



PLAN: DOWNTOWN

DRAFT REPORT: AUGUST 21, 2023



**boston planning &
development agency**

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.

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For more information about PLAN: Downtown please visit <http://www.bostonplans.org/planning/planninginitiatives/plan-downtown>

Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

Downtown has always been where Boston comes together. While the pandemic changed the patterns of foot traffic and office work, PLAN: Downtown is a roadmap to a truly inclusive, round-the-clock neighborhood.

Downtown Boston is a vital commercial and cultural hub for the City and the region. Enriched by centuries of cultural and architectural landmarks, it is a job center that is also home thriving communities, including a vibrant Chinatown, growing alongside educational institutions, dense business districts, and historic landmarks.

Downtown's exceptional variety of uses and people requires innovative and comprehensive strategies to achieve a new kind of growth, one that celebrates Downtown's rich history and promotes affordability, equity, and resilience in the City's urban core.

PLAN: Downtown's vision is to 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.

PLAN: Downtown builds upon community feedback and previous planning efforts, including "Imagine Boston 2030" (2017) and "Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown," (2022) to develop city strategies, regulatory recommendations, and design guidelines aimed at facilitating the deliberate and sustainable growth of Downtown. The PLAN focuses on ways the City can encourage a greater mix of uses and shape a more inclusive and vibrant Downtown that meets the diverse needs of its residents, workers, and visitors.

The PLAN encompasses several key community goals including, fostering mixed-use growth and supporting small businesses, creating additional housing opportunities such as through office-to-residential conversion, enhancing mobility and the public realm, ensuring historic and cultural preservation, and bolstering climate change preparedness and sustainability. By prioritizing these objectives, Downtown will strengthen its unique identity, adapt to potential growth and the evolving climate, and become a more diverse, vibrant, and connected neighborhood where current and new residents, business owners, workers, and visitors can come together to live, work, and connect in new ways.

GOALS



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



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



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



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



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



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

The project team worked with members of the public, key stakeholders, the Plan: Downtown Advisory Group and City staff from across different departments to establish the goals for Downtown Boston. The goals serve as a guide for action, and to direct and assess progress.

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

- **Existing conditions analysis** of the challenges and opportunities facing Downtown today.
- **Development framework** to guide growth.
- **Streetscape and public realm recommendations** for enhanced connectivity and public spaces that support a 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.
- **Design guidelines** to ensure that new development and the public realm respect and enhance Downtown's existing urban fabric.
- **Zoning recommendations** to incentivize new growth and public benefits.
- **An office conversion program** to support adaptive reuse and residential growth.

PLANNING PROCESS

Hundreds of community members, including residents, business owners, workers, students, and visitors helped shape the PLAN.

Engagement activities and events

Community engagement included in-person and virtual workshops and public meetings, pop-up activities Downtown, installations in vacant storefronts showcasing community feedback, office hours, and in-person walk-throughs of Chinatown and the Ladder Blocks District. Three stakeholder roundtable discussions were also conducted, each connecting to a particular type of stakeholder: institutions and community groups, business owners, and developers.

