

CHINATOWN REZONING

Property Owners Meeting | Saturday, January 18



1:05 PM



Planning Department

CITY of BOSTON

TONIGHT'S MEETING

- 1 WHAT IS ZONING?
- 2 ZONING & PRIVATE PROPERTY
- 3 DRAFT ZONING
- 4 DRAFT DESIGN GUIDELINES
- 5 NEXT STEPS
- 6 TRANSPORTATION UPDATE



ABOUT PLAN: DOWNTOWN

Chinatown Rezoning is a part of implementing PLAN: Downtown (2018-2023).

Creates a **framework for the growth, enhancement, and preservation** of Downtown Boston.

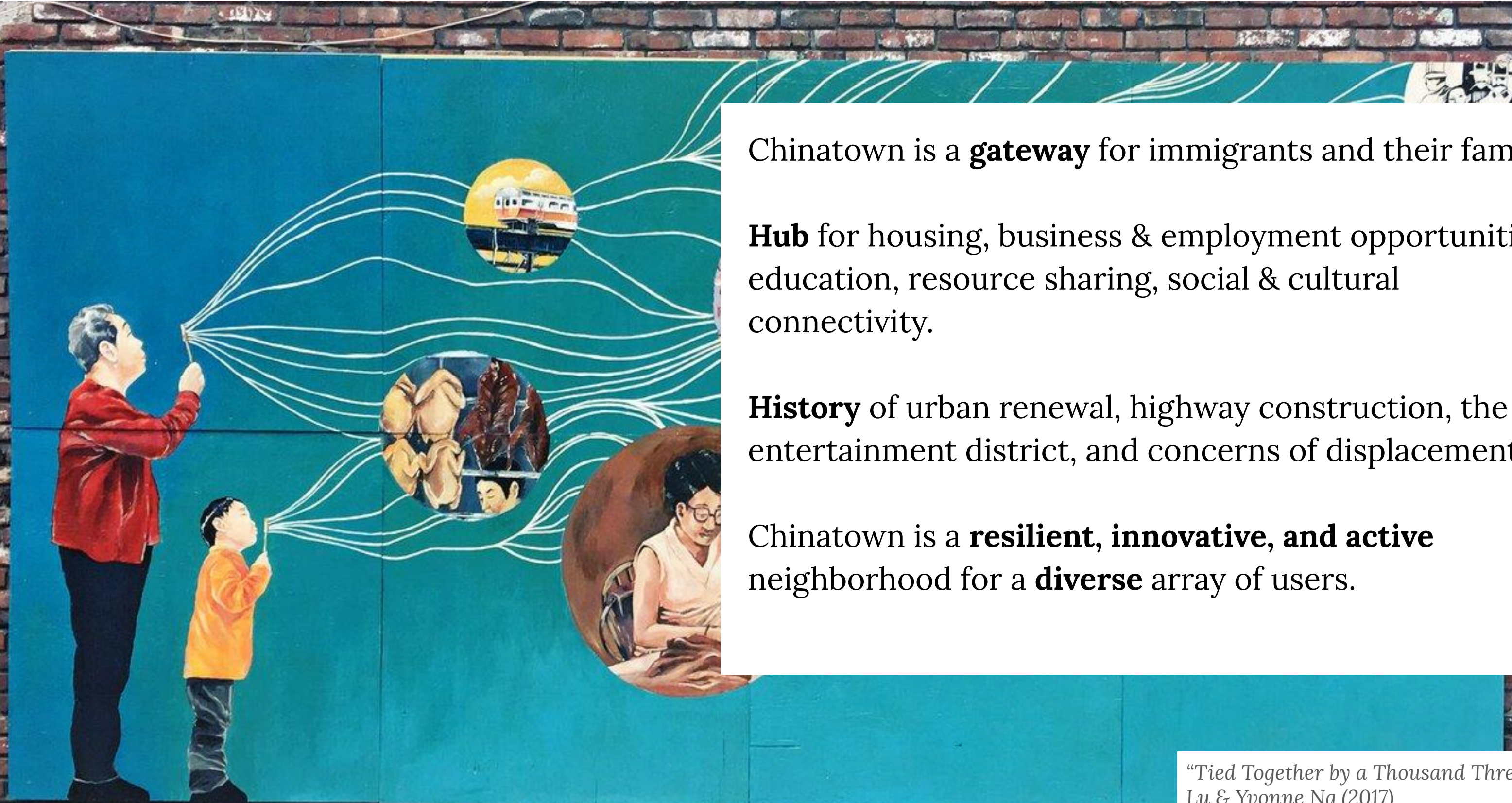
Encourages a **greater mix of uses** for a more inclusive and vibrant Downtown that meets **diverse needs of residents, workers, and visitors.**

PLAN: Downtown engagement identified Chinatown as a unique cultural and community hub that needs its own rezoning process.



Adopted by the BPDA Board on December 14, 2023

UNDERSTANDING CHINATOWN CONTEXT



Chinatown is a **gateway** for immigrants and their families.

Hub for housing, business & employment opportunities, education, resource sharing, social & cultural connectivity.

History of urban renewal, highway construction, the adult entertainment district, and concerns of displacement.

Chinatown is a **resilient, innovative, and active** neighborhood for a **diverse** array of users.

*“Tied Together by a Thousand Threads” by Shaina Lu & Yvonne Ng (2017)
Photo from Asian Community Development Corporation*

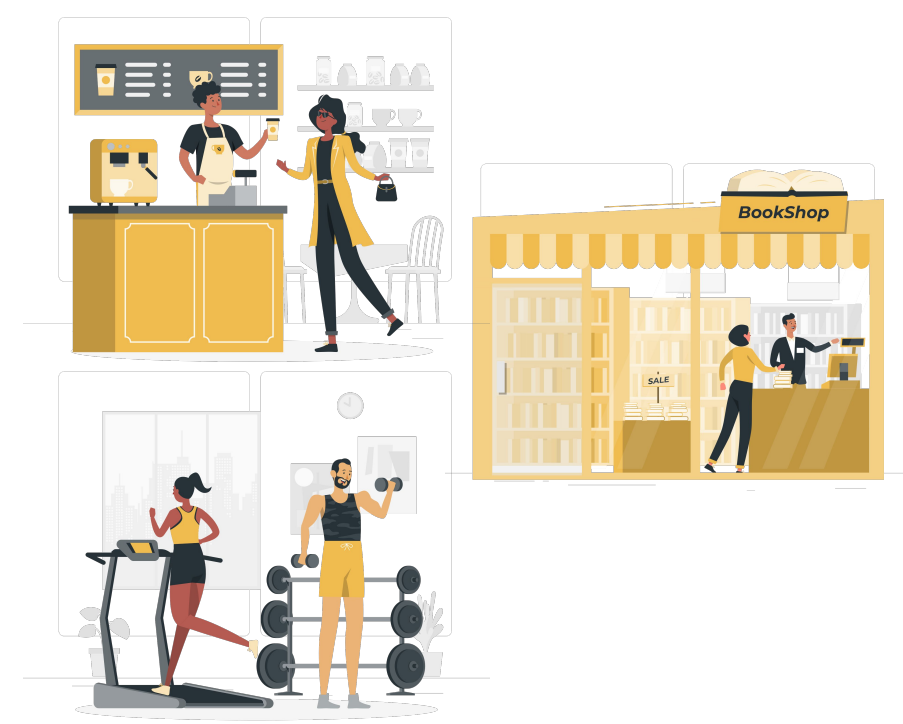


WHAT IS ZONING?



