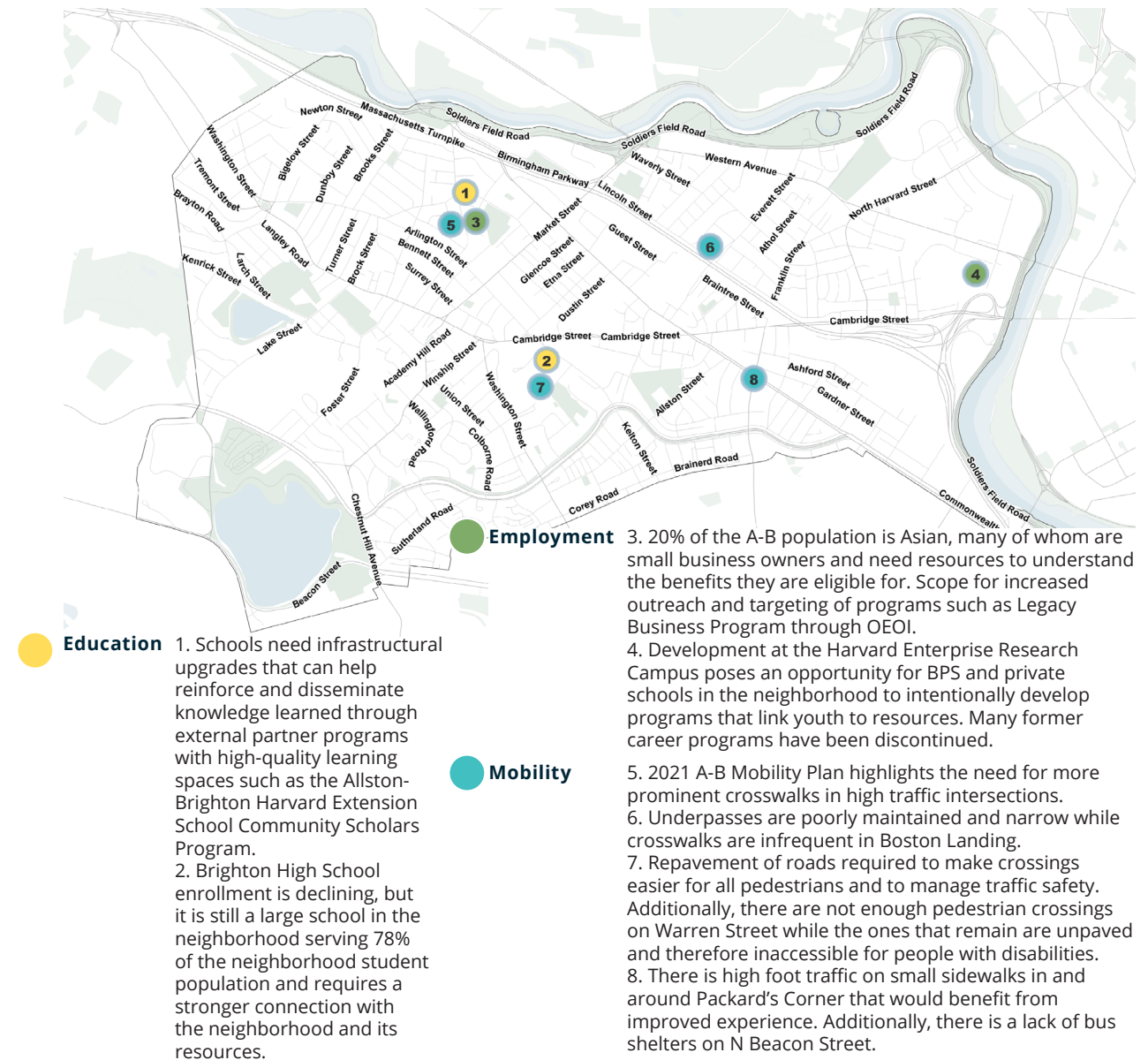
# Overall Neighborhood Level Narratives

**Access to Opportunity:** There is a need for infrastructure improvements that position local schools as critical social and economic infrastructure. Improvements highlighted in qualitative conversations point to better lab infrastructure, access to technology, and transportation for partner programs. These are foundational requirements for external partnerships in order for programs to impact educational outcomes.

With 20% of the population and many business owners in Allston-Brighton being Asian, the Office of Economic Development and Inclusion are working on legacy business programs with small businesses owners to support an intersectional community need. The program provides security and new pathways for businesses to survive ownership transition. It can enhance service delivery by joining forces with city-wide initiatives such as intergenerational wealth creation at the Mayor’s Office of Housing.

Unlike other issues in the neighborhood, mobility concerns are spread out across different areas in Allston-Brighton. The issue of connectivity to services is therefore foundational in the resident experience of the neighborhood. Mobility concerns spread across areas of work, and resident groups await updates on key initiatives that were launched as part of the 2021 A-B Mobility Plan but have not seen fruition.

**FIGURE 22:** SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY NEEDS (QUALITATIVE)



# Topic Findings: Community

## Arts and Cultural Spaces Have Presence in the Neighborhood and Community Centers Serve as Critical Social Infrastructure.

Public community space is essential to neighborhood quality of life and social cohesion. Survey respondents to the Public Space and Community section were asked to note their usage of the following service categories: Parks, Recreational Space, and Playgrounds, Public and Civic Open Space (squares, plazas, etc.), Libraries, Arts and Cultural Space (galleries, theaters, etc.), Performance Space (concerts, music venues, etc.), Social and Entertainment Space (restaurants, cafés, bars), Faith Community Space (church, synagogue, mosque, etc.).

The 2021 Placekeeping Report notes that with rising development pressures in Allston-Brighton, it is increasingly difficult for art and cultural spaces to thrive in the neighborhood. The changing demographics has pushed or fragmented previous artist communities. While various cultural spaces such as the Paradise Rock Club and Brighton Music Hall exist, they need to find new relevance. New development projects—especially in the sub-neighborhoods of Allston Village and Union Square—have included public art and creative spaces within their plans; the same trend however cannot be seen in lower income sub-neighborhoods such as Packard’s Corner and Aberdeen.

Parks and playgrounds, civic open spaces, and social/entertainment spaces are all utilized at a considerable level of frequency. 75% to 80% of respondents to the Public Space and Community subsection utilized those three service categories at least once a month; 40% to 50% of section respondents claimed even more frequent usage of at least once a week. Libraries, specialized cultural spaces, and faith community spaces also claimed regular usage, but at slightly longer time intervals. The time spent on an average visit to these services also indicates usage differences. Park visitors tended to remain at the park for 30 minutes to an hour, as did visitors to civic spaces and libraries. People attending cultural venues, performance venues, or social/entertainment locations spent considerably more time at those locations, from 1 hour to 2 hours to more than 2 hours being the most common response to the usage time interval question for those services.



Photo of route 70 bus and construction near Smith Field with the PRX Podcast Garage in the background

**FIGURE 23:**  
SERVICE MAGNITUDE AND PROXIMITY OF PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY SPACE



Community partner conversations surfaced multiple models of community centers in Allston-Brighton that are invaluable to the day-to-day lives of residents, including sites developed by the city as part of neighborhood planning, larger nonprofit organizations that support of various community programs, and sites developed for a specific demographic such as senior centers.

The centers serve as important sites for ideation of new programmatic efforts and implementation of existing programs that ensure neighborhood

progress. They root communities and organizations to specific sites in the neighborhood, especially important for sub-neighborhoods with a more transient population. This ripple effect of key social infrastructure has supported the formation of new leadership and social movements developed by priority equity communities to meet community needs.

Options for cultural spaces are more limited as identified in the survey; where options do exist, they generally are not within easy walking distance of

residents. Library options are easier to access, but there's still a significant portion of respondents (25%) that noted an option was present but too far to walk comfortably. Simultaneously, qualitative interviews highlighted that a more transient population in the neighborhood has reduced the number of students enrolled in public schools. For example, the total number of students enrolled in Brighton High School has dropped from 682 in 2018 to 360 in 2022, a decrease of 47.3% in just five years according to City of Boston data.

This has led to an underinvestment in school infrastructure and a loss in the total number of school counselors according to community small-scale service provider interviews. Other programming

efforts for youth have also been adversely affected for the same reason. Youth programs for soccer, football, and other sports have seen limited participation in recent years. While Allston-Brighton has large sports fields, there currently aren't enough students and programs to make use of them. These have also become compounding factors in the challenge for the neighborhood to retain a diverse age demographic alongside culturally appealing activities for local youth and teenagers. Only 8% of the neighborhood population is younger than 18 years old, compared to a citywide average of 16%. Conversely, 41% is between the ages of 25-34, a stark contrast the citywide average of 24%, emphasizing the impact of colleges in Allston-Brighton.

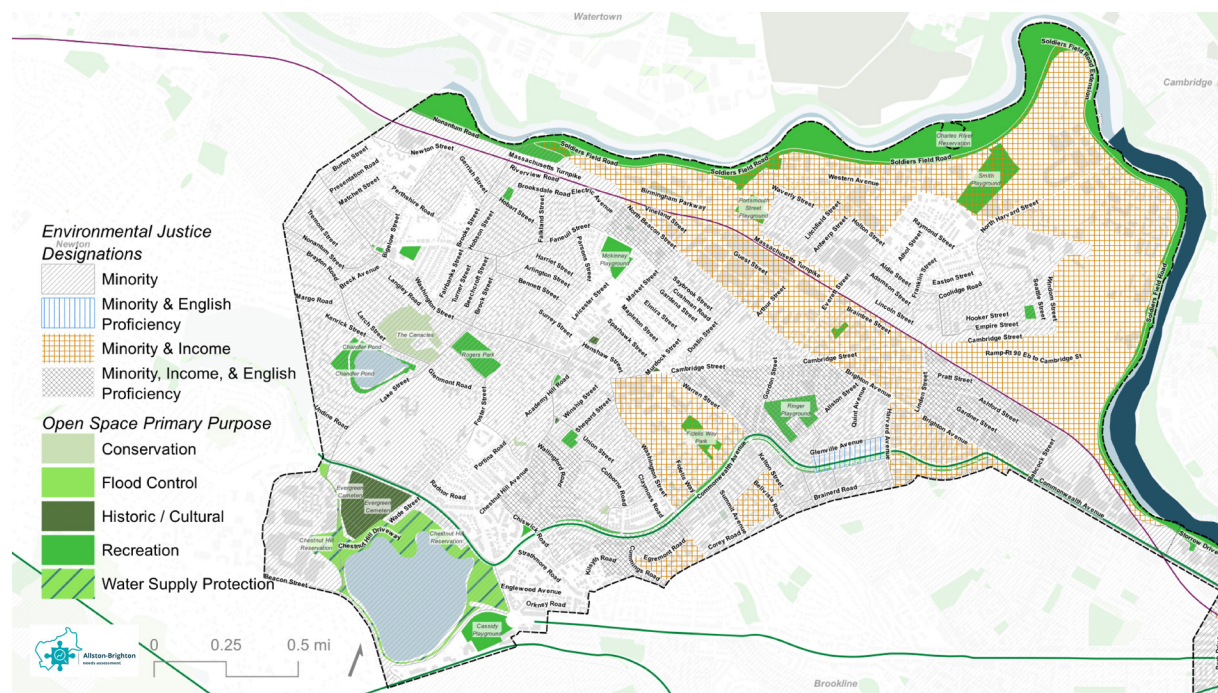
**Open and Green Spaces are Prevalent and Utilized, but Persistent Construction and Accessibility Issues Hamper Resident Experience.**

Unlike other routine activities (buying food, education, work, etc.), the most identified access mode for parks and civic public spaces in Allston-Brighton is by foot: 89% of respondents identified “walk” as (one of) their access modes for parks, 73% for other public spaces, and 60% for public, community, and social/entertainment spaces overall. There is a smaller but more significant (compared to other routine actions) share of bicycle-based access: 21% for parks, 16% for public spaces, 17% for libraries, and 17% for social/entertainment spaces. Overall, bicycle travel is a viable, utilized mode for 15% of respondents. For services with fewer, nearby options, the share of people who use a personal vehicle or transit option to access these services increases. Compare the 31% of people who identified “personal car” as at least one of their options for accessing parks or playgrounds to the 43%, 39%, and 48% of survey section respondents

who claimed “personal car” as means to access “arts and cultural spaces”, “performance space”, or “social and entertainment space”, respectively. Rideshare should also be noted as a relevant mode of access for people traveling to “performances space” and “social/entertainment” spaces (15% and 16%, respectively).

Respondents were less likely to identify concrete barriers to access for these services. Affordability remains an issue for those spaces that are (generally) privately-run (bars, cafés, theaters, etc.). “Service quality” is, however, a relatively frequently identified barrier to access for parks and playgrounds at 25% of responses, the highest of any barrier for that community resource. In other words, the space exists but is not necessarily maintained or designed at a level that meets residents’ expectations or needs.

**FIGURE 24:**  
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE DESIGNATIONS



Spatial analysis highlights that Allston-Brighton’s open space network primarily consists of small to medium size parks and recreational facilities, as well as the open space along the banks of the Charles River. Safety in the neighborhood’s open spaces was a top concern identified in community interviews. Residents identified lack of maintenance, accessibility issues, and environmental nuisances such as construction debris as primary barriers to safe, comfortable use. Tree canopies on streets are sparse, especially in Allston, during the neighborhood walk with residents, some pointed out adverse heat island effects on Cambridge St, around Packard’s corner and Brighton Ave. The City of Boston, Parks and Recreation Urban Forest Plan (2022 UFP)<sup>1</sup> report also points out that while Boston has several designated green spaces in the neighborhood it needs to actively make space for trees on its street. Maintenance of tree canopies on streets is a complex challenge with potential opportunities for improvements and implementation of best practices outlined in the UFP.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.boston.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation/urban-forest-plan>

Community partner interviews expanded on this insight. While the presence of green space in Allston-Brighton is itself viewed as an asset, the lack of connectivity to many is a barrier. As is often noted by community members, Storrow Drive and complicated high-traffic intersections present challenging access issues to the Charles River and other key green space amenities. Experience within public spaces also holds the potential to be more accessible and friendly for seniors and persons with disabilities. Various touch points such as limited places to sit and unlevelled pathways are limiting the inclusive nature of public parks.

