



PLAN: Downtown

Draft Plan Updates

November 8, 2023



**boston planning &
development agency** 1

Meeting Recording

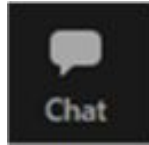
At the request of community members, this event will be recorded and posted on the PLAN: Downtown project webpage at <http://bostonplans.org/PlanDowntown> for those who are unable to attend the zoom event live.

It is possible that participants may be recording the meeting with their phone cameras or other devices. If you do not wish to be recorded during the meeting, please turn off your microphone and camera.

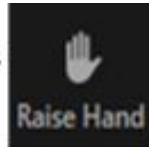
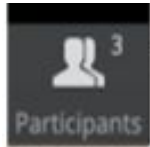
If your camera and microphone are off, you can still participate through the text chat feature at the end of the presentation.

Zoom Tips

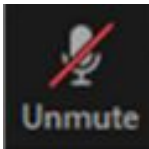
Welcome! Here are some tips for first-time Zoom users.
Your controls are at the bottom of the screen:



Use the **chat** to type a comment or ask a question at any time –
Members of the PLAN: Downtown team will enable the chat at the end.



To **raise your hand**, click on “Participants” at the bottom of your screen, and then choose the “Raise Hand” option in the participant box, or press *9 on your phone



Mute/unmute – Participants will be muted during the presentation – the host will unmute you during discussion if you raise your hand and it is your turn to talk. To mute/unmute on your phone press *6.



Turns your **video on/off**

Zoom Etiquette

- We want to ensure that this conversation is a pleasant experience for all attendees.
- Please remain muted until called on. If you'd like to speak during this time please use the "Raise Hand" function in Zoom so a BPDA moderator can unmute attendees.
- Please be respectful of each other's time.
- We ask that participants limit their questions so that others may participate in the discussion. If you have more questions, please wait until all others attending have an opportunity to ask questions.
- If we are unable to get to your question at this meeting please put them in the Chat at the end or email plandowntown@boston.gov

Agenda

- Welcome and timeline updates
- PLAN: Downtown report overview
- Plan revisions
- Next steps
- Public discussion

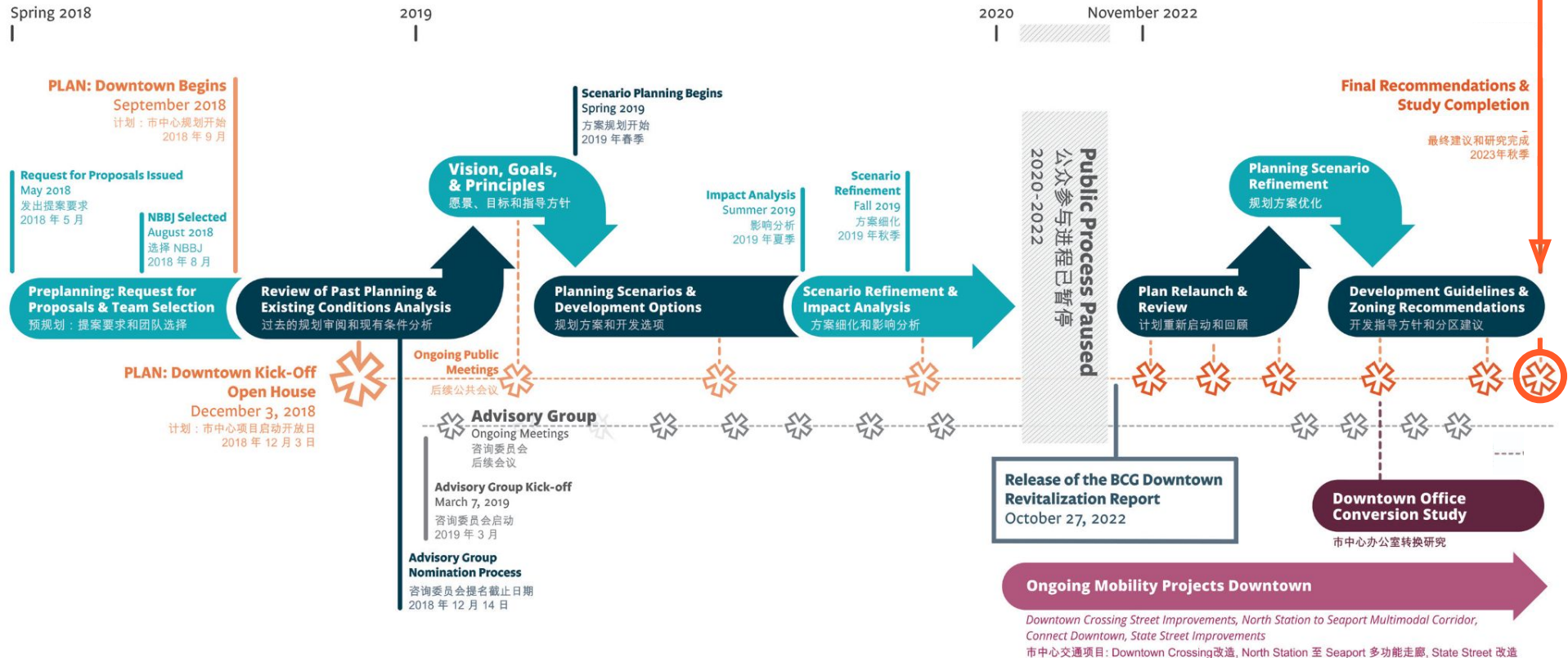
The Draft PLAN: Downtown report was released on August 21st, 2023