WHAT IS ZONING? - ZONING OVERVIEW

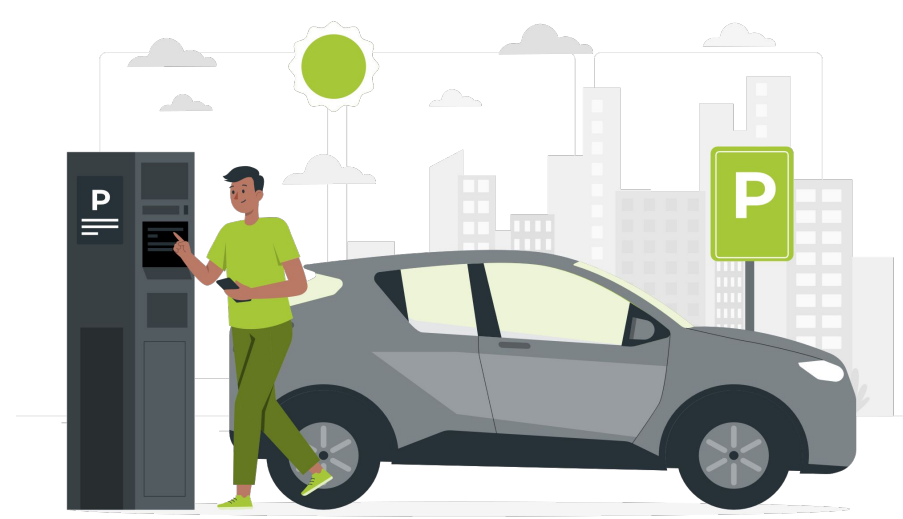
Zoning is a set of laws that are used to guide development by dictating the **allowed land use, shape, and density of a building or structure** in a given area. Some of what zoning regulates includes:



LAND USES
the types of activities allowed within a given area



BUILDING DIMENSIONS
how much space a building takes up, its height, and the open space around it



OTHER REGULATIONS
parking and loading, signage requirements, roof deck allowances, and many more.

Zoning doesn't build or demolish anything; it acts as guides and limits to what people can build.

HOW DO WE UPDATE ZONING? - ZONING AMENDMENTS



ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT

Change(s) in the written text of the Zoning Code that become new or updated rules for development.

Existing Chinatown Zoning Text

ARTICLE 43 - CHINATOWN DISTRICT^[1]

Footnotes:

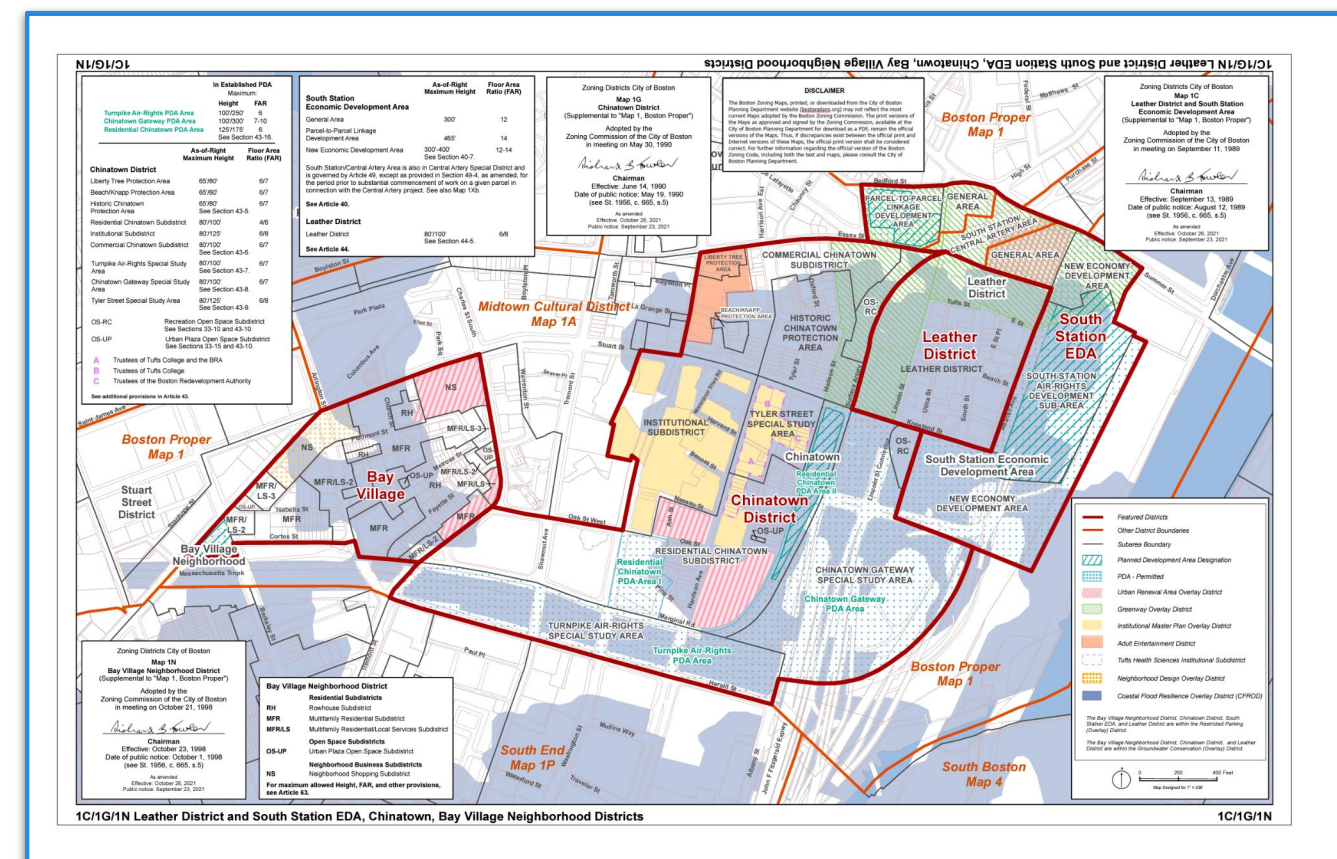
Section 43-1. - Statement of Purpose, Goals, and Objectives.

The purpose of this Article is to establish the zoning regulations for the comprehensive plan for the Chinatown District as required by the provisions of the Downtown Interim Planning Overlay District, [Article 27D](#) of this Code. The goals and objectives of this Article and the Chinatown Community Plan are to upgrade the quality of life and ensure the long-term viability of Chinatown as a historic residential neighborhood and a unique cultural, business, and service center; to create housing which is affordable to all segments of the community; to encourage community businesses and trades; to diversify the economy and improve employment opportunities for neighborhood residents; to protect the historic and cultural resources of the district; to improve the environment through the establishment of open space subdistricts; to manage institutional growth in an open process and to establish boundaries for institutional uses; to promote the most desirable use of land in accordance with the Chinatown Community Plan; and to promote the public safety, health, and welfare of the people of Boston.

ZONING MAP AMENDMENT

Change(s) in the geographic location and application of specific zoning rules on a zoning map of one or more areas within the City.

Existing Chinatown Zoning Map



WHY UPDATE ZONING?

We are **incrementally updating zoning CITYWIDE**; updating our zoning code has **benefits regardless of the specific place** in the City that we rezone.

1

Current zoning regulations do not match what's built, what exists, or the ways we've planned to grow

2

Updated zoning sets clear standards for what can be built (and makes it harder to rely on variances)

3

Provide pathways for small scale residential and commercial development as well as larger ones

4

Make the zoning code more legible, predictable, and easy to navigate

LAND USES



Boston's Zoning Code regulates how **land can be used**. Each land use is delegated as **allowed, conditional, or forbidden** in each area of the City.

Allowed uses can be built new or open in an existing location.

Conditional uses require a conditional use permit, based on set criteria, from the Zoning Board of Appeal, to exist at a location.

This means it will require a review process to determine if its appropriate, usually based on the surrounding area and priorities named in recent plans.

Forbidden uses may not be built.

RESIDENTIAL



RESTAURANT + RETAIL



HOSPITAL + INSTITUTIONS



And many more...

NEW LAND USE STRUCTURE



New land uses and definitions **clarify ambiguous categories and include new land uses** that have not been in the zoning code before.



Existing Land Use Examples

- Restaurant Uses
- Take-Out Restaurant Uses

- Service Uses

- Cultural Uses

New Land Use Examples

- Restaurant Small + Large

- Service Establishment - Small + Large
- Check Casher

- Museum
- Arts Studios
- Entertainment/Events (Extra-Small, Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large)

LAND USE SIZES



Some land uses have **size thresholds**, which can **encourage small business spaces** and **limit large**, outsized and impactful land uses.

Small Retail Store

- Total square footage less than 2,500 square feet.

Allowed on the ground floor of every Chinatown subdistrict, but conditional in the row houses area.



Medium Retail Store

- Total square footage of 2,501-10,000 square feet.

Allowed in the community commercial and MU-10 areas, forbidden in the row houses area, and conditional everywhere else.



Large Retail Store

- Total square footage of 10,001-49,999 square feet.

Conditional in the community commercial area and larger residential area, forbidden everywhere else.



Extra-Large Retail Store

- Total square footage greater than or equal to 50,000 square feet.

Forbidden everywhere, except conditional in the MU-10 area.