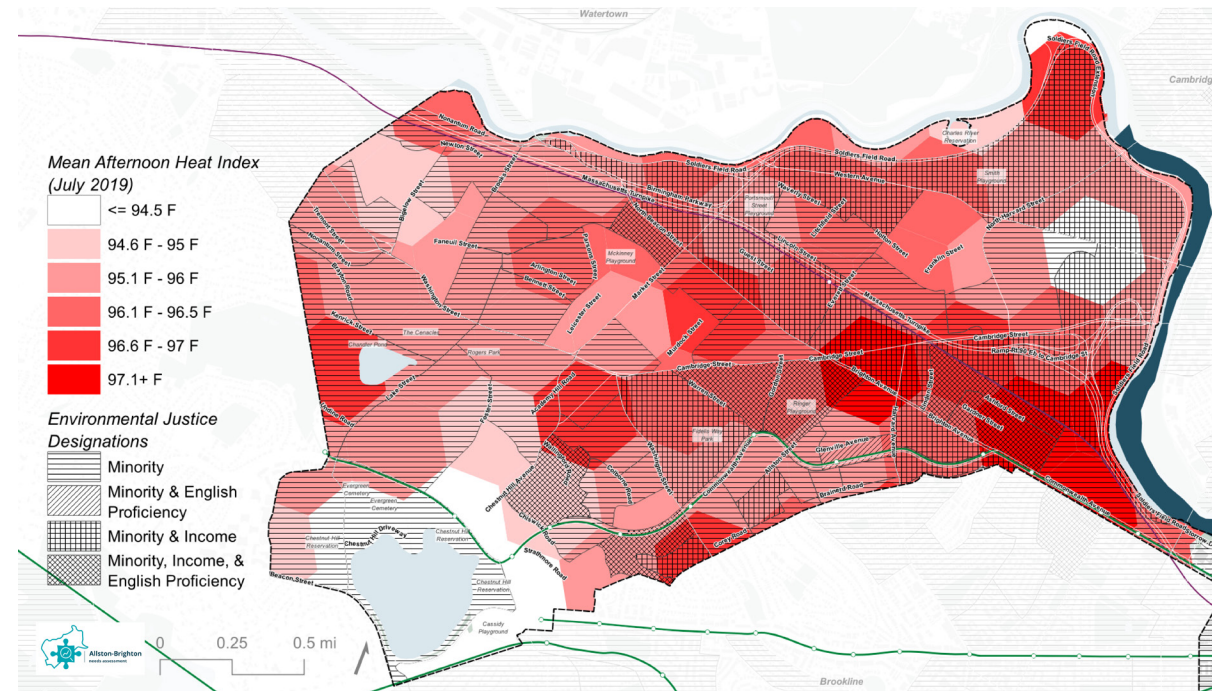
Allston-Brighton has a presence of a wide range of parks but as reported through community partner interviews they are on the extremes of how well maintained and usable they are. Smaller neighborhood parks may currently be overlooked in neighborhood planning and need to be made more accessible. Community members express that they are waiting for basic upgrades to take place so that the parks are functional for public use.

**Resiliency Planning and Communication to Multilingual Population Needs New Capacities and Strategies.**

Health risks from excessive heat are becoming an increasing issue in cities across the U.S. As extreme heat events become more common, an understanding of the places with people most vulnerable to extreme heat is necessary. Within Allston-Brighton, the coolest places on hot days tend to be near bodies of water such as the Charles River and the Chestnut Hill Reservoir. The hottest areas tend to be places with significant pavement and thus

a lack of tree cover such as major thoroughfares. A more detailed study is needed to determine how accessible cooler areas of the neighborhood are for residents. Given the feedback from community interviews, there is evidence that many Allston-Brighton community members face barriers to accessing the coolest parts of the neighborhood on hot days due to infrastructure such as major roads and interchanges.

**FIGURE 25:**  
MEAN AFTERNOON HEAT INDEX



Currently, climate adaptation communication about extreme weather can at times struggle to reach the non-English speaking population in a timely manner. There is a push by small service providers for city-level climate communication to utilize organic channels such as WhatsApp communication to reach populations via community groups. Populations with English as a second language also consume news content via radio, which is also an underutilized medium for communication by the city government.

The City of Boston, Heat Resilience Solutions for Boston (2022 Heat Plan)<sup>1</sup> also proposes 26 strategies for heat preparedness several of which focus on activating diverse communication channels with the public and encouraging neighborhoods to spread the word. The emphasis remains on direct, organic communication channels across areas.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.boston.gov/environment-and-energy/heat-resilience-solutions-boston>



# Overall Neighborhood Level Narratives

**Community:** With persistent changes to its built environment, Allston-Brighton needs to proactively plan for cultural spaces that can serve community needs for years to come. Various small-scale service providers are able to identify spaces for this and may often need partnerships with large-scale service providers to make new spaces functional.

Accessing Open Spaces has become an issue often because of intensified development surrounding the space and because of the poor maintenance of specific sub-neighborhood parks such as Ringer Playground and McKinley Park. The issues are prevalent across larger green spaces in different parts of the neighborhood.

On the other hand, community members have also pointed to new sites for civic engagement activities including the community center on Warren Street, the intersection of Warren Street and Cambridge Street, and the additional space available at the BPL Brighton branch with the expansion of its area.

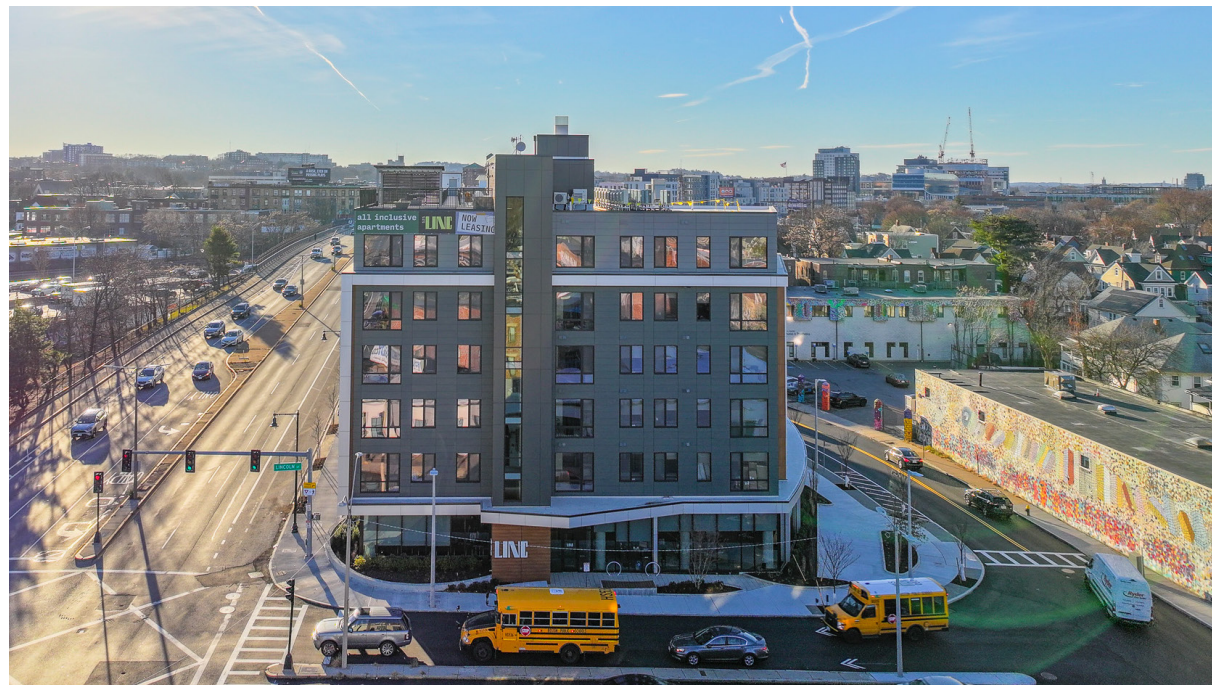
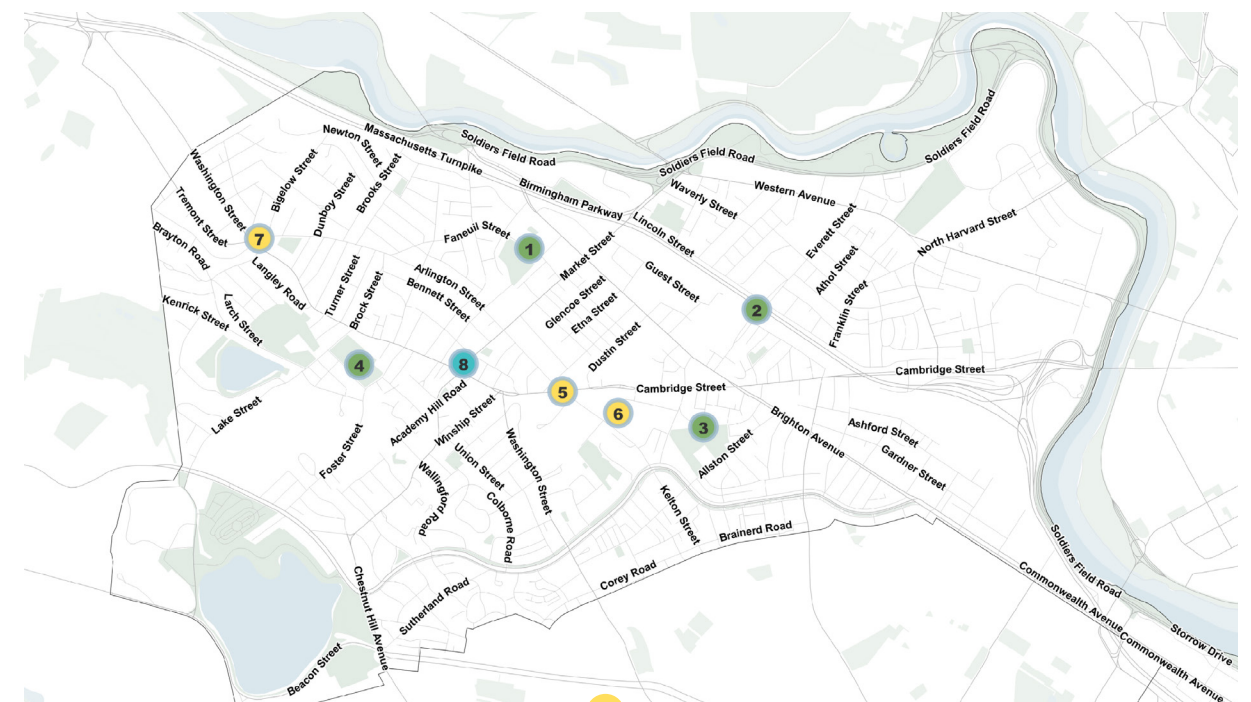


Photo of recent residential development along Cambridge Street looking south-west with a mural to the right

**FIGURE 26:** SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY NEEDS (QUALITATIVE)



- Open Space**
  - 1. Main avenues such as Brighton Ave require more tree cover. McKinley Park remains underutilized because of a lack of funding for the maintenance of Chandler Pond.
  - 2. Barriers to access north of Boston Landing towards the river which is currently separated by the highway resulting in underutilized green spaces.
  - 3. Ringer Playground remains partially accessible as maintenance efforts have not been completed.
  - 4. Rogers Park remains underutilized and maintenance efforts need to be expedited.
- Arts and Culture + Civic Engagement**
  - 5. Placemaking opportunities are possible at the intersection of Warren St. and Cambridge St. The area is well connected and is surrounded by critical institutions such as Brighton High School and Brighton Marine.
  - 6. The Jackson Mann Community Center near Warren St. is being renovated and the community is requesting the provision of a pool.
  - 7. With the expansion of the BPL branch, there is opportunity for civic engagement activities especially for folks with English as a second language and older adults.
- Resilience**
  - 8. Excess use of salt across Market St. creates a heat island effect.

# 05. **Topic Findings: Large-scale Institutional Approaches and Challenges to Local Service Delivery**

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Focus Group Themes & Participants

A Note on Localized Service Delivery in Allston-Brighton

Programming Assets & Barriers

Community Engagement Assets & Barriers

Collaboration Assets & Barriers

Resources Assets & Barriers

## Topic Findings: Large-scale Institutional Approaches and Challenges to Local Service Delivery

Following the analysis of eleven interviews with grassroots neighborhood service providers and early findings from broader resident engagement, the project team held four multi-stakeholder focus groups with large-scale City service providers as well as Harvard University.

The intention of these focus group engagements was to have participants respond to the assessment's initial grassroots findings and identify existing strengths and challenges amongst neighborhood service providers that hold increased capacity and resources.

RC conducted four 60–90-minute focus groups with key large-scale City service providers based on the four themes of Education and Opportunities, Housing and Economic Development, Public Safety, and Institutional Service Providers (for which Harvard University was utilized as a primary case study). The consultant team and the BPDA collaborated to identify and coordinate participation of city departments that provide services that cover these themes. Several City offices and departments were identified to address these themes, but due to time and scheduling constraints, not all were able to be included in the focus groups. This section presents a narrative to the identified assets and barriers from these four focus groups. Recommendations have been weaved into the broader series of recommendations presented in this report.