Advisory Group

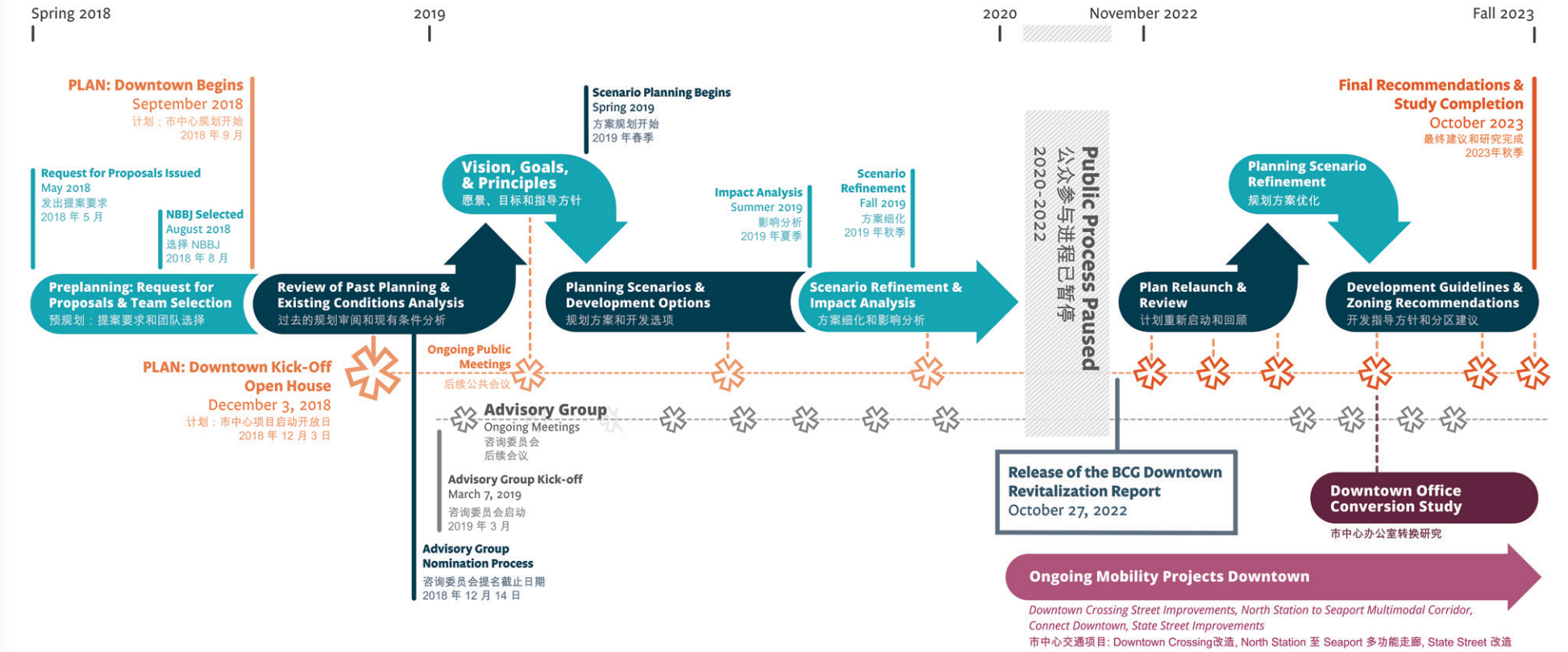
Throughout the planning process an Advisory Group (AG) met regularly to review the work of the project team. The AG was composed of representatives of Downtown, including people from residents' associations, local community groups, institutions, local foundations, preservation advocates, and business and property owners.