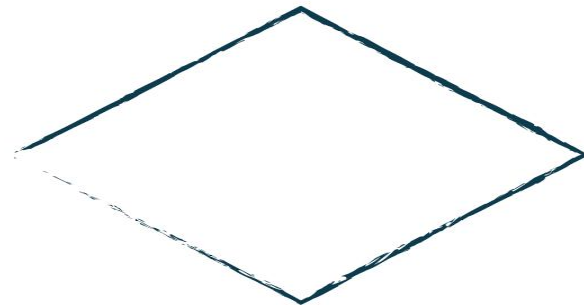
DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS TODAY



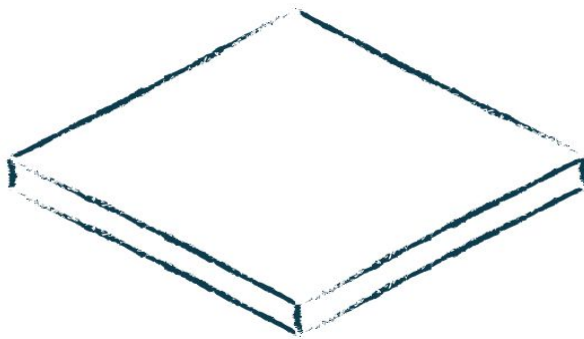
The building dimensional requirements in Chinatown today **only include Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and building height**, which don't control what happens at the ground level.

FAR can result in significantly varying building heights, shapes, and scales.

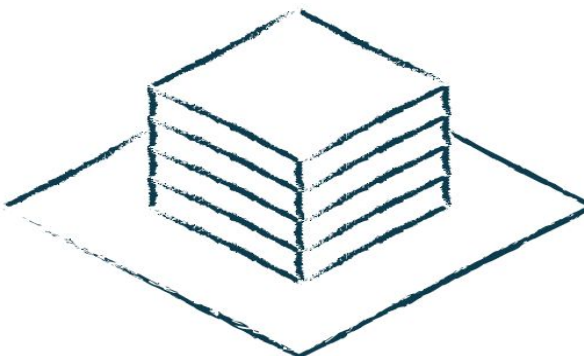
10,000 sqft lot



FAR 1.0
100% Lot Coverage



FAR 1.0
25% Lot Coverage



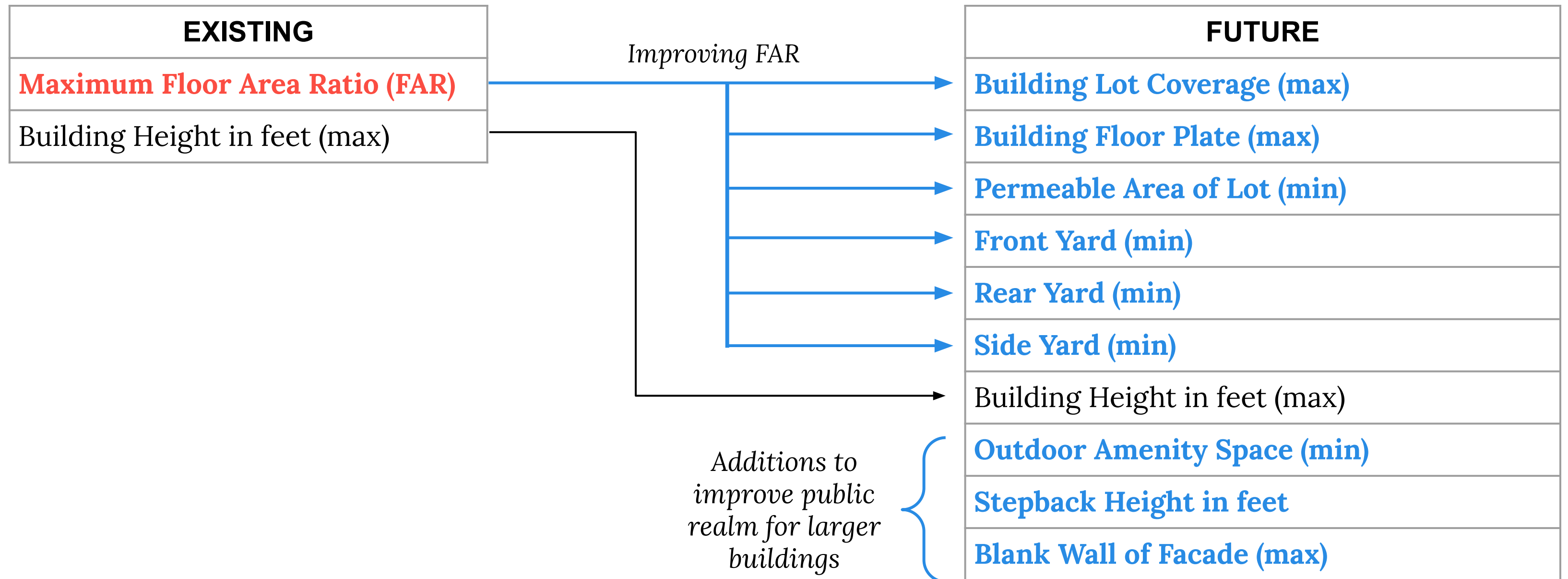
FAR of 2.6



NEW DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS



New dimensional regulations can better control for what future development looks like and introduces new measures to meet neighborhood goals, like outdoor amenity space and permeable surfaces.





ZONING & PRIVATE PROPERTY

2

WHO DOES ZONING APPLY TO?

1

SUB-ARTICLE 80

Changing the use of a property

Constructing an addition on your building

Adding take-out to your restaurant

Construction under 20,000 sf

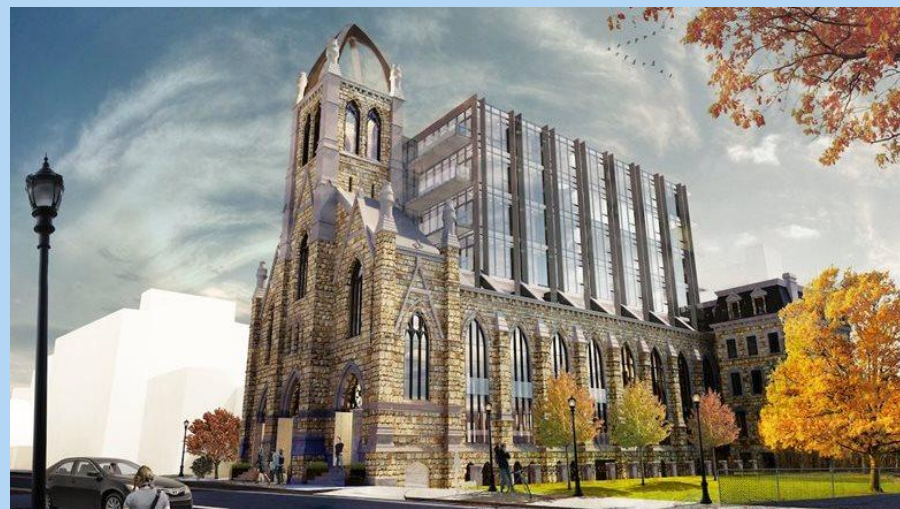
Other building changes...

2

ARTICLE 80 SMALL PROJECTS

Projects between 20,000 sf and 50,000 sf

15 or more housing units



Holy Trinity Church (South End)

3

ARTICLE 80 LARGE PROJECTS

Projects over 50,000 sf



288 Harrison | 86,950 sf

ZONING VIOLATION EXAMPLES



7 HUDSON STREET

Added take-out to existing restaurant.
Restaurants with take-out is a conditional use.



New zoning would allow take-out restaurants

78 TYLER STREET

Converting convent to 8 apartments; not providing required parking (4 spaces).