## Focus Group Themes and Participants



### Education, Childcare, and Community Opportunities

- Boston Public Library (BPL)
- Boston Public Schools, Capital Planning (BPS)
- Mayor's Office of Early Childhood Education (Early Childhood)



### Housing and Economic Development

- Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion (OEI)
- Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH)
- Boston Housing Authority (BHA)



### Public Safety

- Boston Police Department (BPD)
- Boston Fire Department (BFD)
- Boston Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
- Office of Emergency Management (OEM)



### Institutional Case Study (Harvard University)

- Planning Staff
- Design Staff
- Community Engagement Staff

# A Note on Localized Service Delivery in Allston-Brighton

With major higher education institutions such as Boston College, Harvard University, and Boston University partially located within Allston-Brighton, institutional development impacts many areas of Allston-Brighton and is regulated through complicated development review processes that the neighborhoods have been increasingly thrust into over the past several decades. Local community organizations have used this as a source for new partnerships and developed models for more sustainable service delivery. While community organizations hold deep knowledge of community needs, large institutions are often asked to ensure programming is sustainable and to provide resources to expand the impact of programs.

Service delivery is also enhanced when community organizations bridge language gaps that support accessibility challenges for English Language Learner residents who may struggle to coordinate

with City departments and staff. This has helped improve the effectiveness of specific service touch points. While some nonprofits are able to build this capacity internally, others develop a system of accountability that encourages local city authorities to accommodate multilingual services in the neighborhood.

Organizations are accustomed to partnering with a wide range of neighborhood stakeholders that are able to foster fruitful political partnerships that advance policy issues. Allston-Brighton community organizations hold the knowledge and the capacity to negotiate with political actors on neighborhood service delivery. Due to direct channels of communication with local representatives, Allston-Brighton service providers are on the frontlines of enacting systemic solutions catering to the long-term progress of the neighborhood and its people.



Photo of open space near Charlesview Residences

# Topic Findings: Programming Assets

## Reliable Network Partnerships are Driving Large-scale Multi-stakeholder Services.

Across sectors of service provisions, a reliable network of partners is an advantage that small and large service providers do not take for granted. Whether it is for immediate programming requirements such as the relocation of library programming to the Oak Square YMCA during renovation, or long term programming such as the design of the elementary school that is soon to be housed in the Jackson Mann, agencies and institutional partners are able to respond to immediate community needs when they are made a priority. Access to grassroots networks—when utilized—help in the sharing of data and knowledge across departments which eventually aids change management strategies and planning. Many large-scale service providers have the ability to influence the public realm and therefore impact many segments of the resident population. Programming at this scale therefore has the ability to create fast, multi-fold spillover effects, both positive and negative. When prioritized, increasing visibility and awareness of potential partnerships via programming that meets community needs is successful in a neighborhood that features a unique strong network of grassroots

advocacy and service provision entities. For a key institutional partner such as Harvard University, emphasizing public realm designs on its Allston campus that is transparent and accessible to the public has been an important strategy in comparison to the historic gate and wall character of Cambridge. Neighborhood Boston Housing Authority sites have opened up its property to community movie nights in an effort to create a welcoming family friendly atmosphere that is building trust and relationships across a diverse subsection of the neighborhood. Simple acts of service provision amongst public safety entities have been critical to establishing presence and trust between public safety service providers and neighborhood residents. These could include routine quarterly emergency safety checks at all public schools and senior centers, maintenance checks of neighborhood fire hydrants, or monthly public safety community meetings at primary neighborhood community centers. These low-scale acts of service provision are critical in building community relationships that can be utilized for more intricate or complicated service provision efforts.

## Innovative Service Delivery Mediums are Critical for Broader Neighborhood Outreach.

Civic services, when viewed through a systemic lens, offer innovations on the operational and the experiential side. EMS, for example, developed a backend system of connecting patients seeking mental health services to providers directly instead of having patients go through the hospital's emergency care unit. The Harvard Ed Portal, on the other hand, is an experiential innovation delivered through a robust digital medium, utilizing the strengths of the service provider. Through teaching and research, the innovation was able to reach a wider audience and enable access to best-in-class service capacities. These examples and more highlight programmatic efforts that see the greatest impact when they are place-based and use the core competencies of the service providers.

The Boston Housing Authority (BHA) wanted to find ways to connect on-site youth to a broader range of employment and education service offerings but struggled to motivate attendance and youth participation. In response to this, the BHA began offering 3-D printing classes in collaboration with the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation. The innovative technology and exciting topic created increased engagement amongst younger people in the neighborhood and was enabled through donated 3-D printing equipment to create a printing center. Through this, BHA was able to connect a larger, hard-to-reach population and establish relationships and pathways for communication that can promote upcoming job opportunities or alternative educational training sessions.

The Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion (OEOI) identified both legacy small business displacement and neighborhood storefront vacancies as two complementary critical threats to neighborhood economic viability. On legacy businesses, the OEOI offered a multi-pronged service provision approach that provided grant funding, technical assistance, and business succession planning that aimed to address the larger systemic challenges of losing longtime neighborhood businesses<sup>1</sup>, a key challenge named by small-scale service providers. As for vacant storefronts, the SPACE program identified 24 local grantee partners and distributed upwards of \$2.8 million to support the opening of a new business or branch location in currently vacant office space. Both of these initiatives relied on collaboration and service delivery mechanisms that utilize the ladder of engagement across City departments, large-scale service providers, small-scale service providers, and local residents. That approach is a paramount example of the possibilities that exist in addressing community needs in an institutionally rich neighborhood such as Allston-Brighton.

<sup>1</sup> Legacy Business Program <https://www.boston.gov/government/cabinets/economic-opportunity-and-inclusion/legacy-business-program>

### Data-informed Programming and Facilitation is Identifying Immediate and Long-term Community Needs.

Be it in housing, public health, public safety, or education, city agencies and institutions are able to utilize real-time and long-term predictive data exercises to target community needs and program service provision activities for populations most reliant on public services. Harvard relies upon data collected from community forums and visioning exercises to shape the public realm and accessibility of their program offerings that inform key service provision pathways such as the Harvard Ed Portal. Boston EMS identified early amid the rollout of the COVID vaccine that local housing authority residents were more reluctant to schedule an appointment at larger-scale clinics such as the Hynes Convention Center and Fenway Park. Based on this analysis, the city shifted provision to more direct, on-site clinics at Housing Authority residences and saw a clear uptick in vaccine provision amongst this population. The Mayor's Office of Early Childhood Education is partnering with the Education Cabinet initiative Countdown to Kindergarten to quantify provision needs for young children and available local childcare providers to identify future-facing gaps and potential solutions. Capital Planning with Boston Public Schools is developing long-term planning rubrics for Allston-Brighton that can support school infrastructure needs, leading to the recent announcement of a new Allston elementary school.

Taken together, the plethora of available resources and data techniques utilized by government and larger institutional entities serves a critical role for smaller grassroots providers that hold the keys to service provision implementation but lack the resources and capacity to create these real-time and predictive data sets.



Photo of the Harvard John A. Paulson School Of Engineering And Applied Sciences, Science and Engineering Complex on Western Ave

# Topic Findings: Programming Barriers

## New Development is Driving Need for Updated Emergency and Resiliency Planning.

As a neighborhood facing rapid development, Allston-Brighton needs to consider how service delivery should evolve with a persistent increase in the population and changes to the public realm. Various service providers in the public safety focus group expressed the immediate need for emergency management and public safety planning. Planning associated with large development projects, including the future Beacon Park Yard, should consider both potential additional location and increased space at current locations for Boston Fire Department and Boston Emergency Medical Services. With increased development limiting the amount of physical space available to public service provision entities, there is growing concern that future planning is not taking into consideration this need, and combined with increasing disaster and emergency response challenges, a lack of foresight and planning will lead to larger challenges in providing direct and immediate service responses in the future. Service and capacity projections are based on demographic forecasting and while current facilities in Allston-Brighton are high-performing, additional collaboration on projections and communication of the service capacity was suggested.

This is particularly acute for the availability of emergency shelter spaces, with limited options to house displaced residents due to flooding, water main breaks, fires, or other potential scenarios. With such a high renter and transient population within Allston-Brighton, many residents have no local family or support network to access shelter in these scenarios. The identification and investment in potential community spaces that can serve this function is critical in the near and long-term. This issue also comes amid greatly increasing numbers of immigrant families that are arriving in Allston-Brighton, with the recent creation of the Family Welcome Center established by the local nonprofit Brazilian Worker Center.

Harvard planners mentioned the importance of resiliency planning in each new institutional proposed development, yet the dire need for it is often not reflected in broader community forums or expressed as a priority for immediate community benefits within a development review process according to focus group participants. The notable increase in large-scale flooding and torrential rain events has created a renewed emphasis on stormwater drain management and the impact on existing residential areas adjacent to new development.

## Lack of Family Childcare is Exacerbating Gaps in Service Provision.

Education and Child Services providers expressed concerns over diminishing service provider partnerships in their respective sectors. The Office of Early Childhood Education highlighted that while they get multiple permits and programming applications from family service childcare providers in other neighborhoods, they see very limited applications within Allston-Brighton. This is in spite of proactive outreach and language access engagement techniques that advertise available funding and permitting opportunities to establish smaller to medium-sized childcare offerings. Focus group participants surmised that this is likely not a result of limited neighborhood demand, but rather

limited physical space and housing concerns that force potential providers out of the neighborhood. With requirements for the amount of physical space per child and regulations that limit childcare provision above a certain building height threshold, Allston-Brighton is currently ill-suited to activate smaller family childcare providers that often fill gaps in service provision. The 2023 zoning text amendment to the Boston Zoning Code will make it easier to create child care facilities in all neighborhoods of Boston<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bostonplans.org/zoning/zoning-initiatives/citywide-child-care-zoning>

## A Diverse Population Presents Acute Service Provision and Displacement Challenges.

Providers need to consistently maneuver their programming efforts that balance the needs of student populations, young families, and older adults. This often means that large service providers need to have varied programming efforts running at all times in Allston-Brighton. Navigating these diverse interests that often present distinct service needs for both public safety and public realm concerns places large-scale service providers in challenging positions. Addressing issues such as noise complaints, overcrowding within households, and requests of academic institutions places immediate challenges upon agencies and institutions that can hamper the ability to address longer-term concerns for younger families and older adults. Providers across the sphere of provision hear complaints that the neighborhood as currently constituted

is more college friendly than family friendly, and issues of displacement and gentrification that are forcing out younger families is exacerbating this imbalance. In the focus group discussion, there was sentiment that newer, more affluent residents in high-rise condominium developments and more transient college age residents do not seem to utilize public services as frequently, especially libraries. It was unclear whether this was because they are not connected to neighborhood services, do not rely upon them, or do not search out core service provision offerings. However, the lack of shared use was cited as creating a disconnect in the priorities and needs of long-time residents, especially those with families, who utilize services based on more limited individual resources.

# Topic Findings: Community Engagement Assets

## Modern Outreach Techniques are Strengthening Pathways of Communication.

Larger service providers use a range of different direct and indirect channels to reach target populations. Use of interactive channels such as have been helpful in communicating programming updates with target groups and providers see better engagement. For example, WhatsApp<sup>1</sup>, is frequently used by priority equity residents and advocates as a free, global communication platform. Harvard has developed a coalition for the design of a new playscape with the intention of engaging children and the elderly in the design process. The Boston Housing Authority is combining older techniques of flyering and network partnerships with a consistent email and text messaging program in response to previous feedback that reported very little in the way of direct engagement with residents. The Mayor's Office of Housing has implemented consistent high-level focus groups with local affordable housing service providers and experts to create more consistent pathways and resources to support local home ownership opportunities. From these, both their office and other partners have made efforts to simplify and streamline key external communication materials that aim to make the process for accessing programming and resources more clear, transparent, and easy to understand.

The Office of Housing Stability was highlighted as a successful example of engaging hard-to-reach populations within the neighborhood, in particular renters who are experiencing heightened levels of housing insecurity due to increased rental costs within Allston-Brighton. The Office of Early Childhood Education devotes an entire webpage to family engagement and has established a Family Engagement Committee that is popular for family childcare providers. As part of this effort, organizations are able to apply via a google form to alert and invite city officials to attend conventions and events focused on shaping and driving programming and policy for direct service providers.

<sup>1</sup> WhatsApp is free and offers simple, secure, reliable messaging and calling, available on phones all over the world. <https://www.whatsapp.com/about>

## A Renewed Focus on Organizational Engagement and Real-time Language Access.

The development of new organizational departments and roles such as a community planning department has also strengthened engagement tactics for larger institutions. In doing so, these departments have diversified the range of partners service providers engage with when spreading awareness and eventually delivering services to the public. Harvard University has created a new position focused solely on community engagement tactics and strategies within the planning and design department, presenting new opportunities for joint engagement strategies amongst the neighborhood ladder of engagement. These new approaches have also centered upon improvements around language access and translation needs, a clear community need

identified by both small-scale service providers. The ability to locate and identify translation services amid emergency response operations has been strengthened in recent years, with engagement support coming from key community-facing staff such as the Office of Neighborhood Services or grassroots advocacy organizations that are able to partner with city staff in real time. Boston Public Library, in particular, has built up their multilingual staff capacities to work with residents who have English as a second language. They have also adopted new technology to serve residents with a disability through platforms that are able to use sign language to communicate throughout their engagement activities.