Relaunching after the COVID-19 pandemic

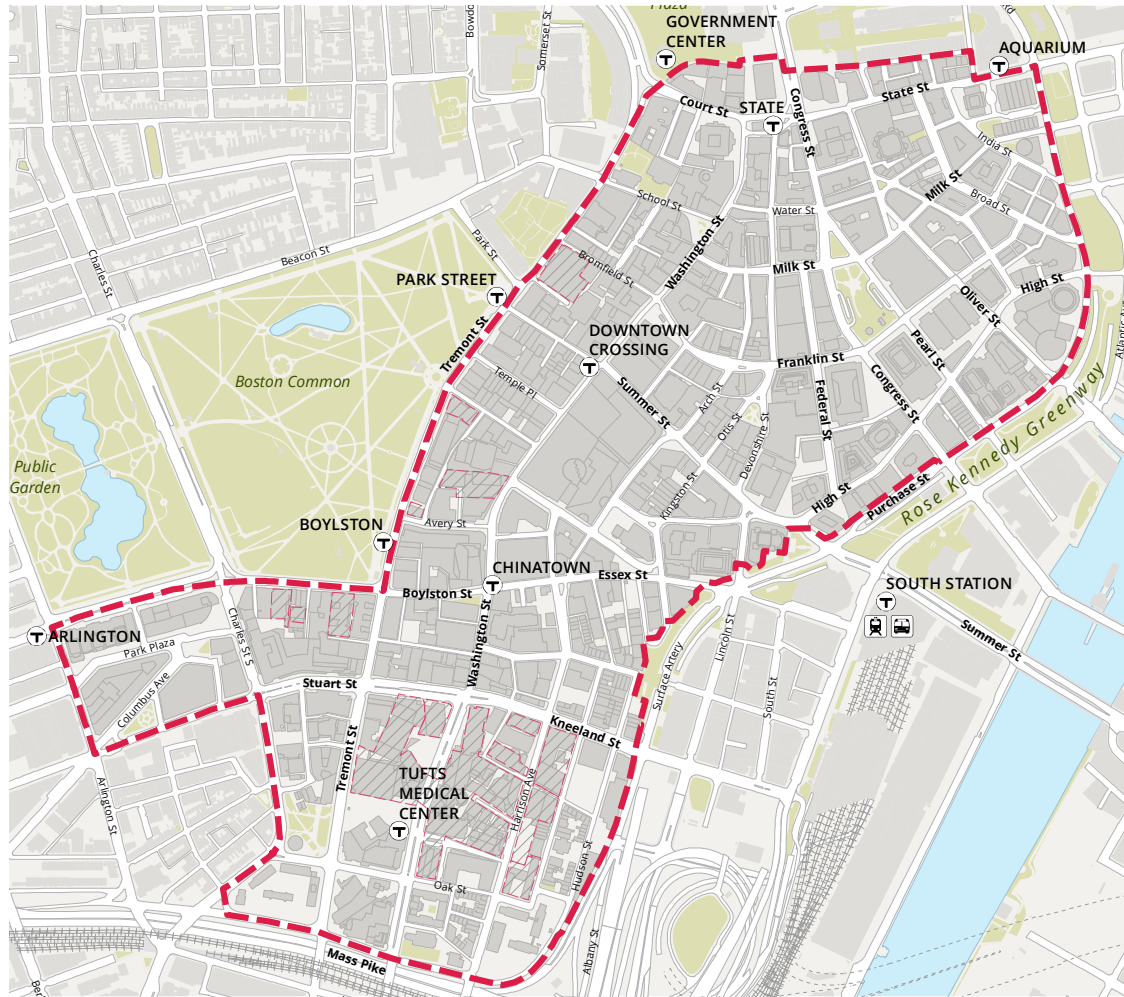
The planning process was paused in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and relaunched in November 2022 with an outdoor event in Downtown Crossing. The event and subsequent public meetings helped reconnect with local stakeholders and community members, playing a vital role in updating and refining the goals and strategies of the PLAN to address the pandemic's impact. The relaunched process also initiated the Downtown Office Conversion Study, exploring the feasibility of repurposing vacant office spaces in conjunction with the PLAN.



Engagement Timeline



WHY WE'RE PLANNING



- Study Area Boundary
- Institutional Master Plan (IMP)
Not included in this study

Downtown is at a critical moment in its history. It serves as the metropolitan region's economic engine, with historic sites and vital transit connections that continue to drive job growth and tourism. Despite its diverse mix of uses and public spaces, Downtown has faced challenges in attracting substantial residential development, a key factor in boosting foot traffic and attracting new businesses, particularly crucial now with the increase in vacant office spaces post-pandemic.

PLAN: Downtown started in 2018 in response to intense development pressure, exemplified by the 115 Winthrop Square development project. This project challenged state building height restrictions aimed at protecting the Boston Common and Public Garden from shadows. Massachusetts House Bill 3749 (2017), known as "An Act Protecting Sunlight and Promoting Economic Development in the City of Boston," modified shadow restrictions to accommodate the 115 Winthrop Square project and unlock its substantial public benefits. The Act mandated a comprehensive plan to guide future Downtown growth in the area.