New zoning would not require parking (but parking can still be built)



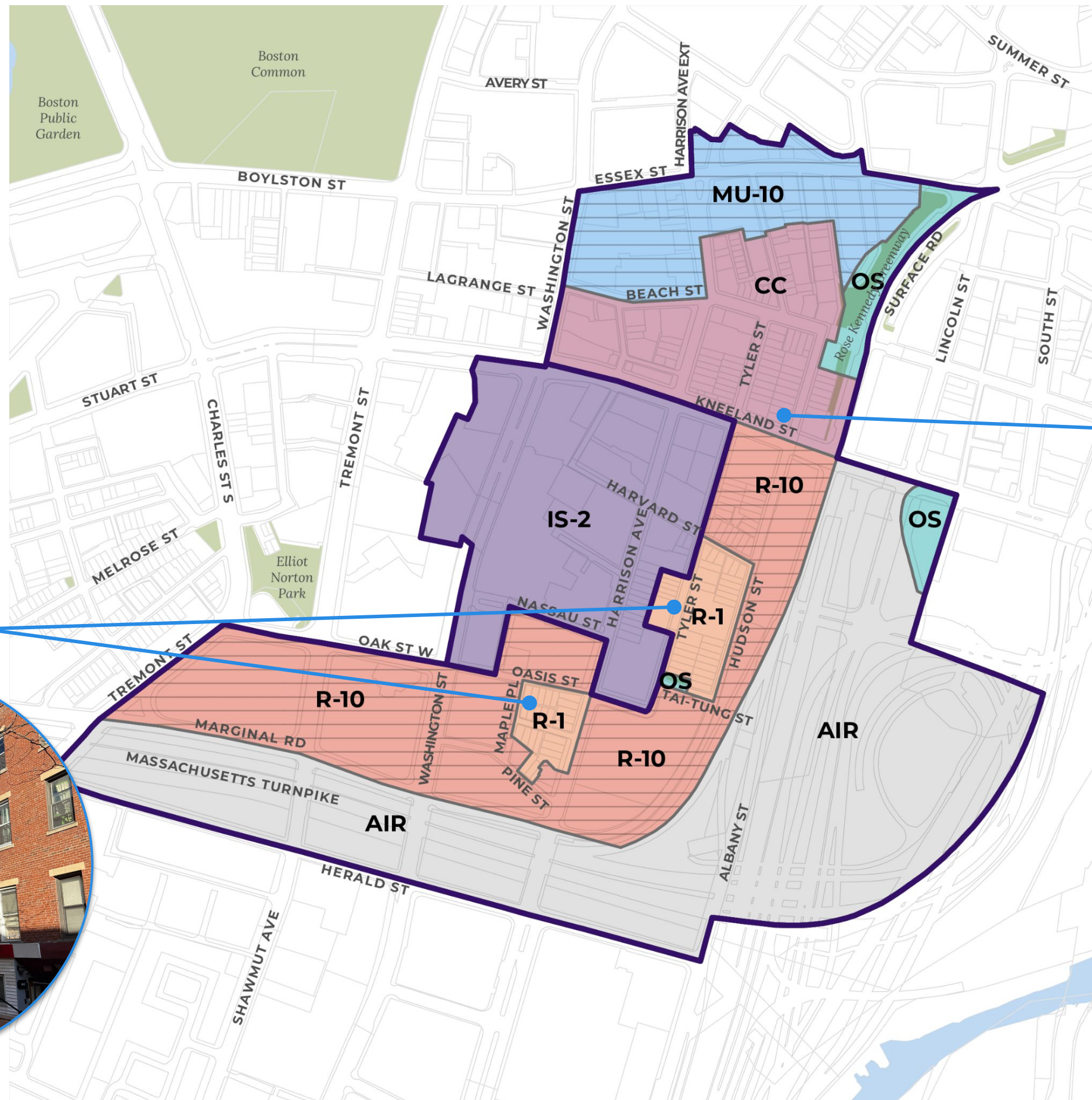
DRAFT ZONING

3

CHINATOWN DRAFT ZONING OVERVIEW – DISTRICTS



These are **zoning districts**. They each have specific *land use* and *dimensional* regulations.



RESIDENTIAL-1 (R-1)
Downzone to maintain row houses.



COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL (CC)
Right-size dimensions to match existing context and encourage small business uses.



R-1 OVERVIEW

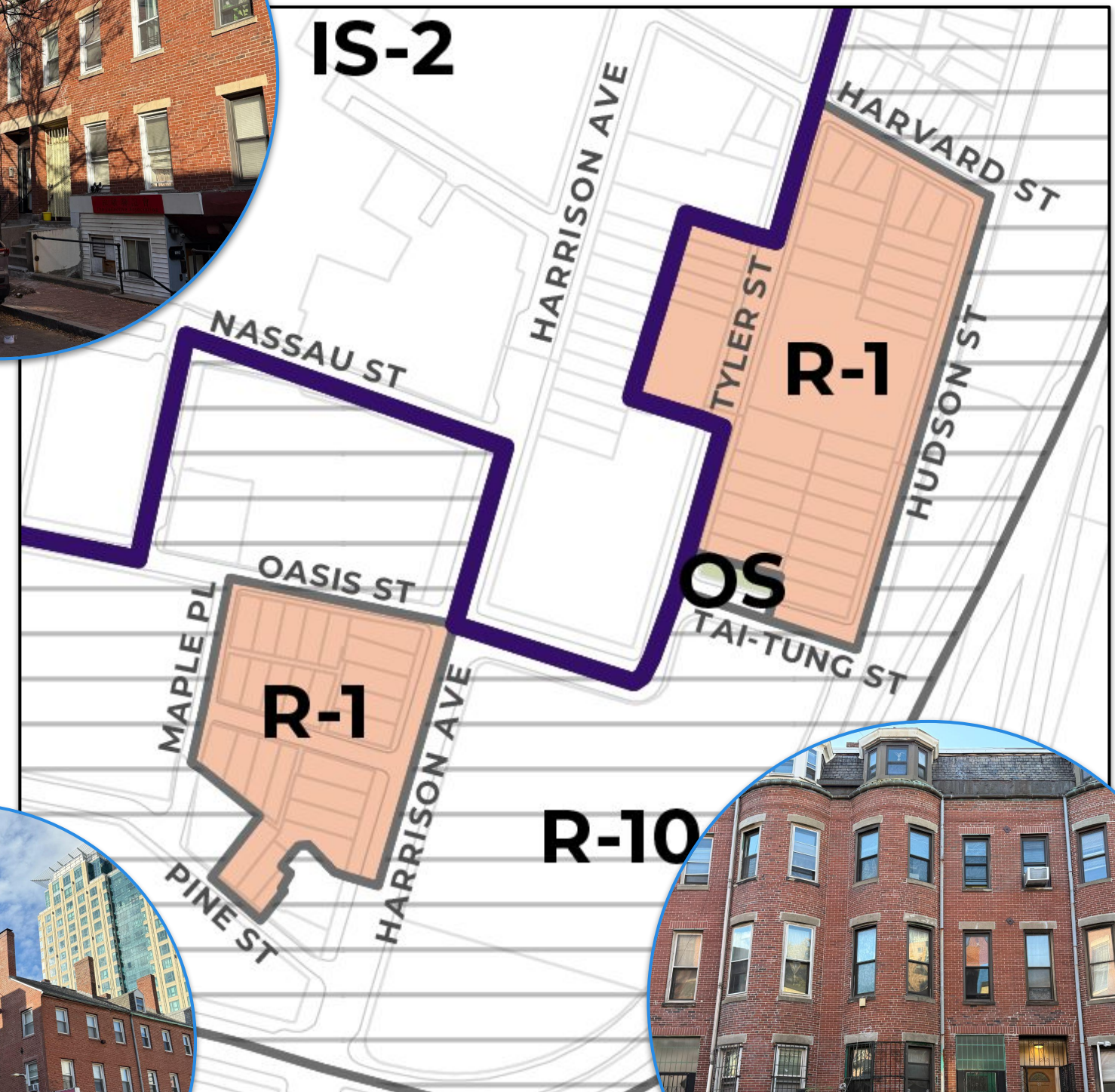
WHAT WE'VE HEARD

- Keep this area generally the same as it exists right now, with a little flexibility to build out, but **not allow growth in height.**

“Preserve the historic fabric of the neighborhood, especially the **row house blocks.**”
 -PLAN: Downtown

ZONING OVERVIEW

- Downzoning and setting dimensional regulations to maintain row houses and small commercial spaces serving the neighborhood.



R-1 LAND USE REGULATIONS



Encourage preservation for residential uses, with some opportunity for commercial or community uses.

ALLOWED USES *(can be built)*

- Residential under 15 units
- Ground floor small grocery stores

CONDITIONAL USES *(requires review)*

- Ground floor small offices, restaurants, retail, and services

FORBIDDEN USES *(cannot be built)*

- Hotels, research labs, larger offices and commercial uses



Focus on small residential



Small commercial (conditional) mixed in with allowed residential uses



Civic uses allowed to support surrounding community

R-1 DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS

New zoning will limit the size of new buildings to ensure small residential character.