Aerial photo of the Boston College Athletic Center and Fields from above Chestnut Hill Reservoir



# Topic Findings: Community Engagement Barriers

## External Neighborhood Realities Limits Trust Building.

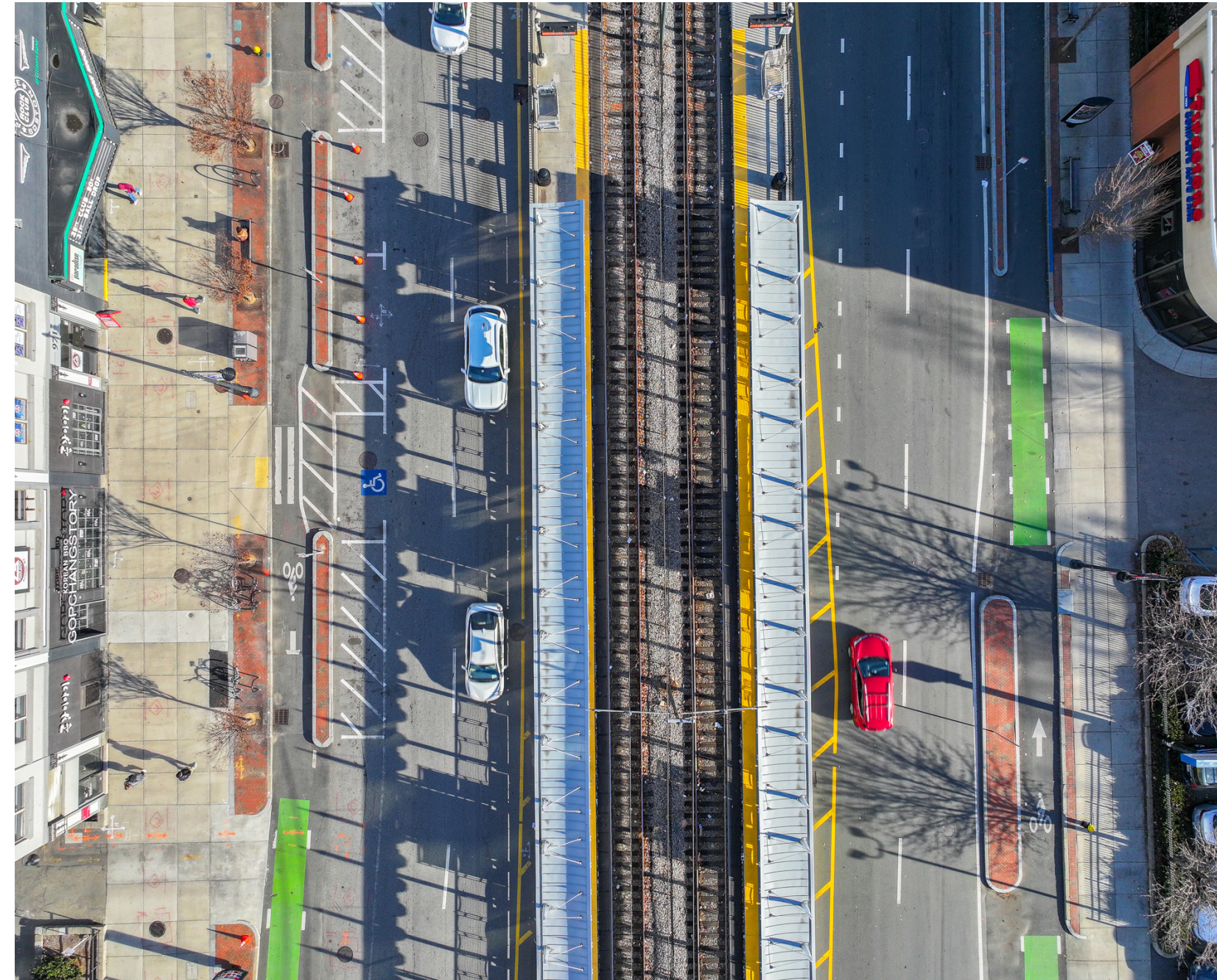
While service providers feel proud of their work and their use of a data-informed approach to engagement, they find it difficult to cultivate trust with residents. Changing market dynamics make it difficult for some service providers to build trust. For example, with persistent development around BHA housing units, residents often think that they are likely to be displaced. The BHA finds it a challenge to provide peace of mind to residents through their programming efforts since residents think about the inevitability of displacement. For an institution such as Harvard University, the ability

to communicate and make clear the provided community benefits that come from mitigation requirements within the Article 80 process is challenging. There is a limited feedback loop that connects the associated benefits that come with development to on-the-ground experiences of local residents, creating a disconnect between residents and institutions. There is a desire for more proactive engagement and communication on this front, with the BPDA serving as key conduit to highlighting the associated benefits to increased trust building amongst residents and institutions.

## Diversity of Voices within Engagement Processes Remains a Challenge.

Task forces and coalitions exist as formal channels for engagement, but they limit the number of people and the diversity of voices for whom program teams engage. Service providers find the taskforce model limiting at times to programmatic innovation that can take place. The Office of Early Childhood Education has also found that digital outreach tactics such as social media and email newsletter underperform when reaching people of high priority, namely low-income residents, English Language Learners, and non-English speakers, primary constituencies of its targeted programming.

They are therefore more reliant on external partners in developing engagement tactics that help them share expertise, limiting the amount of control held over an engagement process and the ability to evaluate it. The development of outreach materials overall to promote participation and attendance at resource-based events is inconsistent across City departments and institutions, with the accessibility of materials for the average citizen challenging. Those residents with language barriers have those challenges greatly exacerbated.



Aerial photo of multiple transportation facilities on Commonwealth Avenue near Babcock Street

## Topic Findings: Collaboration Assets

### A Culture of Collaboration is Maximizing the Strengths of Neighborhood Groups.

Benefits of a reliable neighborhood network of organizations and multi-stakeholder service provision groups are becoming strengthened and empowered due in no small part to the city developing and placing an importance on a culture of collaboration. While channels for collaborating across departments are often informal and ad-hoc, service providers take a proactive approach to invite groups into conversations and create space for thought partnership. Many service providers

collaborate with the city to develop new services and use the site of service provision as important sources of data generation. The Harvard Arboretum was presented as an example of this. In other cases, The Office of Early Childhood Education launches a yearly child services survey that can be a critical resource for collaboration across city departments. Data and research efforts by specific service providers enable a foundation for further collaboration between stakeholders.

### Large Service Providers Deeply Value Direct Channels of Communication with Community.

Both City departments and institutional partners noted multiple forms of direct collaboration channels with community members and advocacy organizations that have greatly shaped the day-to-day programming of service provision. The Boston Housing Authority in particular relies upon these partnerships to both identify need and cultivate solutions that draw upon the expertise of both city and institutional partners. The BHA will regularly partner with the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation on housing concerns, the YMCA on programming concerns, and the Boston Police Department on immediate public safety needs on site. Relationships with small-scale service providers is particularly important as it pertains to addressing food insecurity for on-site residents,

with food pantry accessibility and food bank delivery services directly tied to the neighborhood food infrastructure described by smaller local service providers.

Public safety focus group participants noted the communication between service providers and community groups as one of the unique strengths of Allston-Brighton, and one that can be built upon in future planning processes. Boston Police noted strong pathways of communication between themselves and BHA task forces, as well as strong relationships with programming service providers such as the YMCA, The Veronica Smith Senior Center, and the West End House.

## Topic Findings: Collaboration Barriers

### Collaboration and Community Insight Integration can be Limited by Departmental Knowledge Transfer Systems.

At times a collaborative process has a tradeoff with aspects of operational efficiencies. Departments such as the Boston Fire Department view themselves as being linked to other public safety actors but very much independent in their service delivery. They focus on developing an operationally efficient process for service delivery rather than spending capacity developing channels for collaborative programming. The goals of City department and institutional collaboration with grassroots service providers can sometimes be less impactful due to limited channels of collaboration

on a departmental level. Participants in both the Education and Opportunities and Housing and Economic Development focus groups noted a greater need for systemized knowledge transfer spaces and intentional spaces of collaboration that better filter information down to the department level. Recent efforts by the City to establish these spaces have been noted, but as a new effort, the opportunity remains to instill consistent behaviors that uplift the voice of grassroots service providers.

### Current Community Collaboration Spaces are Stale and Formulaic.

Many development and government service communication and engagement channels are formal or standardized, often improving accessibility, but leaving little room for flexibility. This can result in what feel like only formulaic opportunities for collaboration with the public. For example, the Article 80 process is the primary arena for institutional collaboration with the public on planning and development. Focus group discussion deemed these forums as less impactful because they don't yield the depth or nuance of engagement that can often be achieved with more informal touchpoints.

There is a desire for more consistent and smaller forms of facilitation and collaboration along the ladder of engagement between city departments, larger institutions, community neighborhood groups, and residents that focus on primary basic needs, both for policy implementation and long-term neighborhood planning. Importantly, this lack of consistency and collaboration creates heightened sense of stakes when engagement does occur, placing all parties involved into defensive positions and stifling creative solutions.

## Topic Findings: Resources Assets

In a neighborhood where space is rapidly decreasing, the availability of space to provide critical services is viewed as a critical resource asset. The Boston Public Library for example finds it to be of great advantage to the neighborhood to have two branches of the library since the space is not only a knowledge hub, but it also provides education, economic development and recreational programming. Having access to physical spaces for service provision is a big asset for the community. Not only does it make the service more visible, but it also provides a designated space for accessing civic services. The Brighton branch of the Boston Public Library will be accessible to people with disabilities after its renovation which also involves the expansion of two floors.

Beyond public space and government funding, service providers today are diversifying their options using industrial, corporate and institutional connections, reducing dependency on government funded grants and innovating with new partnership models.



Photo of the Boston University West Campus along Commonwealth Avenue

## Topic Findings: Resources Barriers

Some service providers are restricted because of space constraints. Boston EMS hasn't been able to grow its capacity from two on-call ambulances because it is not finding appropriate spaces to host the infrastructure.

In some cases, service delivery is also compromised because of inadequate access to infrastructure from the point of view of small service providers. The Office of Early Childhood expressed that small service providers are often unable to join webinars or utilize online resources because of the digital literacy gaps, resulting in valuable opportunities lost for the primary users of their services and benefits. The library has also developed programs to bridge the technology resource gaps such as a program where patrons could rent a laptop from the library, however sustainable grant funding for the program was not made available. Access and use of adequate technology is therefore a critical resource gap for residents and service providers.



Photo of Boston Fire Department Engine Company 41 and Ladder 14

## 06. Recommendations

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Basic Needs Recommendations

Access to Opportunity Recommendations

Community and Engagement  
Recommendations

# Recommendations

**Several recommendations were gathered at various stages of the research process from small-scale and large-scale service providers in Allston-Brighton.**

Small-scale service providers often brought the point of view of priority-equity users while large-scale providers provided systemic and policy level dependencies on service provision. The recommendations section in this report is two parts.

First it will provide an understanding of recommendations across subcategories in Basic Needs, Access to Opportunity and Community while linking each recommendation to primary City offices and departments, BPDA, and organizations that have the competency to act on the recommendation. The categories for reading and further understanding the recommendations are as follows:

**1. Programming Strategy and Implementation:**

Recommendations that directly impact how programs are developed, deployed and evaluated across areas of work.

**2. Interdepartmental and Public Communication:**

Recommendations that foster new, often formalized methods of communicating between organizations, institutions and the public.

**3. Service Delivery and User Experience:**

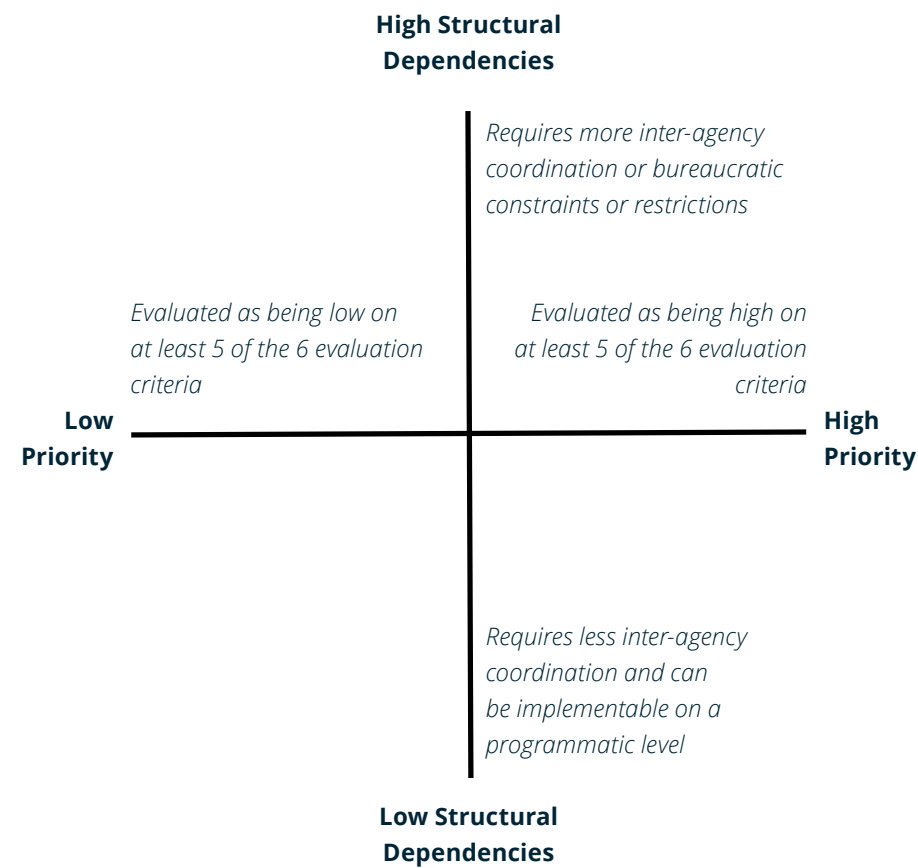
Recommendations that are focused on the end experience of a service for a resident.

The second part of the recommendations section offers a method of prioritizing the recommendations. RC evaluated recommendations based on a six-criteria rubric linked to the Needs Assessment outcomes and to key neighborhood assets that can be further utilized. Each recommendation is ranked qualitatively on a scale of high, moderate and low satisfaction of the criteria to offer a final, overall priority that ranges from low priority to high priority. Detailed evaluation tables for each category of the Needs Assessment can be found in section 11 of the Appendix.