The Final PLAN: Downtown report will be released on November 17th, 2023



Timeline

We are here



Vision Statement

Create a new framework for the growth, enhancement, and preservation of Downtown Boston as a place for all, balancing livability, daylight, walkability, climate change preparedness, access to open space, affordability, and a dynamic mix of uses.



Goals



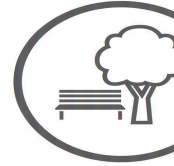
Promote dense, mixed-use development, and grow and diversify active ground-floor uses, especially legacy and small businesses.



Strengthen connections to and throughout Downtown, with a focus on active transportation, transit, and other non-vehicular modes of transportation.



Enhance access to housing and amenities Downtown for all levels of affordability, stages of life, and backgrounds.



Improve existing public spaces and create new ones that invigorate Downtown year-round.



Preserve cultural heritage, historic building fabric, and embrace distinctive histories to create a unique and cohesive Downtown.



Ensure new and existing spaces and development projects are resilient and mitigate climate change impacts.



PLAN: Downtown
Report Overview



Contents

1 Introduction

- Goals
- Planning Process
- Character Areas
- Key Demographic & Development Trends

2 Recommendations

Based on existing conditions analysis challenges and opportunities facing Downtown today.

- Growth & Preservation
 - *Development Framework*
- Mobility
 - *Street typologies, key public realm connectors and mobility projects*
- Open Space & Public Realm
 - *Priority improvement projects*
- Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development

3 Implementation

- Policy actions
- Design guidelines
- Zoning updates
- Downtown office conversion

Overview

To fulfill community's goals, the report relies on the following components:

- **Existing conditions analysis** of the challenges and opportunities facing Downtown today.
- **Development framework** to guide growth and inform zoning updates.
- **Streetscape and public realm recommendations** for enhanced connectivity and public spaces that support a safer and more vibrant, accessible, and greener Downtown.
- **Priority public realm projects** for new and enhanced public spaces.
- **Policy actions** that establish a coordinated approach across city departments and agencies to fulfill the PLANS goals.
- **Zoning recommendations** to guide new growth and public benefits.
- **Design guidelines** to ensure that new development and the public realm respect and enhance Downtown's existing urban fabric.
- **Office conversion recommendations** to support adaptive reuse and residential growth.

PLAN: Downtown
Revisions



Feedback Overview

General feedback

- Prioritize residential development and access to housing
- Preserve the boundaries of the Wharf District as recognized by the Wharf District Council
- Clarify how the study area was determined
- Activate empty buildings and vacant ground floors
- Focus on public safety and the accessibility of public spaces
- Address the enforcement of curbside uses
- Preserve historic buildings and character areas
- Clarify non-zoning height limitations