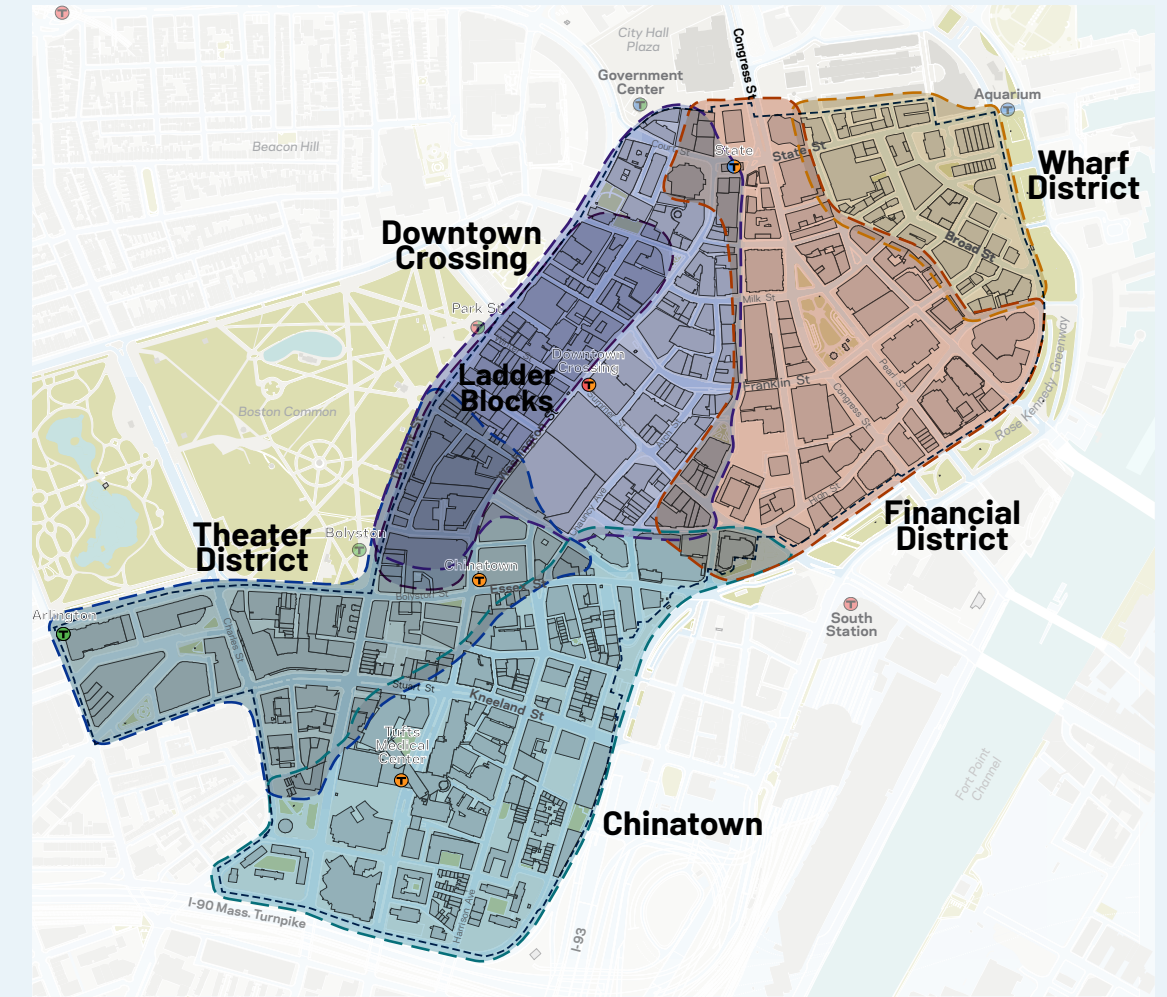
Post-pandemic, it is even more imperative to provide strategies for Downtown revitalization. The recommendations in PLAN: Downtown build on the findings of "Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown" report and robust community engagement from before and after the start of the pandemic to drive economic recovery for Downtown with a focus on equity, resilience, and affordability.

CHARACTER AREAS

Five distinct Downtown districts were defined early on in the engagement process. These districts were distinguished by their uses, built form and scale, and cultural and architectural heritage. These include: [Downtown Crossing and the Ladder Blocks](#), the [Financial District](#), the [Theatre District](#), the [Wharf District](#), and [Chinatown](#).