**TABLE 6:**  
PRIORITIZING RECOMMENDATIONS

To what extent does the recommendation directly impact priority residents?	To what extent is the recommendation pulling on a leverage point, able to address multiple issues identified in the Needs Assessment?	To what extent is this recommendation reflected in learning from all engagement points in the Needs Assessment?
Priority equity users include but are not limited to seniors, youth, people with a disability and more	A leverage point is a critical point of intervention that can create multiple positive spillovers	Engagement points include the survey, public events, qualitative research and the neighborhood walk
To what extent does the recommendation utilize the neighborhood asset of having a network of small-scale service providers?	To what extent does the recommendation utilize the neighborhood asset of having larger-scale institutional service providers?	To what extent does the recommendation create new, sustainable opportunities for large-small scale service provider partnerships?
This is a unique asset to Allston-Brighton that if utilized further can create sustainable impact	This is a unique asset to Allston-Brighton that can be utilized further	This is a unique opportunity in Allston-Brighton that can strengthen service provision

**FIGURE 27:**  
RECOMMENDATION PRIORITIZATION MATRIX



A 2x2 prioritization matrix is used to map recommendations based on level of priority and the degree of structural dependencies. Structural dependencies include the amount of inter-agency coordination and bureaucratic bottlenecks the recommendation is likely to face. The more systemic a recommendation is, the more likely it is for facing higher structural dependencies before it is implemented.

The recommendations section is designed to aid more conversation and facilitation of discussion amongst City offices and departments as the neighborhood planning process commences. Implementation is addressed through policy (structural) and capital (personnel and cost) and the need for capital should also indicate a recommendation’s potential for funding. This Needs Assessment section can serve as a foundational tool or guide for interdepartmental planning, community benefits and mitigation conversations as well as the public discussions in the upcoming neighborhood planning process.

# Basic Needs Recommendations

Programming Strategy and Implementation	Interdepartmental and Public Communication	Service Delivery and Experience
<p><b>BPDA + PAC + DOIT</b></p> <p>Developing a cross departmental tracker of programmatic initiatives can aid proactive strategy development.</p>	<p><b>Mayor’s Office of Housing + Office of Economic Development and Inclusion</b></p> <p>There is an opportunity for MOH and OEIO to create joint communications and outreach efforts for intergenerational wealth generation.</p>	<p><b>Office of Small Business + Office of Economic Dev + BPDA</b></p> <p>Plan for ground floor space for culturally competent small food retail.</p>
<p><b>BPDA + Public Safety Departments</b></p> <p>Proactive emergency management and public safety planning. Neighborhood planning can plan for and provide more space for Boston Fire Department and Boston Emergency Medical Service services aligned with population projections and large development.</p>	<p><b>Mayor’s Office of Housing + BPDA</b></p> <p>Support outreach to explain that IDP units are available to a broad range of households and increasingly housing voucher holders as part of updates to IDP.</p>	<p><b>Health Services + BTD</b></p> <p>Large hospitals and medical centers can consider a van that does a circuit where seniors could walk a short distance for a pickup. The City of Boston could also consider providing or partnering to provide that service.</p>
<p><b>Mayor’s Office of Housing + BPDA</b></p> <p>Actively utilize and track utilization of linkage funds or other affordable housing funds within the neighborhood.</p>	<p><b>BPDA</b></p> <p>Utilize space within the neighborhood for capacity building/ training of key public facing service staff including but not limited to public safety staff, health workers and more.</p>	<p><b>Office of Small Business + Office of Economic Dev + BPDA</b></p> <p>There is a need to increase retail footprint of affordable food sources. One suggested route is for Department of Small Business Development and OEIO to provide small business loans for a more thorough local grocery retail network.</p>
<p><b>Mayor’s Office of Housing + BPDA</b></p> <p>Activate communication channels with developers, advocacy organizations and residents that IDP units are available to households with AMI less than 70%.</p>	<p><b>BPDA + PAC</b></p> <p>The neighborhood plan is an opportunity for the BPDA to activate the role of the Planning Advisory Committee for inter-departmental planning.</p>	<p><b>BPHC + Institutional Partners</b></p> <p>Consider the development of a city on wheels service, that involves a vehicle making trips within the neighborhoods and providing essential services. Versions of this exist currently for groceries and medicine.</p>
<p><b>Mayor’s Office of Housing + BPDA</b></p> <p>Streamlining the process a developer goes through for accepting and facilitating housing voucher utilization, including as part of IDP when applicable to expand access of income restricted units.</p>	<p><b>Various City Offices and Departments</b></p> <p>A combination of illustrative and organic channels of communication is needed for public facing communication, especially on the health care system and affordable housing options for new immigrants.</p>	<p><b>BTD + Office of Food Justice + BPDA</b></p> <p>Provide transit routes and service to affordable food sources for seniors; utilize existing private transit networks in the neighborhood.</p>
		<p><b>BPDA + Boston EMS + BPHC</b></p> <p>Build off and scale the system developed by Boston EMS to connect mental health patients to service providers directly and avoid wait time in emergency rooms.</p>

- Housing
- Health
- Food Security
- Safety
- Miscellaneous

## Programming Strategy and Implementation

The BPDA has a strong research team that has been at the center of creating valuable products such as the development review database that fosters understanding about planning and development in Boston. As an anchor agency with work cutting across sectors in the public realm, the BPDA is poised to develop new systemic interventions that offer large and small service providers the data they need for proactive decision making. The BPDA research team is currently working on renewed population projects for several neighborhoods. While information is often made available, it needs to be communicated more actively with various city departments. This can include the development of a database that offers insights on demographic projections on a neighborhood level and its influence on services within the public realm.

Within Allston-Brighton in particular, institutional partners and public safety service providers have raised concern on rapid development and its subsequent impact on population increase. Planning and development within a rapidly transitioning, diverse neighborhood needs to have the strategic foresight to plan for emergency management and public safety, school programming, family care services, and affordable food retail to ensure future needs are accounted for in the neighborhood plan. With an increase in high-rises and rising rent, policy change is needed. A 2023 zoning amendment will help address this need by adding a new Article 79 (Inclusionary Zoning) to the Boston Zoning Code that updates the Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) which requires that market-rate housing developments with seven or more units and in need of zoning relief support the creation of income-restricted housing<sup>1</sup>.

Additionally, smaller service providers have suggested flexibility in the policy make up to increase access to housing access. A flexibility in the quota of IDP units that developers can offer while also considering an income range was discussed as a potential way to help more people qualify for IDP units. Housing advocacy organizations have been integral in helping populations access benefits; however, a systemic intervention will make the benefit more readily accessible. Various suggestions to this end also reflect Mayor Wu's housing policy that seeks to increase inventory of affordable housing units and make the process of housing voucher utilization more streamlined for developers.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bostonplans.org/projects/standards/inclusionary-development-policy>

## Interdepartmental and Public Communication

Recommendations by service providers offer significant collaboration opportunities between the housing and economic inclusion programming. The Office Economic Development and Inclusion for example actively organized around increased property ownership for small businesses in Allston-Brighton while the Mayor's Office of Housing is focusing on intergenerational wealth generation through the new city-wide housing policy. In both cases the offices are working to offer more stability to population groups through property ownership. The Needs Assessment, therefore, highlights an opportunity for complementary efforts to consider joint outreach, programming, and access to benefits such that the population groups meet two core basic needs that residents have. Collaborative efforts such as this can help reduce the pressure of rising housing costs, stagnating income, and displacement concerns that particularly affects minority populations in Allston-Brighton.

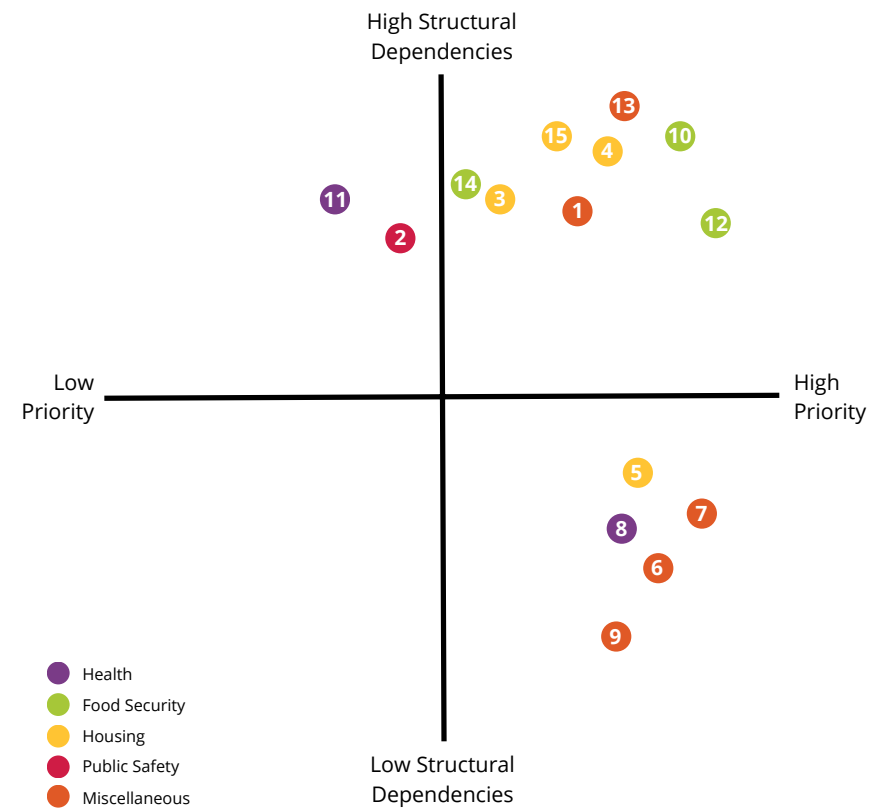
A culture of collaboration in the city has encouraged self-initiated, organic channels of collaboration between service providers. The collaboration efforts, however, need a degree of formalization for ideas to materialize in public facing communication and service delivery. The newly established Planning Advisory Committee (PAC)<sup>1</sup>—an internal City group composed of Cabinet officials to ensure that long-range City planning emphasizes internal collaboration—can grow to be a critical resource for this. The upcoming neighborhood plan is an opportunity for the PAC to establish points of inter-departmental collaboration. Simultaneous to this effort, it has become increasingly important for service providers across scales to collaborate. Collaboration currently takes place laterally between providers of comparable size while collaboration forums between large- and small-scale providers remain one-off events. The Needs Assessment has brought to the purview a strong network of small-scale service providers that bridge important gaps in service delivery that often get overlooked by city-wide service providers. Programmatic efforts in Allston-Brighton—especially for addressing basic needs—should utilize the neighborhood's unique asset of a strong local network of service providers.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2023/01/Boston%20Planning%20Advisory%20Council%20Executive%20Order%20-%20Jan%2026%202023.pdf>

## Service Delivery and User Experience

Food security in the neighborhood needs to continue to be cultivated via the development of stable, easy to access affordable food sources. Secondly—keeping in mind the multicultural population of the neighborhood—there exists a need for affordable food sources with culturally competent food options. Looking singularly at the data will show that Allston-Brighton has a range of food retail locations but on an experiential level the need remains unmet because of the cost of food, the location, and the cultural incompetence of the option. The inconsistent nature of bus route timing and service delivery as seen by neighborhood residents makes it all the more difficult for priority equity populations such as recent immigrants and seniors to reach food access points. Suggestions for food security therefore range from short-term ideas of getting food to the people directly and more strategic, long-term ideas to use small business loans to incentivize small food retail stores serving varied cultural groups.

**FIGURE 28:**  
BASIC NEEDS RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZATION



- 1** Development of a cross departmental tracker of programmatic initiatives can aid proactive strategy development.
- 2** Proactive emergency management and public safety planning. The neighborhood plan can help identify space for BFD, EMS, and OEM services especially in current and future large development areas.
- 3** In a neighborhood with some of the highest rates of development there is scope to reallocate and repurpose linkage funds to fuel affordable housing development.
- 4** Activate communication channels with developers, advocacy organizations, and residents to align understanding and advocacy for IDP units which under current policy and the Inclusionary Zoning article are available to households with AMI less than 70%.
- 5** There is an opportunity for MOH and OEOI to partner in the communication and administration of programs for intergenerational wealth generation.
- 6** Utilize space within the neighborhood for capacity building/ training of key public facing service staff including but not limited to public safety staff, health workers and more.
- 7** The neighborhood plan is an opportunity for the BPDA to activate the role of the Planning Advisory Committee for inter-departmental planning.
- 8** Revamping and developing accessible channels for mental health services, build off the system developed by Boston EMS to connect mental health patients to service providers directly and avoid wait time in emergency rooms.

- 9** A combination of illustrative and organic channels of communication is needed for public facing communication, especially on the health care system and affordable housing options for new immigrants.
- 10** There needs to be ground for culturally competent small food retail.
- 11** Large health providers could operate a van that does a circuit so seniors only have to walk a short distance for pickup; potentially in partnership with The City of Boston.
- 12** Working with the Department of Small Business Development, OEOI to provide small business loans for a more thorough local grocery retail network.
- 13** Consider the development of a city on wheels service, that involves a vehicle making trips within neighborhood and providing essential services. Versions of this exist currently for groceries and medicine.
- 14** Transit programming to affordable food sources for seniors by utilizing existing private transit networks in the neighborhood.
- 15** Streamlining the process a developer goes through for accepting and facilitating housing voucher utilization, including as part of IDP when applicable to expand access of income restricted units. Support outreach to explain changes to IDP and availability of units for a range of households.

High priority recommendations with high structural dependencies are often those that propose change on a policy and planning level. Suggestions to expand affordable food sources in the neighborhood (number 10 and 12) for example need the buy-in from multiple stakeholder groups in order for the change to take place on the streetscape and for the end user experience to be positively impacted. However, the proposal of working with the Department of Small Business Development, OEOI on a pre-existing program in order to expand on ground food retail can help expedite processes and reduce dependencies via a collaborative strategy.