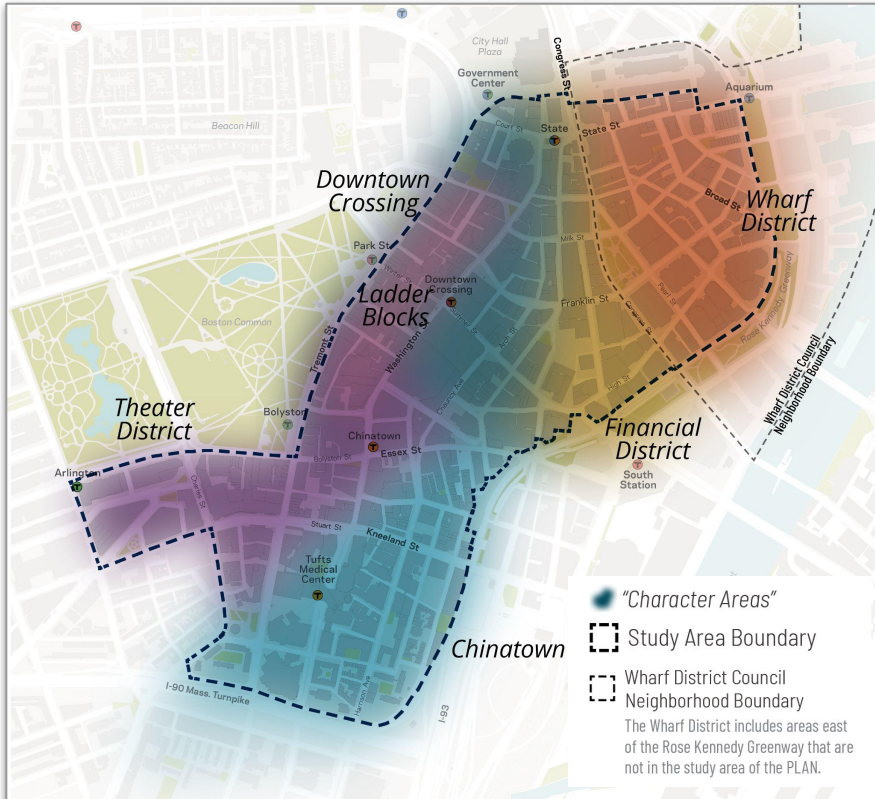
Zoning recommendations

- Opposition to the proposed heights in the Ladder Blocks area.
- Opposition to allowing office development Downtown, especially in the Ladder Blocks area.

126 responses

- 94 online survey responses
- 32 additional written responses

Overview and Character Areas

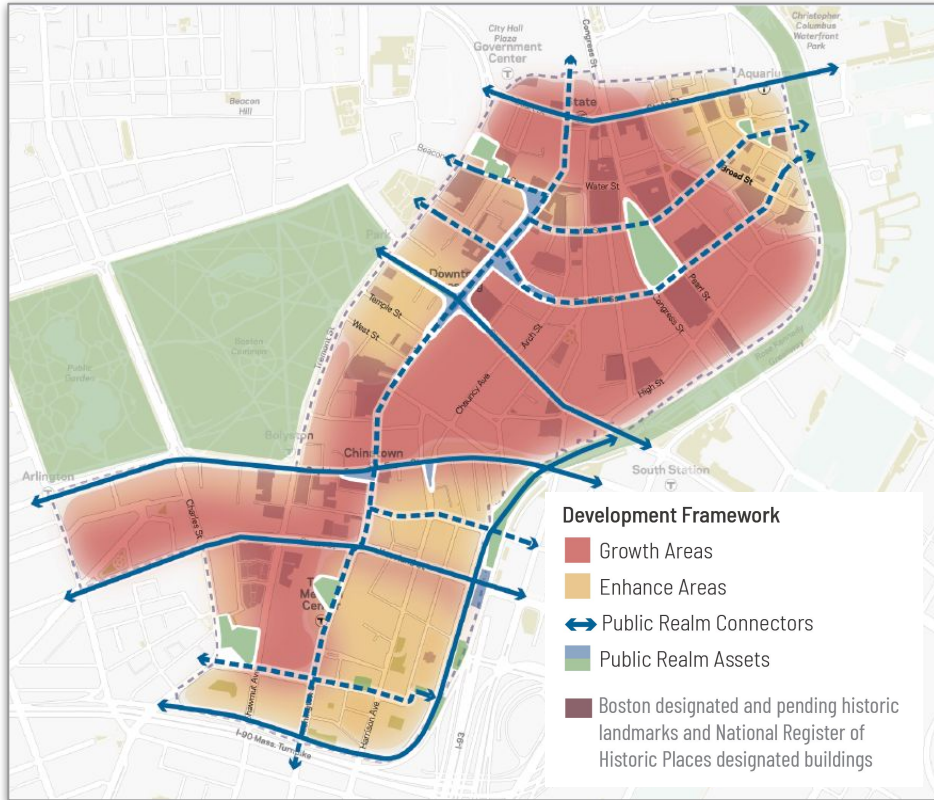


Updates & Edits

- Letter from the Chief of Planning
- Provided background on how the study area was determined.
- Updated the Character Area map and clarified how areas were determined.
- Clarified the Wharf District neighborhood boundaries.