BUILDING HEIGHT

- Maximum 45' (down from 80' today)

FLOOR PLATE MAXIMUM

- 1,500 square foot maximum to maintain small-scale buildings (none today)

YARD MINIMUMS

- Allowing for party wall condition and possibility for small rear-yard additions



CC OVERVIEW



WHAT WE'VE HEARD

- Preserve the Chinese heritage of existing shops and restaurants
- Provide **affordable goods and services**

“Support new and legacy small businesses.”
-PLAN: Downtown

ZONING OVERVIEW

- Focus on maintaining what's there today and encouraging commercial activity with zoning rules that allow it.



CC LAND USE REGULATIONS



Allow smaller commercial land uses across multiple floors, confirm the commercial heart of Chinatown, and limit larger land uses that could threaten the small-scale fabric of the area.

ALLOWED USES *(can be built)*

- Residential on upper floors
- Medium retail and entertainment
- Small grocery stores, services, and offices

CONDITIONAL USES *(requires review)*

- Residential on ground floor
- Retail cannabis establishment

FORBIDDEN USES *(cannot be built)*

- Hotels, research labs, larger offices and entertainment/events

Mix of land uses across multiple floors



Small-scale land use allowances

Blend of retail, restaurants, and services



CC DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS



Limit the maximum size of developments to match what's built today. Keep current rules for building height.

BUILDING HEIGHT

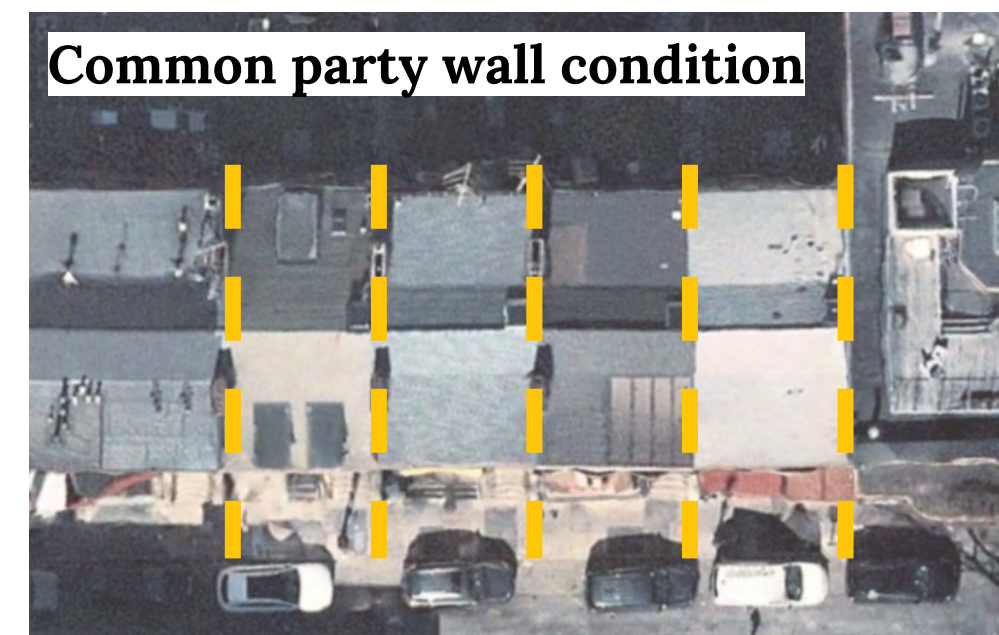
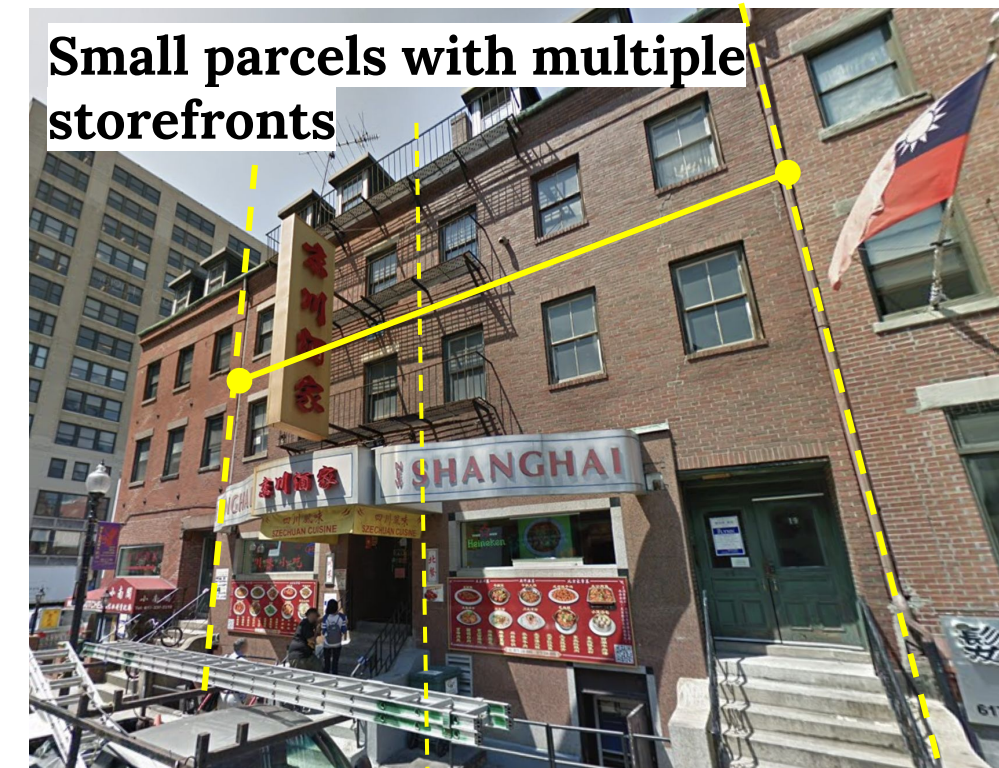
- Maximum 80' (no change from today)

FLOOR PLATE MAXIMUM

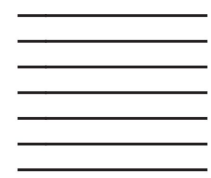
- 2,000 square foot maximum to maintain small-scale buildings