It is also important to note that lower priority recommendations are not necessarily less important. They are however recommendations that address emerging needs of the neighborhood and have more planning capacity. Proactive emergency management and public safety planning for example (number 2) is a critical recommendation that needs to shape planning in Allston-Brighton in years to come as a way of preparing for a significant population increase.

While recommendations for housing access and affordability are systemic (offering intervention ideas impacting housing voucher utilization, funding proposals, and IDP) the focus group with the Mayor's Office of Housing and the Office of Economic Development and Inclusion offered a collaborative opportunity on a programmatic level to impact housing access (number 5). The two offices work in different ways on intergenerational wealth creation and a programming strategy that expands wealth generation from the employment and housing perspective can offer tremendous upgrades to quality of life, especially for priority equity users. A similar opportunity arises for expediting access to mental health services. Boston EMS has operationalized a system to direct mental health cases directly to mental health professionals (number 8), bypassing the wait time in the hospital emergency room system. Their foundational approaches for screening and directing cases can be a fundamental model to strengthen the supply side and connect it to residents through service provider partnerships.

Each time a programmatic strategy builds off the pre-existing work of a service provider it expedites service delivery and reduces structural dependencies. The Needs Assessment has highlighted some of the opportunities for enhancing Basic Needs service provision.



# Access to Opportunity Recommendations

Programming Strategy and Implementation	Interdepartmental and Public Communication	Service Delivery and Experience
<p><b>OEI</b></p> <p>Developing an aggregator portal for economic opportunities, community engagement opportunities and service provider partnerships across A-B.</p>	<p><b>BPDA and City of Boston Agencies</b></p> <p>Production of new materials and content on program needs to be done with the intention of closing the knowledge gap by visually transcending language barriers. For example, the Center for Urban Pedagogy in NYC created many creative planning resources.</p>	<p><b>Boston Housing Authority + Center for Working Families</b></p> <p>There is an opportunity for BHA to partner with the Center for Working Families in their Boston Savings Program and offer a collective service for minority communities in A-B to access financial services.</p>
<p><b>OEI + BPDA</b></p> <p>Proactive data sharing on service population: There is an understanding of the resident population in a neighborhood but there is limited understanding on who comes to work in Allston-Brighton and how is that changing?</p>	<p><b>Department of Innovation and Technology (DOIT) + PAC</b></p> <p>Formalizing channels of peer capacity building; Identify City departments likely to have programmatic overlaps and strategizing regular peer capacity building points to share research.</p>	<p><b>Early Childhood + BPDA</b></p> <p>Formalize messaging to the public and support services for small family care providers based on the zoning text amendment making it easier to create child care facilities in all neighborhoods of Boston.</p>
<p><b>OEI + Institutional Partners + BPS + BPDA</b></p> <p>Utilize upcoming lab infrastructure to connect communities through scholarship programs or extra curricular offerings that can connect local population to better opportunities.</p>	<p><b>OWD+ BPS + Dept of Youth Engagement &amp; Advancement</b></p> <p>Roles of youth workers need to be re-evaluated, they need the job security and financial stability to hone into the role and reach kids but also the community at large.</p>	<p><b>BPS + Union Capital Boston</b></p> <p>Utilize models such as Union Capital Boston to build community networks within Allston-Brighton schools.</p>
<p><b>Institutional Partners + BPS</b></p> <p>Invest in physical school infrastructure such as technology and laboratories to ensure sustainability of partner programs with institutions.</p>	<p><b>BTD + BPDA</b></p> <p>Communicate the dependencies in a project that impact timelines directly to the public. Currently residents expect updates about various projects that were initiated based on the 2021 A-B Mobility Plan.</p>	<p><b>BPS + BTD</b></p> <p>Offer after school transportation options to school students in Allston-Brighton as majority travel from outside the neighborhood and find public transport unreliable for youth programming opportunities.</p>

- Education
- Employment
- Mobility
- Miscellaneous

## Programming Strategy and Implementation

Allston-Brighton is a neighborhood with several large-scale institutions in Education, Pharmaceuticals, and Healthcare which have for years been a significant opportunity for programming. Service providers have recently highlighted several opportunities for positive spillovers that could come from direct channels to employment and resources in large scale institutions. For example, a platform connecting youth with employment opportunities within larger institutions or with local businesses that work with institutions is recommended as a new programming effort. This multi-scale and cross-issue programming could integrate the core competencies of large-scale institutions into the neighborhood. Harvard and various other institutions have innovative programs such as free legal and family health clinics that unfortunately remain under-realized in the community. Several school programming initiatives were developed in previous years connecting youth to labs but were not able to sustain long-term because of resource discrepancies. A platform such as the one suggested can help expand the value chain and open up longer-term programming opportunities and partnerships.

Requirements of data as explained in the previous section also expand to Access to Opportunity needs. With Allston-Brighton becoming a hub for employment, demographic projections also need to account for the service population that uses the neighborhood. Workers and their access to the neighborhood will continue to shape services in Allston-Brighton. Transferring insights about the non-resident population to service providers can only aid better service delivery for the resident population in Allston-Brighton.

## Interdepartmental and Public Communication

While the recommendations above speak to the development of and access to new opportunities, operational recommendations suggest methods for communicating about programming and opportunities to the public. Communication of project timelines and progress especially on mobility projects need to activate feedback loops with the public. There is persistent confusion about when projects pertaining to connectivity within the neighborhood will be completed. Core transportation departments in the City need to be better coordinated in providing the public with the desired updates on transportation projects.

If youth programming is to be revitalized in the neighborhood, the roles of key liaisons such as youth workers or peer mentors from universities need to be reimagined and activated. This poses an opportunity for Boston Public Schools to partner with local universities and the Office of Workforce Empowerment to conceptualize the role and offer desirable benefits for it to be a sustainable model. Investing in youth programming is of critical need for Allston-Brighton and can be an important incentive that can help retain families.

### Service Delivery and User Experience

Several policy shifts are going to shape the services that connect individuals and families to economic opportunities, this includes childcare services. With the zoning text code amendment for childcare services, the Mayor’s Office of Early Childhood Education is envisioning more family childcare providers who can offer services in Allston-Brighton. Neighborhood plans and several other efforts need to formalize new service provisions and communicate the addition of new family health care providers to the residents.

Several conversations with service providers working on access to opportunities often have a duplication of efforts. For example, the Needs Assessment highlighted an opportunity for BHA to partner with organizations such as the Center for Working Families on their Boston Savings Program to connect families to financial services. Service providers working on housing and economic development are working on core areas that determine the quality of life for individuals in the neighborhood. Intentional sharing of knowledge and capacities between service providers is key to improved service delivery.

**FIGURE 29:**  
ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZATION



- 1 Developing an aggregator portal for economic opportunities, community engagement opportunities and service provider partnerships across A-B.
- 2 Proactive data sharing on service population: There is an understanding of the resident population in a neighborhood but there is limited understanding on who comes to work in A-B and how is that changing?
- 3 Utilize upcoming lab infrastructure to connect communities through scholarship programs or extra curricular offerings that can connect local population to better opportunities.
- 4 Invest in physical school infrastructure such as technology and laboratories to ensure sustainability of partner programs with institutions.
- 5 Production of new materials and content on program needs to be done with the intention of closing the knowledge gap by visually transcending language barriers. For example, the Center for Urban Pedagogy in NYC created many creative planning resources.
- 6 Formalizing channels of peer capacity building; Identify City departments likely to have programmatic overlaps and strategizing regular peer capacity building points to share research.
- 7 Roles of youth workers need to be re-evaluated, they need the job security and financial stability to hone into the role and reach kids but also the community at large.
- 8 Communicate the dependencies in a project that impact timelines directly to the public. Currently residents expect updates about various projects that were initiated based on the 2021 A-B Mobility Plan.
- 9 There is an opportunity for BHA to partner with the Center for Working Families in their Boston Savings Program and offer a collective service for minority communities in A-B to access financial services.
- 10 Formalize messaging to the public and support services for small family care providers based on the zoning text amendment making it easier to create child care facilities in all neighborhoods of Boston.
- 11 Utilize models such as Union Capital Boston to build community networks within A-B schools.
- 12 Offer after school transportation options to school students in Allston-Brighton as majority travel from outside the neighborhood and find public transport unreliable for youth programming opportunities.

Recommendations tapping into the research and innovation aspects of policy making often highlight data gaps that can improve programming strategy (number 1). The recommendation for an aggregator portal to connect populations to local employment opportunities is a method of making employment opportunities more accessible while utilizing a strong, growing network of employers in Allston-Brighton. Programmatic efforts in the past, especially with the Boston Public Schools and Institutions in the area have shown immense potential for impact but have not been proven sustainable. Successful partnerships between schools and higher education institutions in the area first require investment in physical school infrastructure such as technology and laboratory equipment to enable a transference of knowledge (numbers 3 and 4).

Some of the more actionable Access to Opportunity recommendations would be for the core transportation agencies to activate feedback loops with the residents and give much needed updates on implementation of mobility initiatives from the 2021 A-B Mobility Plan (number 8). There is a need for proactive sharing of data on the service population, which can be an initiative that can be championed by the BPDA research team and offered as a programming resource for small- and large-scale service providers (number 9). Finally, there is an opportunity across various areas of work to close the knowledge gap on policy communication with the public via illustrative public communication. This type of public facing communication is more visually sound and combats language barriers through an illustrative approach to communication (number 5). The Center for Urban Pedagogy is a well-suited example to benchmark new public facing communication standards.



Photo of the Washington Street Green Line T stop on Commonwealth Avenue

# Community and Engagement Recommendations

Programming Strategy and Implementation	Interdepartmental and Public Communication	Service Delivery and Experience
<p><b>BPDA + Various City Offices and Departments</b></p> <p>Office of Early Childhood Development has developed programs such as the Parent Advisory Committee to center caregiver voices in the development of policies. Similar spaces can be developed to center the voices of a target audience.</p>	<p><b>BPL + Early Childhood + DOIT + Worker Empowerment Commission</b></p> <p>Provide alternative and longer-term financing for programs that bridge digital divide especially in multi-cultural neighborhoods such as A-B.</p>	<p><b>Various City Offices and Departments</b></p> <p>Open up physical space, providing access to resources for community members such as a meeting rooms, art &amp; cultural spaces, and more. Build trust with community members through sharing space.</p>
<p><b>Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC) + BPDA</b></p> <p>With the Jackson Mann closing, proactively plan more designated spaces for arts and cultural activities in Allston-Brighton to strengthen social fabric; accompany with art making space.</p>	<p><b>Office of Emergency Management (OEM) + ONS</b></p> <p>Provide communication to the public about climate change effects are not multilingual and need to be disseminated through formats such as radio or organic channels such as WhatsApp. There is room to innovate with the medium of communication to get essential messaging to minority groups.</p>	<p><b>Parks and Recreation + OEOI</b></p> <p>Rethink access within parks more expansively, how easy or difficult it is for people to sit on tables, to access unique areas within the park, to make spaces of their own, etc.</p>
<p><b>Parks and Recreation</b></p> <p>Improve communication regarding open space improvements; especially when important infrastructure such as the Ringer Playground and the McKinney Park will be accessible.</p>	<p><b>BPDA + Institutions + Office of Environment and Sustainability</b></p> <p>Build public facing messaging and conversation about climate adaptation strategies within development projects such that it becomes a shared priority.</p>	<p><b>Parks and Recreation + DCR + Developers + BPDA</b></p> <p>Telford St. pedestrian bridge that connects residents to the Artesani Playground was named as unsafe and deteriorating infrastructure that is a key connection point for seniors, families, and youth alike. There is immediate opportunity to repair and restore access to an open space.</p>
<p><b>BPDA + Various City Offices and Departments</b></p> <p>Extending periods for community feedback on programming efforts has proven helpful for mobilization and trust building. Focus on activating more access points for priority equity users. This is discussed further in the report conclusion.</p>		

- Arts & Culture + Civic Engagement
- Open Space
- Resiliency
- Human Services
- Miscellaneous

## Programming Strategy and Implementation

Development of direct channels of engagement with the community such as the parent fellows that the Mayor's Office of Early Childhood is introducing enables resident voices to be heard and integrated in the policy making process. Similar models of engagement have existed in the development context such as the Impact Advisory Group (IAGs) and the Institutional Task Forces. While these models are sustainable, they need to have a system of monitoring and evaluation to understand when to invite new members and foster rotational leadership. This is needed to ensure the policy making process continues to invite diverse voices years after the model is in place. Along with this, forums for understanding public opinions such as comments period need to accommodate for more flexibility such that various members of the community are able to voice opinions on critical planning and development issues.

Being in a phase of heightened development, community spaces in Allston-Brighton are often affected with frequent renovation efforts or a shifting of location. With the closure of Jackson Mann there needs to be proactive planning about new arts and culture hubs within the neighborhood. The neighborhood has a thriving artistic community that can be invited into the visioning of new spaces. "Spots for Murals" are examples of local programs that encourage the integration of public art into spaces by local artists. Open Spaces such as the Ringer Playground and McKinney Park remain under renovation, the neighborhood planning process can be presented as a catalyst for expediting maintenance efforts, prioritizing ones close to lower income areas.

## Interdepartmental and Public Communication

Reaching communities through mediums such as WhatsApp have proven effective for the Office of Economic Development and various small service providers such as the Brazilian Women's Group. Translated messaging, in a direct format, is needed for communicating with communities and can prove to be more effective than current outreach and advertising efforts in newspapers. It is suggested that messaging especially on climate communication and weather needs to be made more accessible as areas become subjected to extreme heat and flood risk. The Department of Innovation and Technology (DOIT) created Wicked Free Wi-Fi, Boston's outdoor wireless network, for residents and visitors to find places to shop, eat, or connect with other residents in the City.