These character areas create understandable boundaries, enabling the PLAN to address discrete and overlapping needs of each district. It is important to note that while these boundaries offer insight into each district's strengths and qualities, there is overlap and rarely a sharp divide between them. As a result, they will benefit from and inform one another's development and growth and these boundaries are designed as flexible tools to bolster and promote Downtown's character and identity.

In this way, Downtown's neighborhood character will be enhanced, contextually sensitive development will be encouraged, historic architecture will be prioritized, and the existing public realm and open spaces will be improved while reflecting local needs and culture.



Character Areas Key Priorities

One of Downtown Boston's greatest strengths lies in its diversity of spaces and uses. The character areas that make up Downtown are all unique, with their own balance of priorities. Altogether, the diversity of the character areas strengthens Downtown into a varied and thriving neighborhood.

Downtown Crossing



Downtown Crossing is a major hub of shopping and transit at the center of Downtown. Its pedestrianized streets help fuel Downtown life and connectivity. The Downtown Business Improvement District (BID), a non-profit corporation maintained by property owners, enhances the area and parts of neighboring districts through programs, events, and community services. While the area was noticeably impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, its strategic location and already diverse mix of uses makes it well-positioned to support further growth at different scales.

Key priorities

- Promote a diverse mix of uses to support job growth and new housing.
- Support the growth and diversity of active ground floors, especially for small legacy businesses.
- Improve the public realm and pedestrian spaces to maintain vibrant public life and spaces for art, events, and gathering.
- Protect historic urban fabric and noteworthy historic buildings and features.
- Improve connectivity, safety, and access to different modes of transportation.

Ladder Blocks



A sub-area within Downtown Crossing, the Ladder Blocks are a series of small historic blocks that connect the Boston Common and Washington St. The area is known for its range of small storefronts and rich mix of historic buildings and architectural styles. Its smaller-scale buildings lend themselves to adaptive reuse opportunities that can help balance the need for sensible, sustainable development with historic preservation.

Key priorities

- Explore opportunities for adaptive reuse, especially office-to-residential conversion.
- Support the growth and diversity of active ground floors, especially for small legacy businesses.
- Enhance public realm connections, especially between the Boston Common and Washington St.
- Preserve the historic urban fabric and noteworthy historic buildings and features.

Theater District



The Theater District is the region's and City's performing arts center, with over a dozen theaters clustered within walking distance, including the cultural landmarks of the Emerson Paramount Center and the Boston Opera House. Colorful and vibrant signs animate streets like Washington St., showcasing the district's cultural activity. In addition to its theaters, the district houses institutions like Suffolk and Emerson Universities. Alongside its historic theaters, the area's established college student population can continue to add to the district's vibrancy and character.

Key priorities

- Promote the area as a center for cultural activities across diverse scales and formats.
- Promote appropriate commercial activity and a nighttime-friendly public realm, recognizing this area should be a 24/7 place in the City.
- Protect and preserve existing theaters, acknowledging both their architectural presence and their engaging programs.
- Support student activity and housing options.

Financial District



The Financial District is Downtown's economic hub and one of the City's core business districts. Comprised primarily of large office buildings, the Financial District lacks the diversity of uses that drives strong office market performance and vibrancy in other areas. While the district struggles to fill vacant offices and storefronts, the Financial District has the opportunity to diversify its existing uses through office conversion as well as leverage the area's capacity for height and density.

Key priorities

- Implement adaptive reuse practices to convert vacant office spaces into residential and other viable uses.
- Find opportunities for new permanent or tactical public spaces.
- Enhance key public realm connections that connect the Boston Common and the Greenway
- Provide a greater mix of uses beyond office, especially residential.
- Ensure the highest levels of sustainability in new construction.