LOT COVERAGE

- High building lot coverage to reflect existing density

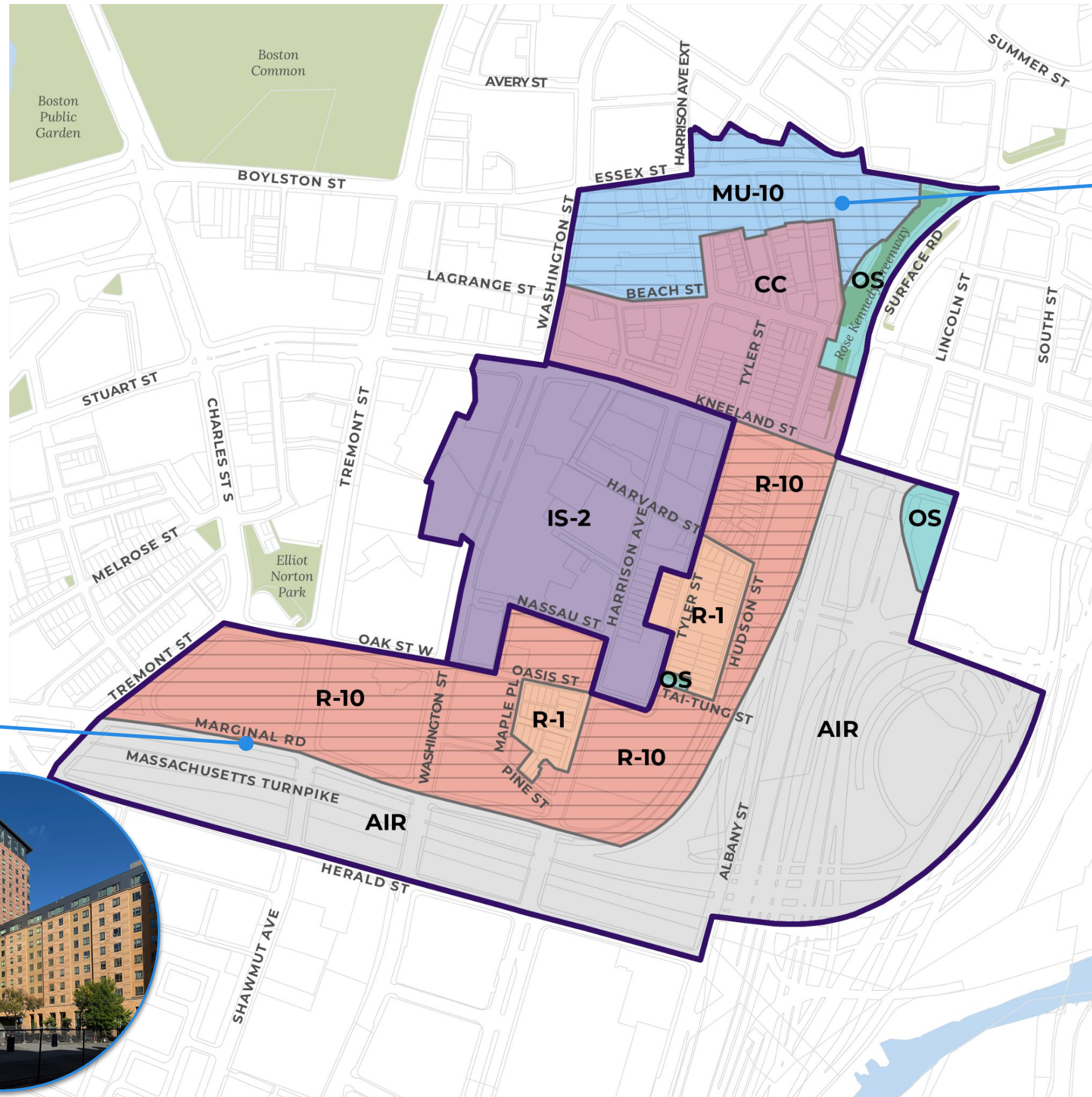


CHINATOWN DRAFT ZONING OVERVIEW – DISTRICTS



CHINATOWN AFFORDABLE HOUSING OVERLAY

Encourage affordable housing projects through a height bonus.



MIXED-USE-10 (MU-10)

Prioritize affordable housing with height bonus and allow residential and tourism-related development



RESIDENTIAL-10 (R-10)

Right-size dimensions to allow height of existing apartment buildings, with a height bonus for affordable housing projects.



R-10 OVERVIEW



WHAT WE'VE HEARD

- Higher density for more affordable and workforce housing units
- Build off existing concentrations of **affordable and mixed-income** housing
- Increase open space opportunities

“Support programmed public outdoor spaces... to **create space for community/ social gatherings** and families.”
-PLAN: Downtown



ZONING OVERVIEW

- Increase heights to enable affordable housing and create regulations to improve residents' and visitors' experience.

R-10 LAND USE REGULATIONS



Encouraging housing and supportive community land uses by allowing any number of residential units and some limited commercial uses.

ALLOWED USES *(can be built)*

- Residential uses, grocery stores, and community centers
- Ground floor small offices, restaurants, retail, and services

CONDITIONAL USES *(requires review)*

- Ground floor larger retail, services, and restaurants

FORBIDDEN USES *(cannot be built)*

- Hotels, research labs, larger offices and entertainment/events



Service establishments, like salons, allowed on ground floor

Restaurants serve residents + the community



Schools are an important civic use within the neighborhood

R-10 DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS

Allowing the highest height for affordable housing, requiring permeable area and outdoor amenity space, and setting dimensions that better match existing apartment buildings.

BUILDING HEIGHT

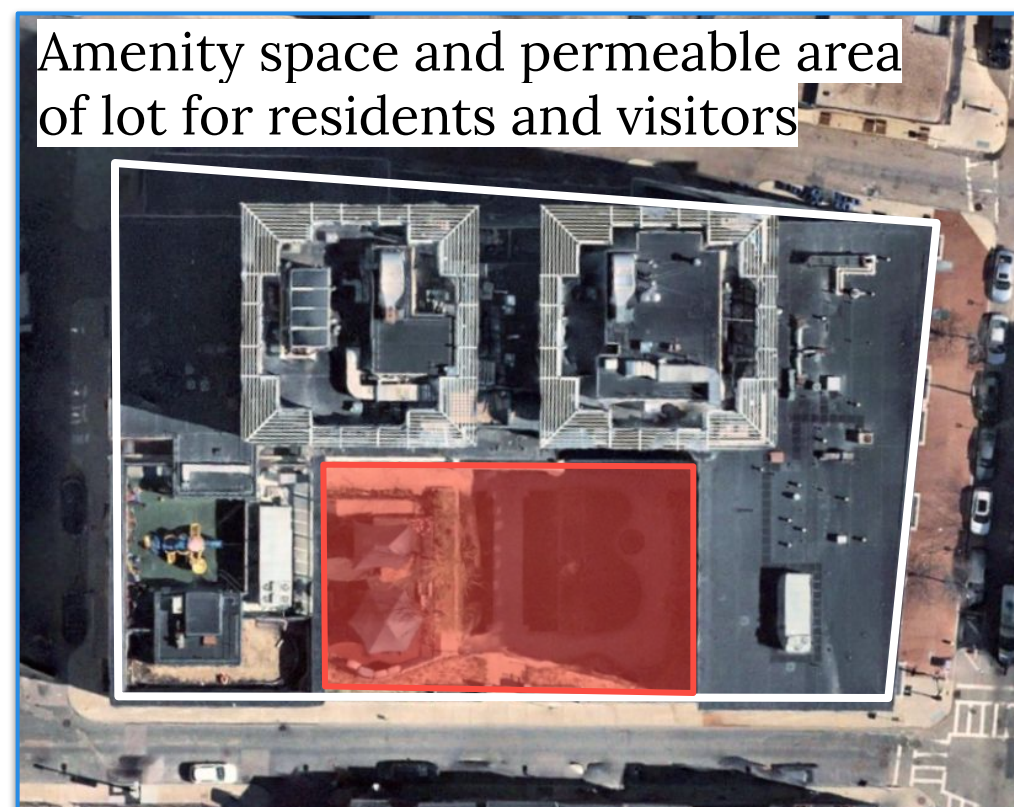
- 350' for affordable housing
- 150' for all other uses

AMENITY SPACE + PERMEABILITY

- 20% minimum outdoor amenity space
- Large lots must include 15% permeable area

STEPBACKS

- Buildings must to reduce size above 70', or to the height of an abutting historic building



MU-10 OVERVIEW

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

- More opportunities for development of varied businesses and housing above ground floor
- **Growth and development opportunities + tourism** as priorities for Chinatown (survey)
- Residential identity of the Essex St area

“Create **additional housing for a range of incomes** while balancing the preservation of the existing built fabric.”
 -PLAN: Downtown

ZONING OVERVIEW

- Zoning to encourage more of the uses that Chinatown has expressed needing, including housing and uses for tourism.



MU-10 LAND USE REGULATIONS



Highlight Chinatown as a growing residential neighborhood and tourism destination by allowing residential and tourism-related uses while limiting large offices and research labs.

ALLOWED USES *(can be built)*

- Multi-unit residential
- Hotels and large offices
- Grocery stores, restaurants, services, large retail, entertainment/events

CONDITIONAL USES *(requires review)*

- 1-8 residential units

FORBIDDEN USES *(cannot be built)*

- Research labs



Larger scale residential buildings



Mix of residential uses and accessory retail/services

MU-10 DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS



Ensure that if tall buildings are built, they incorporate affordable and workforce housing.