Language access within a diverse neighborhood such as Allston-Brighton also widens the digital divide in many cases. Grants for programming in this area of work have increased over the years, however programs haven't been able to access sustainable funding for efforts. Across city agencies there is an opportunity to understand what current programs exist for digital equity and how they can be accessed more sustainable financing options. This is a critical leverage point for residents with English as a second language to not lose out on experiences and opportunities that are increasingly online.

## Service Delivery and User Experience

Repurposing of space for community activities is viewed as a resource and a method of social cohesion. Physical locations are available for communities to access in Harvard Business School, community centers such as the Presentation School Foundation (PSF), and other third spaces such as places of worship. Often, however community groups are not aware of the service, especially ones provided by institutions. There is scope to build outreach efforts that encourage the repurposing of space by members of the community and foster a culture of shared ownership in the built environment.

Design assessments of parks within Allston-Brighton will be a helpful exercise to undertake in order to understand their accessibility issues, especially for residents with a disability. It is not just about providing access to the park but various experiential aspects to it. This may include upgrading seating, access ramps to water bodies and monuments within parks as well as playgrounds. The definition of accessibility needs to be widened while upgrading the service delivery in open and green spaces.



The Presentation School Foundation Community Center at Oak Square

**FIGURE 30:**  
COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZATION



**1** Office of Early Childhood Development has developed spaces such as the Family Engagement committee to center caregiver voices in the development of policies. Similar spaces can be developed to center the voices of a target audience in different areas of work.

**2** With the Jackson Mann closing, proactive planning needs to take place to offer more designated spaces for arts and cultural activities in their neighborhood to strengthen social fabric.

**3** Open spaces remain under renovation, residents expect more communication when important infrastructure such as the Ringer Playground and the McKinney Park can be accessible.

**4** Extending periods for community feedback on programming efforts has proven helpful for mobilization and trust building. Can help activate more access points for priority equity users.

**5** Build public facing messaging and conversation about climate adaptation strategies within development projects such that it becomes a shared priority.

**6** Alternative and longer-term financing is needed for programs that bridge digital divide especially in multi-cultural neighborhoods such as A-B.

**7** Communications to the public about climate change effects can be disseminated through formats such as radio or organic channels such as WhatsApp.

**8** Opening up physical space, providing access to immediate resources for community members such as a meeting room, art/ cultural space and more can be ways of building trust with community members.

**9** Access within parks needs to be thought of more expansively, how easy or difficult it is for people to sit on tables, to access areas within the park and more.

**10** Telford St. pedestrian bridge that connects residents to the Artesani Playground was named as unsafe and deteriorating infrastructure that is a key connection point for seniors, families, and youth alike. There is immediate opportunity to repair and restore access to an open space.

Community engagement models such as the Family Engagement Committee developed by the Office of Early Childhood Education offer parent fellows a platform to shape policy. High touch engagement channels such as this enable new voices to shape high impact interventions while offering opportunities for innovative facilitation. The model can be translated into various stages that lead up to service delivery (number 1). Another high priority recommendation is to strengthen climate adaptation messaging for the public so that it becomes a shared priority. While community members are aware of climate risks, cultivating a shared language on climate adaptation strategies can aid forward thinking conversations in development projects, especially the numerous large scale development projects in the area (number 5). This will require coordination with the department of Environment and Sustainability as well as larger scale developers, institutional partners and small-scale service providers. The BPDA is positioned to be a nodal point for such an engagement.

Immediate action items for BPDA and partner departments involve proactive planning and communication with the public on new arts and culture spaces especially with the closing of the Jackson Mann (number 2). Open spaces remain underutilized because of maintenance upgrades and there is an immediate need to provide updates to residents on the status of construction and eventual use (number 3). Finally, in order to build community resilience, it will be critical to try new formats for accessible climate communication. Channels such as WhatsApp groups can prove to be more effective especially for reaching multilingual populations about critical advisories such as those on extreme weather (number 7).

## 07. Conclusion and Action Steps

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Pillar One: Historical Neighborhood Context and Collaborative Planning

Pillar Two: Centering Equity and Shared Knowledge in Planning and Engagement

Pillar Three: Inclusive and Equitable Data Analysis and Collection

Pillar Four: Human-Centered Design Thinking and Facilitation

## Conclusion and Action Steps

**Through the use of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, the Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment was able to glean key lessons on existing strategies for engaging neighborhood residents for future planning processes as well as strategies for collaboration along the ladder of internal planning and community engagement.**

The opportunity to understand the assets and needs of Allston-Brighton separated from formal neighborhood planning processes or ongoing development review was a welcome approach to collaborating with both service providers and everyday neighborhood residents. This research design allowed for a more holistic approach to capturing community insight and allowed for the longer-term trust and relationship building needed to forge greater ties between city government and the neighborhood at large. Allston-Brighton in particular is a critical case study for this approach, with both high levels of ongoing development as well as complicated residential dynamics that feature both strong non-English speaking populations and a transient college-aged population. Lastly, the scale and scope of institutional involvement and presence within Allston-Brighton makes long-term intentional planning and collaboration critical to the future vibrancy of the neighborhood. This Needs Assessment factored these conditions into our engagement approach, and thus hopes to set the stage for improved collaboration and collected clear recommendations for future planning efforts with the BPDA, interdepartmental actors, service providers, and residents.

With this approach and future planning initiatives in mind, it is instructive to consider four critical pillars of planning and engagement that were emphasized within this Needs Assessment and its ability to be utilized moving forward. While in no way fully sufficient to addressing the complicated and intersectional issues that reside both internally within city government and externally with local service providers, these thematic approaches to trust building, collaboration and planning can provide a foundational framework for activating the wide breadth of assets that exist within this neighborhood and city government overall.



Photo of Brighton High School with residential development behind



# Pillar One: Historical Neighborhood Context and Collaborative Planning

## A Culture of Collaboration is Maximizing the Strengths of Neighborhood Groups

History matters and it lives deeply in the day-to-day life of all neighborhoods that make up the City of Boston. To fully utilize and implement the myriad of recommendations in this report, planners, consultants, and other city actors must continuously account for the past to understand the experiences and insights that residents and stakeholders have about the present and the possibilities of the future. Decades of market forces and public policy decisions have benefited specific residents and business interests throughout Allston-Brighton, a pattern largely replicated across the City of Boston. Delivering on course corrections—the application of equity—for those most underrepresented and impacted by affordability and access should be a shared priority in future neighborhood planning and resource allocation.

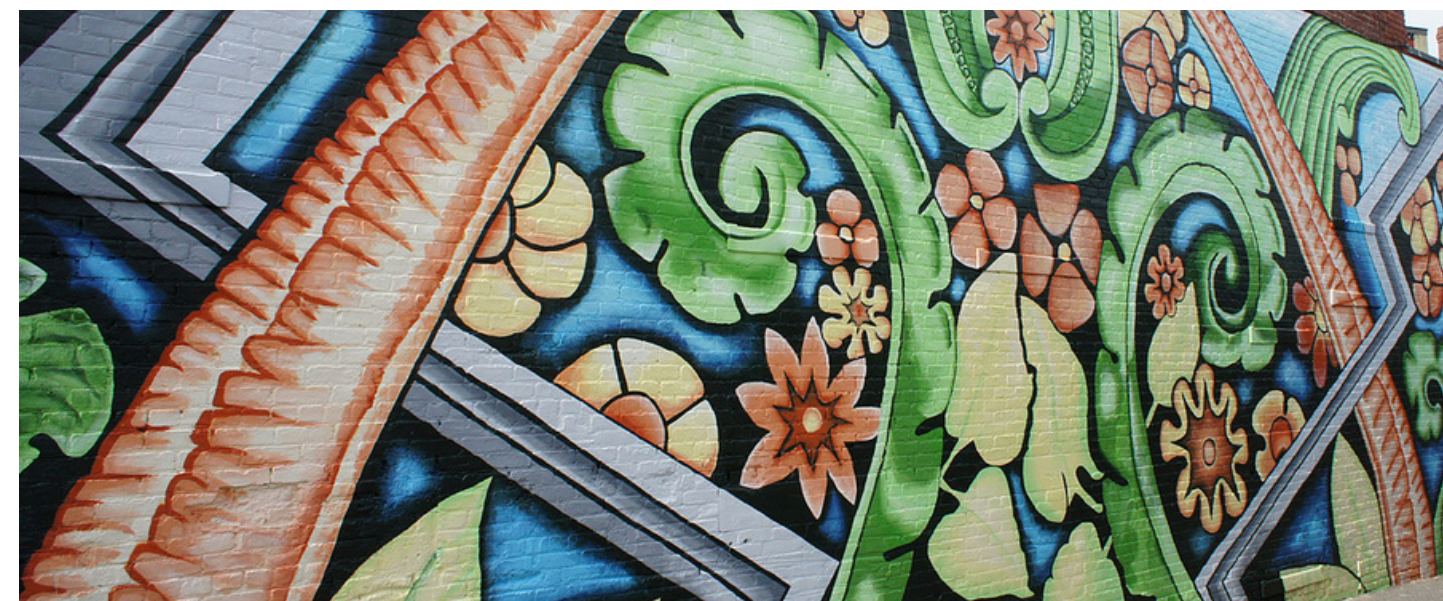
Internal choices and process action steps taken in community engagement and policy prioritization across Allston-Brighton inherently determines its capacity to operationalize and deliver on addressing the core themes of community need identified throughout this assessment. The City of Boston and institutional actors would benefit from having established and agreed upon restorative and inclusive planning practices for data collection of community insight and feedback that better aligns with the internal context of the BPDA's planning team and other key city actors. This will help foster the ongoing conditions to build trust and continue to shift cultural practices across municipal planning. This assessment's piloting of intensive and documented engagement with small-scale service providers and broader techniques of embedded community engagement data collection is a valuable step in this direction but inherently insufficient as a six-month engagement.

As learned through this engagement, Allston-Brighton offers an incredible network of small-scale service providers dedicated to critical issues of community need such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, pathways to economic opportunity, educational training opportunities, and community cohesion. These providers also hold deep historical neighborhood context for a community that is rapidly changing and struggling to retain long-time residents and families (see the Appendix: Section 14 for an expansive list of service providers and organizations for future collaboration and planning).

At the present moment, the pathways for shared learning and communication between these providers, city actors, and larger institutional voices are limited and informal in nature. A year-round model of management could include a quarterly convening space amongst small-scale service providers and agency planning and engagement staff to build an ongoing relationship with each other, identify shared engagement activities, upcoming issues of community need, and the promotion of city services that strengthen or complement local neighborhood programming.

Additionally, the city may be able to create more streamlined and systemized forms of communal knowledge around available community resources and encourage forms of communal knowledge between existing community-based service providers. At present, there are gaps on a neighborhood level of cultivating shared opportunities between these Community Based Organizations and city actors. As a first step, the establishment of a formal quarterly space led by BPDA and engagement staff for both Executive and Program Directors involved in service provision is critical to creating more resource accessibility and broader knowledge and awareness.

The ability to modernize information technology efforts across city agencies that speak to both historical neighborhood context and knowledge transfer opportunities that come out from the collaboration described above is critical to filling in existing service gaps to be addressed in future neighborhood planning efforts. This Needs Assessment both emphasized critical issues in service provision gaps as well as opportunities to bolster internal collaboration to seize on the historical context provided by grassroots service providers, agencies, institutions, and residents alike. Be it food insecurity, public health and safety, educational training opportunities, mental health services, or direct municipal support for smaller service providers, the ability to seize upon the quantitative and qualitative findings of this report requires shared processes and systems of knowledge transfer across city agencies, and in particular those that have a direct community-facing role that supplements engagement efforts by the BPDA.



Gateway to the Gardens by the Mayor's Mural Crew (photo by Gregg Bernstein), <https://www.zone3westernave.com/project/favorite-murals-allston/>

## Pillar Two: Centering Equity and Shared Knowledge in Planning and Engagement

The recent intersecting crises of COVID-19, rising economic inequality, and climate change have only increased our need to name, protect, and support those at higher risk from these grave effects. This means a greater interdepartmental planning emphasis on both social determinants of health within these communities, and the ways in which data can inform the land use and public realm of Allston-Brighton in the future. To improve external and internal knowledge sharing and collaboration, the BPDA and its City department partners should continue to implement and iterate on the Allston-Brighton research and engagement framework. Determining the why (purpose), who (external users and internal BPDA and City collaborators), and what (activity) of engagement is essential to shape and execute future planning initiatives in Allston-Brighton. To center equity in this Needs Assessment meant prioritizing the voices of small-scale service providers and the priority residents whom they serve. Building upon and strengthening those values in upcoming planning and engagement processes for the BPDA and City departments at large is critical to actualizing the findings of this Needs Assessment.

This Needs Assessment was designed and implemented with the intention of identifying community strengths and needs from the lens of both small- and large-scale service providers that align with the assessment's foundational Needs Analysis Table. Part of this project approach was to center and emphasize the lived experiences and expertise of smaller scale neighborhood-based service providers focused on critical issues of housing, food insecurity, pathways to employment, educational training offerings, issues of public health, immigrant rights, youth activation services, and a myriad of other service provision goals. Understandably, city engagement and planning often instead emphasizes the experiences and lens of larger scale institutional voices that hold a larger footprint within communities.

The choice to foreground the experiences of small nonprofit service providers and advocacy organizations within Allston-Brighton allowed the project team to develop a more granular on-the-ground understanding of priority equity residents within Allston-Brighton, including seniors, youth, non-English speakers, and lower to middle-income residents. While the project team also engaged with larger city service providers and academic institutions, this was phased in following engagement with smaller yet just as critical service provision institutions. Beginning with high-intensity, 75-minute conversations with on-the-ground community leaders created an important foundational basis for all other engagement phases of this Needs Assessment. The interviews built trust and understanding within the community and the project team, helped to further refine the central research questions, and opened up pathways for both community events and the dissemination of the core project survey.