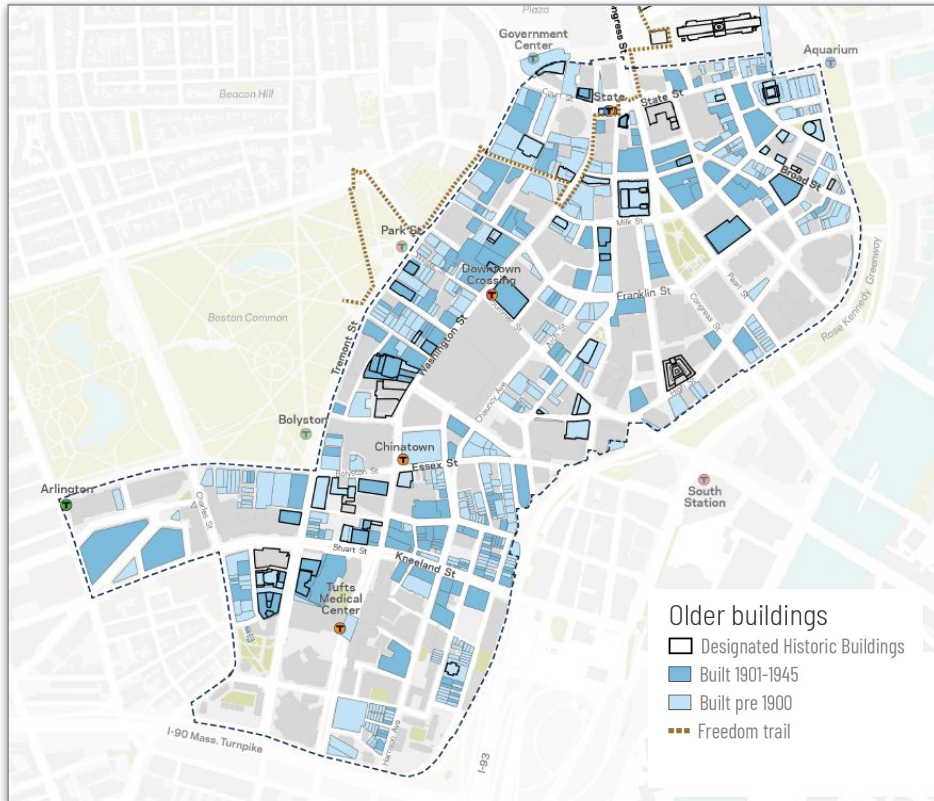
Preservation



Updates & Edits

- Revised labeling on Development Framework graphic and included designated and inventoried historic buildings.
- Emphasized policy priority to identify key buildings of both historic, cultural, and community significance for protection.
- Highlighted the risk to unprotected older buildings, especially naturally occurring affordable housing in Chinatown.