BUILDING HEIGHT

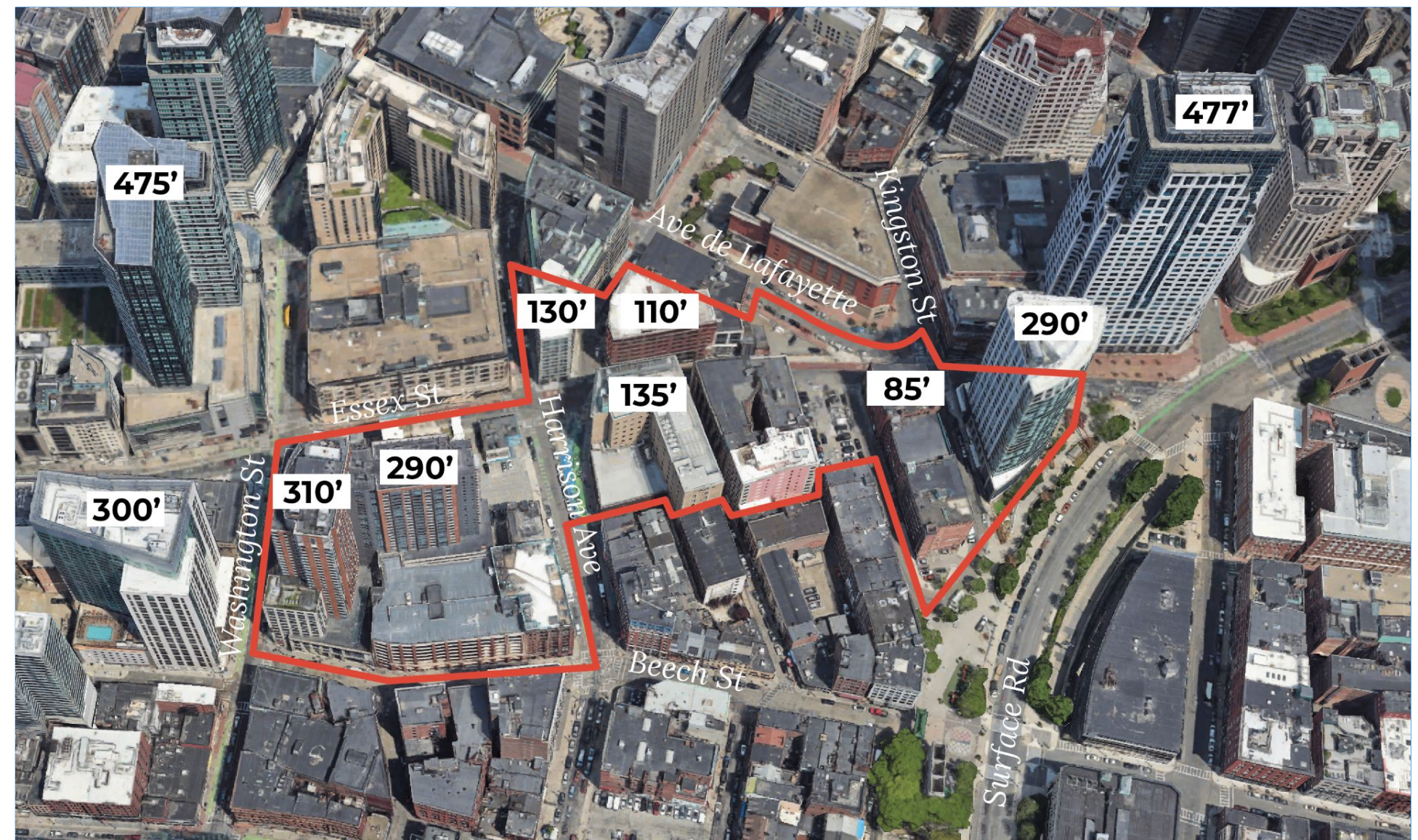
- 350' for affordable housing
- 150' for all other uses

AMENITY SPACE

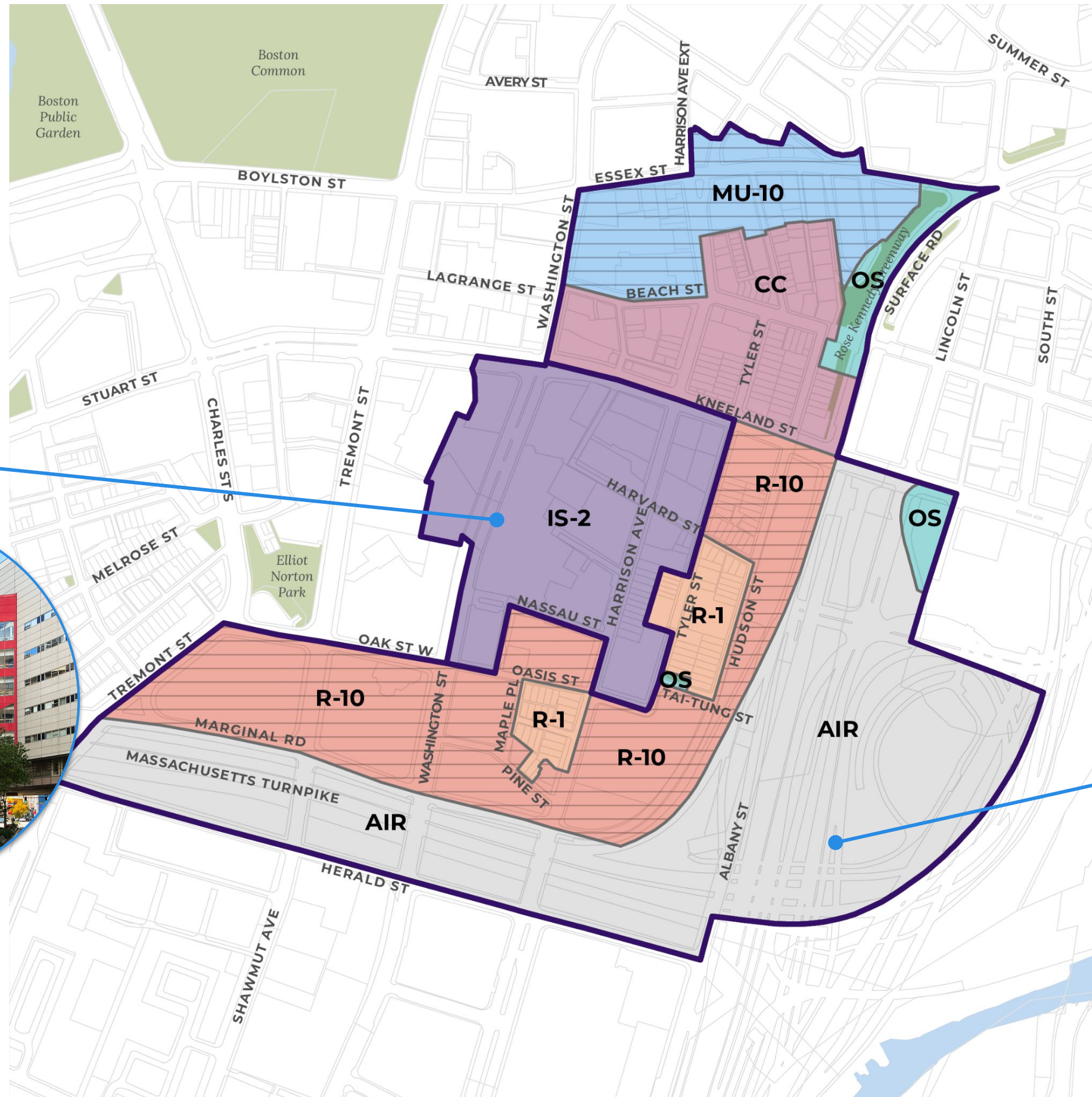
- For large lots, 10% minimum ground floor outdoor amenity space

STEPBACKS

- Buildings must reduce size above 155', or to the height of an abutting historic building



CHINATOWN DRAFT ZONING OVERVIEW – DISTRICTS



INSTITUTIONAL-2 (IS-2)
Set regulations to better match medical institutional uses.



AIR RIGHTS STUDY AREA (AIR)
Allow PDA projects and use regulations to stitch together both sides of the highway.