This kind of trust building and layered micro-engagement approaches are critical to creating greater levels of shared understanding and language with broader sects of the neighborhood in an ecosystem often dominated by a small percentage of voices and civic associations.

Short project timelines and the absence of a city-wide community engagement enterprise model remain key challenges for external consultants and project teams of the BPDA. Creating even more successful environments for projects headed by non-city staff requires year-round community education and engagement centered on the intersectional issues unearthed in this Needs Assessment. Shaping shared language and engaging in year-round organizing can place residents in a more advantageous position to engage on these complicated planning endeavors while creating new pathways of involvement and trust building that can be utilized by outside partners.

It is not enough to simply ask residents to share their lived experience in a vacuum. The insight and information collected for this engagement was vast and powerful. Understanding what structures, capacities, and commitments can be made to advance collaborative planning and year-round engagement are essential to mapping out the incremental and tangible milestones for upcoming neighborhood planning efforts.



Photo along the Charles River

## Pillar Three: Inclusive and Equitable Data Analysis and Collection

One of the ultimate goals of any Needs Assessment is to encourage the adoption of mixed-method and data collection engagement practices that produce sound and innovative findings. These community-rooted findings and recommendations can support planners to better measure and track where and how community needs persist and how neighborhood-level inequities are addressed. Alongside the neighborhood-level quantitative analyses that will persist within the BPDA, more granular qualitative data gained from consistent grassroots service provision engagement can support these data measurements. Affordable housing waitlist time periods, healthy and culturally competent food connectivity options, the prevalence of ground-level food retail, employment training and economic pathway resource accessibility (in particular for English Language Learner populations), youth programming and athletics utilization, emergency preparedness and flood resilience geographies, neighborhood social worker and mental health counseling accessibility, neighborhood small-scale family childcare provider establishments, and multilingual service provision staffing and city support network are all critical community needs metrics that were identified across engagement touchpoints that can be further refined and strategized for future data collection tactics.

Democratizing participation in the data collection and planning process is a fundamental first step to getting new results and influencing behavior shifts amongst interdepartmental actors, thereby promoting a new culture as an ongoing basis for research, engagement, and development. Through the utilization of the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation's Ambassador program, this Needs Assessment was able to emphasize survey outreach events at locations of neighborhood convening important to priority equity residents within the neighborhood. Locating tabling events at Boston Housing Authority sites and local community centers gave the project team access to hard-to-reach populations that rely upon municipal services to meet their basic needs. This consistent outreach at places of physical convening was critical to balancing out the more typical residential voices that engage with city municipal surveys via online participation.

The outsized influence and participation of highly engaged, educated residents is often amplified if the primary point of engagement relies upon online data collection tools and outreach techniques. This combination of survey outreach at important points of neighborhood convening combined with attendance at broader community events is necessary to balance out that expected influence while engaging the types of residents for which municipal and nonprofit service provision is paramount to their daily lives within Allston-Brighton.

Tabling and attendance at broader community events was complemented by door-to-door outreach and flyering in sub-neighborhoods of particular importance for this Needs Assessment. Utilizing existing Census and American Community Survey data, the project identified smaller pockets of neighborhoods and community spaces within Allston-Brighton with a higher prevalence of renters, younger families, immigrant families, and seniors.

This included large-scale housing complexes in Brighton Mills/North Allston boundary along both Antwerp and Telford St., the primary neighborhood Boston Housing Authority sites, including both 35 Fidelis Way and Faneuil Gardens, pop up events in Allston Village with larger numbers of renters and English Language Learners, local farmers markets that offered fresh fruit and vegetable SNAP and HIP benefit access, places of community gathering at senior center housing and community centers located in Allston Village, Packard's Corner, Brighton Center, and Oak Square, as well as public health pop up events and resource fairs run by primary community service providers. In total, over sixty community and organic Needs Assessment events were conducted or attended, with the overriding goal to reach the priority equity residents named above that have a larger stake in the myriad of municipal and nonprofit service provision programs discussed within this Needs Assessment.

This door-to-door and community-grounded approach encouraged participation in the Needs Assessment survey. For example, while Allston-Brighton holds a similar Limited English Proficiency (LEP) percentage in relation to citywide averages, there are pockets of sub-neighborhoods that feature much larger resident populations that fall into this category. The subarea that features the 35 Fidelis Way Housing Authority site bracketed by Warren St. and Washington St. is greater than 46% LEP residents, while areas of Allston Village, Packard's Corner, and North Beacon St.-Market St. feature lesser but similar levels of LEP residents. These sub-neighborhoods received a significant amount of engagement resources geared towards resident outreach and survey completion, both through door-to-door outreach, tabling, and event attendance.

With significant Asian and Hispanic populations relative to the rest of Allston-Brighton located in these geographies, this equity-based engagement approach was critical to balancing the influence of white property owner voices that typically dominate civic engagement techniques. Over 24% of survey respondents either came from a home that speaks another primary language in addition to English, or a home in which English is not spoken. This also resulted in over 10% of survey responses being completed in either Spanish, Simplified Chinese, or Portuguese. Once again, this technique was done to balance out the participation and influence of those frequently engaged in civic processes within Allston-Brighton that challenges the principles of inclusive data analysis and collection.

In addition to tabling, door-to-door outreach, and attendance at existing community events, the project team implemented four community interfacing events over the course of September 2023. In just one month, the community had the opportunity to meet project and city staff, learn about the aims of the Needs Assessment, provide qualitative and quantitative data feedback, and develop relationships with community members that hold similar interests of civic engagement. This included an experiential and designed community walk that led residents through the heart of Allston into the adjoining resident neighborhoods of Brighton and back.

It is clear from the project interviews with City of Boston interdepartmental staff that there exists a myriad of siloed neighborhood-based data analysis and research projects that speak to the Needs Assessment topics of Basic Need, Access to Opportunity, and Community. Be it housing insecurity, food insecurity, small business development, community spaces, or human services, the intersectional nature of the charge of this Needs Assessment instituted by the BPDA touches upon almost every single city agency within city hall. The recent creation of the Planning Advisory Council via executive order is a helpful and important start to the kind of collaboration required to address the paramount issues of community need identified by service providers and residents alike. An important next step is identifying how this council can create systems of support within the BPDA to create a more seamless form of knowledge transfer and problem solving amongst city agencies. The goal of identifying these existing and ongoing data sources that speak to the upcoming neighborhood planning process is a critical first step in this regard.

Additionally, what steps must be taken to utilize that knowledge early in a planning process such that engagement and analysis is not duplicated? In a neighborhood such as Allston-Brighton, planning fatigue for residents and service providers alike is a serious concern. Utilizing this Needs Assessment alongside existing city data sources as a means to shaping the early discovery work of neighborhood planning is critical in order to build upon and solidify trust amongst city actors, service providers, and residents alike.



Photo at the intersection of Brighton Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue with a food market in the background

## Pillar Four: Human-Centered Design Thinking and Facilitation

Stakeholder and community-centered engagement is the cornerstone of planning and development. It is critical that planners and external consultants expand traditional strategies and tactics through design thinking, human-centered facilitation practices, and restorative planning principles. This means fostering practices and norms that create the conditions for the BPDA planning team and their related stakeholders to participate more intentionally, thoughtfully, and transparently. The use of this methodology can provide interdepartmental actors, planners, and other related institutions with a predictable, adaptive, systematic approach on both singular projects and broader city-wide policy goals in upcoming planning within Allston-Brighton. Ultimately, this equity engagement framework can provide a common space for continuous process improvement for projects, the agency, and the city more broadly.

Traditional models of engagement and research in planning often rely on the past, present, and future data collection methods of quantifiable metrics. This omits the use of social science design practices such as asset mapping and community-based research. This severs the ability to generate connective tissue between policy and planning goals of the BPDA, other city agencies, and institutional actors with solutions and ideas from most underrepresented early in any project or engagement. The inclusion of this type of data collection and engagement can create the conditions necessary for planners, external consultants, and cross-sector stakeholders to formulate integrated workflows and products that better deliver on social justice and equity. Practically speaking, this means placing community and residents in meaningful engagement points that help inform our thinking, research design, and collaboration planning approaches and recommendations.

This Needs Assessment vied to complement more formal techniques of quantitative evaluation and community engagement with different forms of human-centered community insight and design thinking exercises. This combination of long-form interviews, institutional focus groups, mapping exercises, and community walks was able to produce a varied and informational lens of the needs of the neighborhood, and in particular priority equity residents that may often engage less in formal city planning efforts. These forms of engagement techniques for a two-year neighborhood planning process between the BPDA, other city agencies, and outside partners could be implemented and utilized in a much more impactful manner. However, to do so requires early foresight and planning that lays the groundwork to implement these more high-effort engagement tactics not afforded a quicker six-month engagement.

For example, providing interactive mapping exercises throughout the neighborhood to identify strengths or weaknesses within the public realm year-round could create a wealth of data for neighborhood planners while providing low-effort engagement pathways for everyday residents. A formal community walk once every four months can build off past learnings and discussions, creating a more thorough narrative and

shared understanding. Such a walk could feature a different interdepartmental actor (Parks and Recreation, MOH, OEOI, BPS, etc.), with different frames for each community conversation. Whatever the path forward, it requires planning, flexibility, and consistency. A two-year window for neighborhood planning affords such an opportunity, and the piloting of such techniques on this engagement shows an appetite for such alternative approaches. Methods of evaluating such engagement and needs identification processes are numerous and diverse in nature. It begins with a more thorough accounting of the types of engagement events and aligning those outreach activities with the type of user prioritized relative to the equity goals outlined at the beginning of any planning process.

The specific and detailed facilitation guides created for all qualitative aspects of this Needs Assessment is an easy starting point and encouraged requirement for future neighborhood planning efforts, alongside more intentional partnerships with small-scale service providers that connect city agency staff to hard-to-reach populations, in particular residents for whom English is a second language. To evaluate the engagement and outreach techniques utilized to make use of those facilitation designs, several questions should be considered. How many one-on-one conversations have occurred between staff and community leaders? How many existing community events have been attended? What systemized form of data collection has been created and proposed for community events attended by planning or engagement staff? How is that information shared and what is the proposed framework for incorporating that knowledge into upcoming planning processes? Based on the priorities identified in this Needs Assessment, what grassroots providers need to be emboldened to capture needed community insight and partner with city agency staff for specific high-level needs such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, mobility concerns, and employment pathways and broader forms of access to economic resources such educational training or childcare service vouchers?

That sort of intention speaks to the need for upcoming neighborhood planning processes to include a community engagement plan that establishes the main questions that the BPDA and agency partners would like the community's expertise in answering in the planning process. This plan should establish how answers to these questions will be synthesized and how they will inform development of the final neighborhood planning document. This can include the identification of key community-facing staff such as BPDA Community Engagement Managers, the Office of Neighborhood Services Neighborhood Liaisons, Development Review Project Managers with a deep knowledge of neighborhood history and dynamics, as well as interdepartmental and elected official staff members that interface with the community on issues outside the purview of the BPDA. Once these actors are named, identifying the tactics and strategies to be utilized for engagement can be tied to the primary questions being sought after.

With this Needs Assessment and several other policy specific action plans in tow, the opportunity exists

for a deeper and wider engagement strategy that activates the wide array of community partners and institutions that reside within Allston-Brighton. Yet to move past the traditional tactics of online surveys and public meetings, a documented engagement strategy early in the process that builds upon the learnings unearthed in this Needs Assessment is required.

For example, the use of online survey tools to capture community feedback and insight is a necessary and important outreach tactic to quickly capture large amounts of community feedback. However, such an outreach strategy will continually favor residents that are previously engaged in city planning efforts through social media, listservs, or other existing community sources. The response rate of neighborhood residents that engaged with this project survey solely through online, non-in-person means did not abate this trend. This condition inspired the project team to employ in-person engagement events to balance out the influence of this reality wherein higher-educated and affluent residents respond to civic engagement requests from the city. In the future, an ever-greater emphasis on the collection of survey data through in-person tactics is crucial, which require greater staff capacity and project flexibility.

The creation of incentives for responses to the Needs Assessment survey assuredly diversified survey responses, creating alternative motivations for participation. More collective effort is needed to actively promote these incentives in less engaged communities via active partnerships with both city staff and institutional voices within the neighborhood. As research and engagement experts, year-round models are much more effective and predictable for agency planning staff and related stakeholders across projects.

Overall, the techniques and tactics employed to capture the needs and lived experiences of priority equity residents and sub-neighborhoods alongside more traditionally civically engaged residents were successful. Utilizing traditional outreach tactics such as an online survey required researchers to engage in more direct in-person interactions based on spatial analyses and geography, which proved impactful. Intensive one-on-one interviews with small service providers and an experiential community walk similarly achieved this goal and can be built upon in future neighborhood planning processes.

The critical issues and topics of development and community need addressed by the BPDA daily are intricate, complex, and intersectional. Because of this, the ability to connect and solicit insight from neighborhood residents on the plethora of community needs that encompass city planning is persistently a challenge. This challenge remains for outside consultants and project teams and is exacerbated based on the short project timelines and collateral deadlines associated with projects such as these. Creating even more successful environments for projects headed by non-city staff requires year-round community education and engagement centered on the intersectional issues unearthed in this Needs Assessment.

Shaping shared language and engaging in year-round organizing can place residents in a more advantageous position to engage on these complicated planning endeavors while creating new pathways of involvement and trust building that can be utilized by outside partners.

It is not enough to simply ask residents to share their lived experience in a vacuum. Instead, it is incumbent upon all actors involved with civic engagement to provide year-round tools for learning and understanding for when opportunities such as this project come along. The insight and information collected for this engagement was vast and powerful. One can only imagine the possibilities of collaborative planning with residents if expanded opportunities for shared learning were made more readily available. This kind of planning and activation can spur the type of interdepartmental collaboration needed to address many of the root causes and challenges identified in this project.



Photo of Oak Square with the YMCA in the background