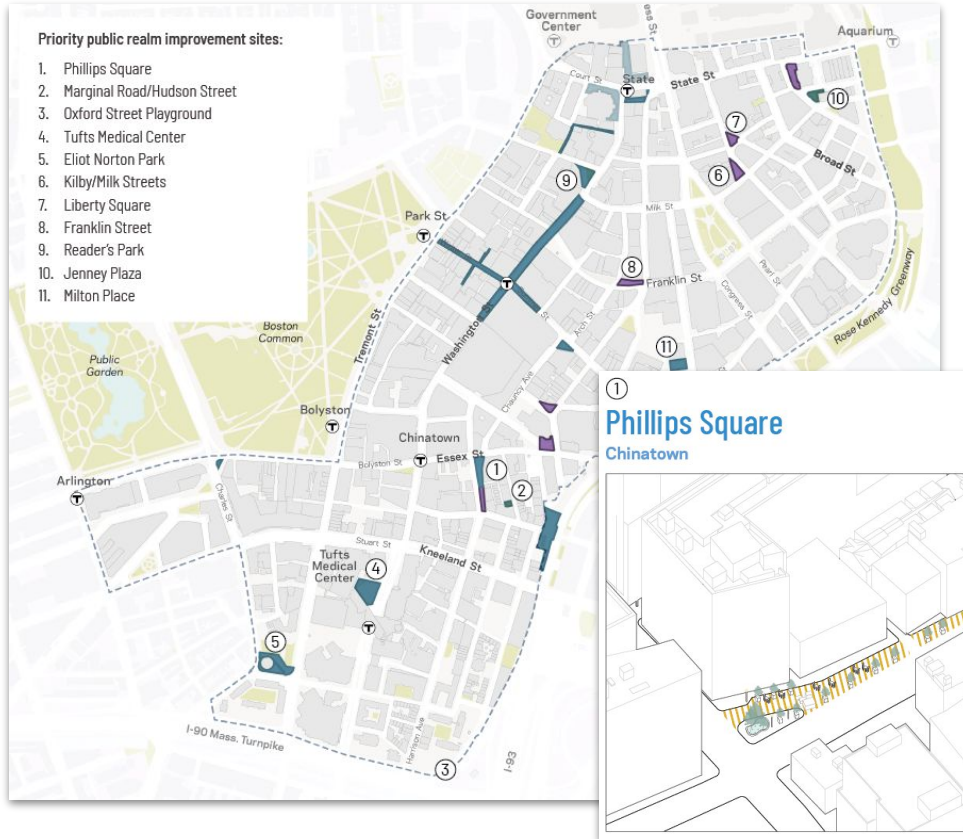
Preservation



Updates & Edits

- Revised labeling on Development Framework graphic and included designated and inventoried historic assets.
- Included key priority to identify key buildings of both historic, cultural, and community significance for protection.
- Highlighted the risk to unprotected older buildings, especially naturally occurring affordable housing in Chinatown.

Public Realm Projects and Mobility



Updates & Edits

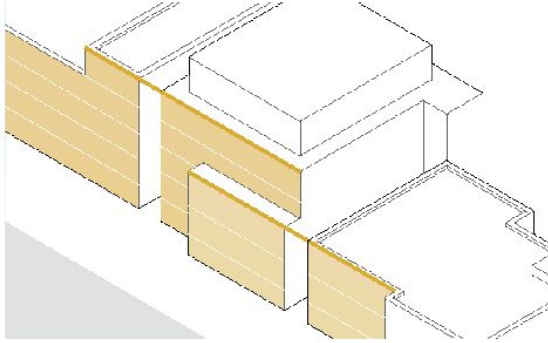
- Strengthened recommendations for accessibility improvements and repair to sidewalks to improve safety and multigenerational.
- Clearer labeling of priority projects.
- Additional detail on Phillips Square.
- Additional language on need for enforcement of curbside uses and vehicles, especially in pedestrian areas.
- Support MBTA's Transit Priority Vision and Climate Change Resiliency projects to improve resilience to challenges like stormwater infiltration and excess heat.

Design Guidelines

1.2 Building Massing

Shape buildings to respect the scale of the surrounding context and mitigate impacts on nearby buildings and the public realm.

- Reference and respond to the height, massing, and important architectural lines of abutting buildings. Particular attention should be paid to the base or first 5 to 6 stories of abutting buildings in the Ladder Blocks, Wharf District, and Chinatown.
- Align new development with the predominant setback along the street to maintain continuous street edges and active streetscapes. Exceptions may include courtyards or forecourts that do not significantly disrupt a continuous street edge. Upper story facades should not protrude beyond street alignment.



1.3 Towers

Towers should provide visual interest at various scales and mitigate height using set-backs, stepbacks, and other massing changes and architectural elements.

- Test impacts on the local environment at the design stage and ensure tall buildings minimize impacts such as wind levels at the street level.
- Introduce setbacks, floor plate reduction and back-to-back lightwells to maximize access to light and air to adjacent buildings and the public realm.
- Utilize materials that have impact from a distance while also providing, scale, pattern, and jointing up close, particularly on the ground floor and base of the building.
- Mechanical penthouses should be treated as integral elements to the overall design, concealed as much as possible within the typical facade treatment.



