



## STAFF REPORT

**TO:** Boston Zoning Commission

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**REPORT PREPARATION DATE:** 2/13/25

**PROJECT:** Petition to Amend Bulfinch Triangle Zoning - Article 46 (“the petition”)

**PROJECT SUBMISSION DATE:** 1/29/25

**TYPE:** Text Amendment

**APPLICANT:** Boston City Council through and by Boston City Councilor Sharon Durkan

### **Background Information:**

On January 23, 2025, the Boston City Council Committee on Planning, Development and Transportation held a hearing sponsored by Councilors Sharon Durkan and Gabriela Coletta Zapata to change residential uses in the Bulfinch Triangle District from conditional to allowed. The Docket Order #0189 included:

- A brief history of the area, including the significance of the Big Dig project to revitalize the Bulfinch Triangle and spur new residential and commercial development;
- Identifying the proximity to public transit, employment centers, and amenities;
- Acknowledging the housing shortage in Boston; and,
- Highlighting the regulatory hurdles for housing production when residential uses are conditional.



The City Council hearing was publicly advertised, provided an opportunity for public testimony, and offered accessibility services upon request. Several key community organizations provided testimony in support of the proposal, citing a need for additional housing production, reducing barriers to converting underutilized properties to residential, and maintaining the historic character of the neighborhood.

The Boston City Council voted on January 29, 2025 to submit this petition.

### **Analysis of the Petition:**

The proposed petition includes two changes:

- Removing “Residential Uses” from the Conditional Uses Section 46-9.3; and
- Adding “Residential Uses” to the Allowed Uses Section 46-9.2.

The proposed text amendment directly copies the existing language from the Conditional Uses section to the Allowed Uses section. The Planning Department does not foresee any structural issues that would be created by this proposed text amendment.

The Planning Department supports the rationale included in Docket Order #0189. Significantly, a goal of ongoing zoning reform is to reduce regulatory barriers for housing production and better align zoning with the built context. Article 46 was last significantly amended in the 1990s, prior to completion of the Big Dig. Since then, there has been significant residential development in the district, further cementing the Bulfinch Triangle as a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood where residential uses are appropriate.

The proposed change does not modify the dimensional regulations, so it would not change any component of what size building is allowed under the existing zoning. However, it would signal to property owners that residential uses are welcome in the neighborhood and remove the regulatory burden of receiving a conditional use permit. This is perhaps most important for the conversion of existing underutilized or outdated buildings to residential uses, and for property owners who may want to renovate their existing residential buildings but would otherwise be faced with a costly and time-consuming process at the Zoning Board of Appeal. There is some appetite today to convert underutilized spaces to residential use. For example, a project at 129 Portland Street was approved by the BPDA on September 12, 2024 to take advantage of the Office to Residential



Conversion Program and create 25 new housing units.

The public process associated with the City Council Hearing, the City's elected legislative body, was transparent, accessible, and provided an opportunity for public testimony.

**Recommendation:**

Staff recommends approval of this petition.

Reviewed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathleen Onuf".

Deputy Director of Zoning,

Planning Department