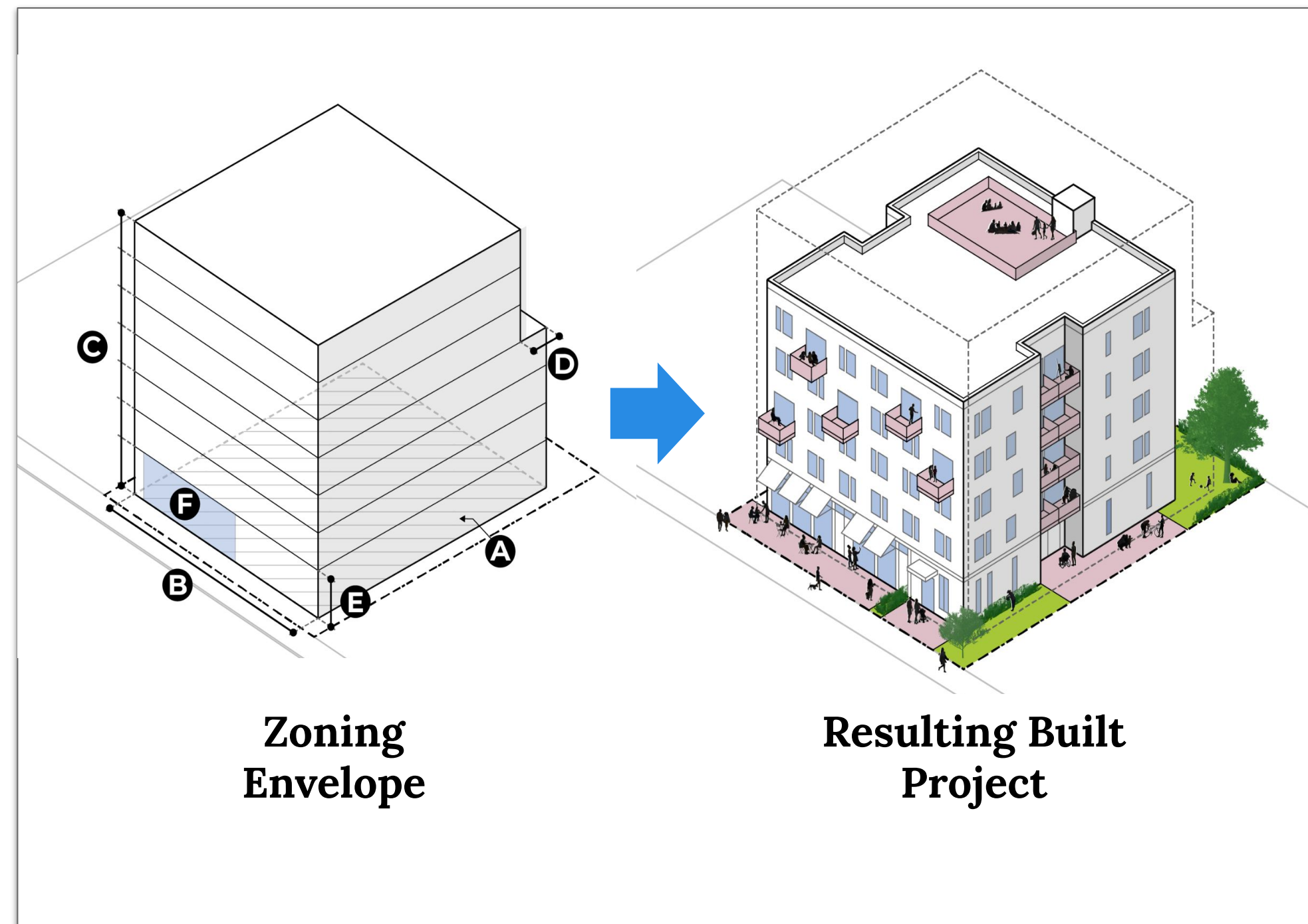
DRAFT DESIGN GUIDELINES

4

CHINATOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines, enforced through Article 80 project review, help ensure projects enhance and respect Chinatown's historic streets, buildings, and character.

- The guidelines are intended for City staff as well as developers, architects, and community members to help shape and evaluate projects in the area.
- They will be used and enforced when projects undergo the BPDA and BLC design review process
- The place-specific guidelines for Chinatown are an addition to the general design guidelines in PLAN: Downtown that apply to Downtown and Chinatown



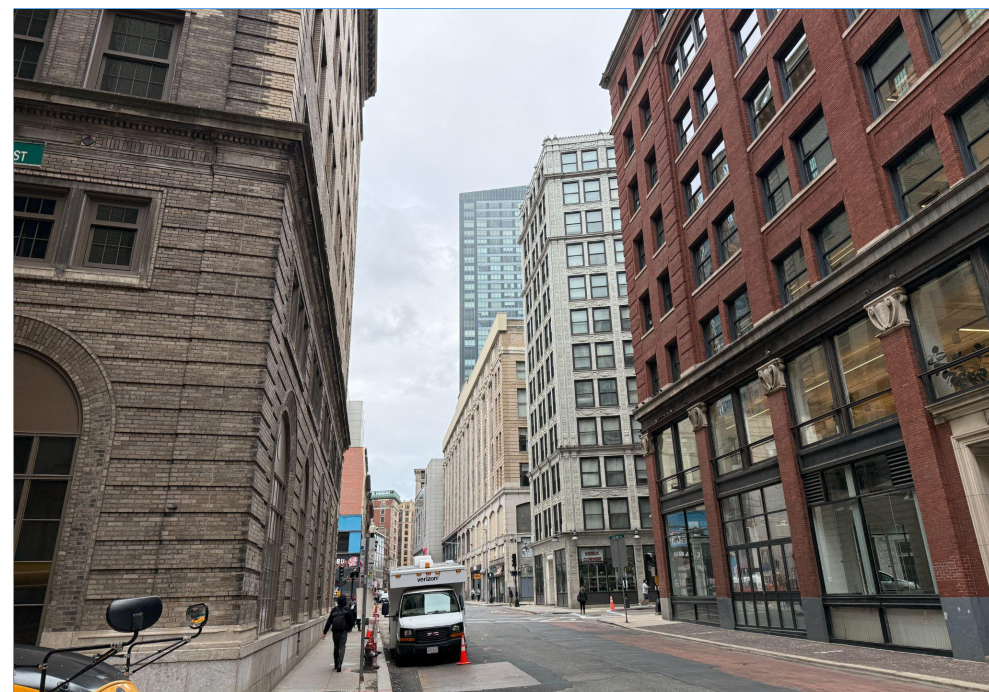
KEY DESIGN PRINCIPLES



Find mixed-use growth and adaptive reuse opportunities along Chinatown's Essex St. edge and Harrison Ave. gateway.



Maintain the rhythm, scale, and vibrancy of facades and storefronts in Chinatown's mixed-use core.



KEY DESIGN PRINCIPLES



Maintain the scale and character of the clusters of historic rowhouses throughout Chinatown.



Find opportunities to pair new residential growth with the creation of new community spaces and improved public realm in Chinatown's larger-scale residential area south of Kneeland.



[Dancing Dragon] 2023-2024
Katherine Chin & Parke MacDowell



[Storytell and Sway] 2021-2022
Gianna Stewart

KEY DESIGN PRINCIPLES



Work with artists, Chinatown organizations, and the community to identify opportunities to include public art and integrate features in site and building design that highlight the history and culture of Chinatown.



“Tied Together by a Thousand Threads” by Shaina Lu & Yvonne Ng (2017)



“Where We Belong” mural in Chinatown by Ponnapa Prakkamakul at Oxford St. and Essex St.



NEXT STEPS

5

GIVING FEEDBACK



COMPLETE the Public Feedback and Comment Form

- Open until February 5, 2025
- bit.ly/ChinatownRezoning_feedback

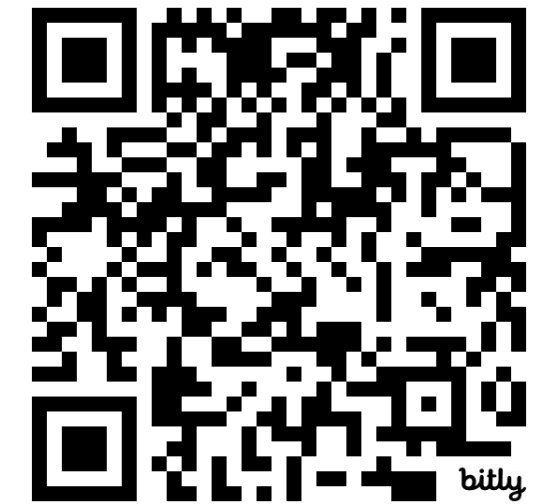
ATTEND Office Hours + Public Meetings

- In-person and virtual options from November 20, 2024 - February 4, 2025
- Sign up to receive email notifications:
www.bostonplans.org/about-us/get-involved

SCHEDULE Planning Staff to Meet with Your Group/Organization

- Planning staff will be available to meet with any groups or organizations
- Please email: Jack.Halverson@boston.gov

Public Feedback and Comment Form



UPCOMING ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE



JANUARY 18, 2025
Property Owners
Meeting

FEBRUARY 5, 2025
Comment Period Ends

WINTER 2025
BPDA Board + Boston
Zoning Commission



VIRTUAL

- 1/22 | 10:00 am - 11:00 am
- 1/23 | 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
- 1/27 | 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm
- 1/30 | 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
- 2/4 | 11:00 am - 12:00 pm

Public Comment Period

Zoning Adoption

THANK YOU

HAVE QUESTIONS?

JACK HALVERSON Jack.Halverson@boston.gov

OR VISIT:

bit.ly/ChinatownRezoning