Wythe Hotel, New York



The Apsley Building, New York



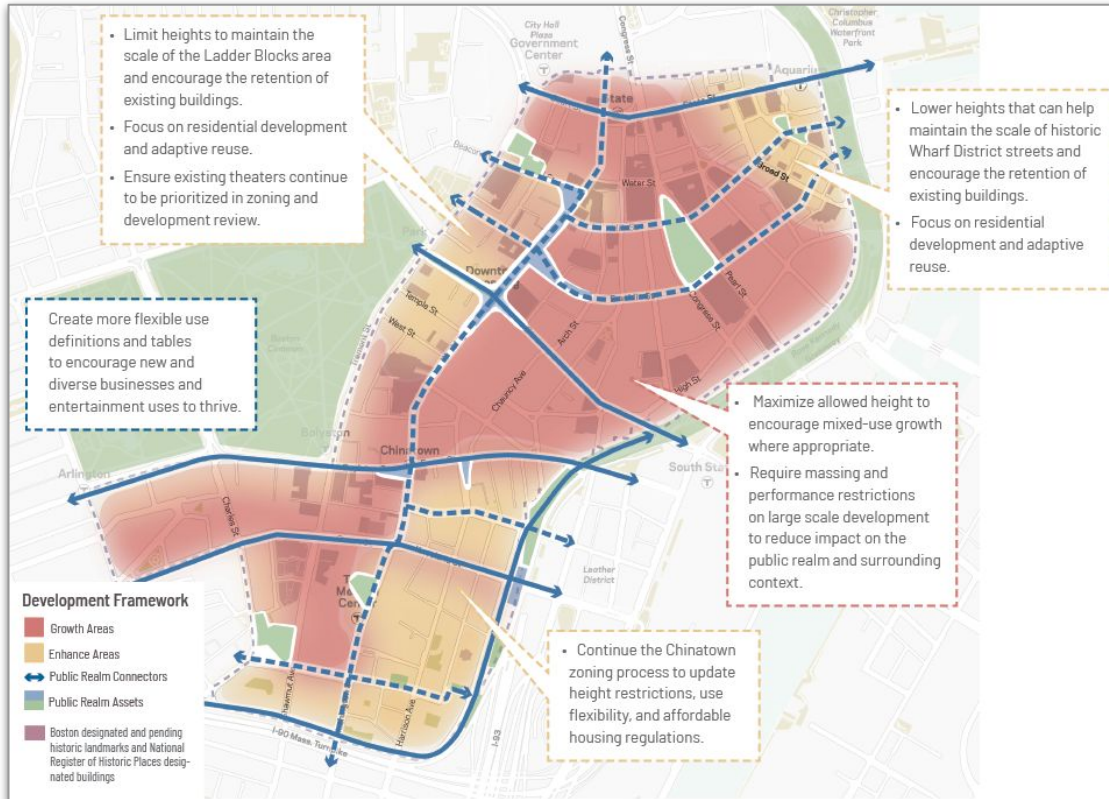
Rocket&Tigerli mass timber tower, Switzerland

Updates & Edits

- Added design guidelines for towers, emphasizing the need to test impacts on the local environment.
- Guidance on the placement of mechanical vents, to avoid negative impacts on the public realm.
- Differentiated public vs. tenant-only active ground floor uses.



Zoning



- Zoning changes will be divided into phases.
- Each phase will include an additional public comment period.
- Zoning considerations will guide each phase:
 - Focus on residential and adaptive reuse development.
 - Lower heights that help encourage the retention of existing buildings. Maximize heights where appropriate for new residential growth.
 - Reform use definitions and tables to encourage new and diverse businesses.

Zoning Timeline

Zoning changes will be implemented in the short, near, and long term, focusing first on use tables and definitions and residential and reuse development:

1. **Near-term (January-February 2024)**

- a. Uses: Updated use definitions and tables that lower barriers for existing and new retail and services and encourage new and diverse businesses and entertainment uses.

2. **Mid-term (Winter/Spring 2024)**

- a. Chinatown zoning
- b. Heights: Create additional as-of right density for residential projects and for projects that add less than 50k SF of all other uses by reusing existing buildings.

3. **Long-term (Summer '24/Long-term)**

- a. Pursue streamlining project negotiation and benefits through Article 80 modernization.
- b. Create a density bonus that is possible through Article 80 modernization that helps reduce project by project negotiation and supports specific projects and project mitigations categories in this PLAN.

Next Steps



Next Steps

PLAN: Downtown report:

- **Release date:** November 17, 2023
- **BPDA Board meeting:** December 14, 2023

Zoning Updates:

- January 2024 - Uses
- Spring 2024 - Chinatown zoning and residential heights
- Summer 2024/long term - Article 80 modernization

Public Discussion