Wharf District



The Wharf District is a key transition between the dense urban fabric of Downtown and the Rose Kennedy Greenway and the waterfront. Its historic streets and buildings—some of the oldest in the Downtown—have a mix of office and residential uses that give it a quieter atmosphere than the rest of Downtown. With its proximity to the City's green corridor it has direct access to some of the city's iconic attractions and open spaces and has the potential to create a stronger bridge between Downtown and the waterfront with additional housing opportunities.

Key priorities

- Enhance public realm connections, especially between the Greenway, the waterfront, and Downtown.
- Create more housing choices, including affordable housing.
- Provide a greater mix of services catering to residential uses in the neighborhood to help meet residents' daily needs.
- Preserve the historic fabric and explore opportunities for adaptive reuse, especially office-to-residential conversion.

Character Areas Key Priorities

Boston's Chinatown has a long history of being a major social, cultural, and economic hub for thousands of immigrant and working class families in the City and the Greater Boston Area.

Chinatown

Established in the late 19th century, Boston's Chinatown is a neighborhood that has supported generations of immigrants and their families, providing jobs and economic opportunities, as well as helping to maintain social and cultural connections. Boston's Chinatown is the third largest Chinatown in the United States and is home to over 50% of Boston's Asian population. Its central location and fine-grained urban fabric fueled by a thriving network of markets and restaurants, retail shops, mixed-income housing, and social service providers have helped to reinforce the neighborhood as an anchor for immigrants and Asian Americans in the city and throughout the region, and for tourists visiting Boston.

Chinatown is maturing into an arts and cultural center through its number of murals, public art installations, and "placekeeping" programs. The neighborhood is also enlivened with regular activities and events conducted by various community organizations, creating an inviting environment for a diverse and multi-generational population.



However, due to these aspects, there have been considerable development pressures felt by residents and community members, which have raised concerns about the preservation of existing affordable housing and historic buildings. Affordability remains a considerable challenge for the neighborhood as more than half of Chinatown's households make an annual income below \$35,000. This need has been further emphasized by a 102% population increase since 1980.

Additionally, close proximity to major roadways like the I-90 and I-93 highways, and limited green space and tree canopy, have raised health and safety concerns by residents and community advocates, citing traffic-related air pollution, threats of pedestrian injury, and increased occurrences of extreme heat. The neighborhood also holds the majority of surface parking spaces in the Downtown area, exacerbating high heat levels and the risk of flooding.

In 2020, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) worked with the Chinatown Master Plan Committee, composed of Chinatown residents and community-based organizations, to conduct the 2020 Chinatown Master Plan. The Master Plan reaffirmed goals from the previous 2010 Chinatown Master Plan with a focus on stabilizing Chinatown following the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 Chinatown Master Plan emphasized the need for a historic and cultural district for Chinatown, continued creation and preservation of affordable housing, increased

greening efforts and open space improvements, and prioritization of pedestrian and residential health and safety.

Responding to these needs, the Boston Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC) is working with the MAPC to create a Chinatown Cultural Plan. The Chinatown Cultural Plan will create an inventory of Chinatown's cultural, artistic, and historical assets and develop strategies to preserve and expand cultural and artistic vitality in Chinatown.

It is essential to continue the vision set by the 2020 Chinatown Master Plan and continue the Chinatown Cultural Plan to strengthen the social, economic, and cultural identity of Boston's Chinatown.

Including Chinatown in PLAN: Downtown's larger study area ensures strategies are developed to connect Chinatown to the area's mobility infrastructure and public realm network and harness the benefits of future growth in the entire downtown area.

At the same time Chinatown's uniqueness as a cultural asset and community, coupled with development pressure in the neighborhood, highlights the need for a neighborhood specific examination of zoning regulations and preservation strategies that can guide growth and enhance the area. A Chinatown Zoning Study will continue to refine the zoning recommendations for Chinatown that are explored in PLAN: Downtown.



Key priorities

- Create a future Chinatown Zoning Study that builds on the findings of PLAN: Downtown and continues its community engagement process.
- Improve housing options, with a focus on affordable housing (new or preserving existing).
- Create additional housing for a range of incomes while balancing the preservation of the existing built fabric
- Preserve the historic fabric of the neighborhood, especially the row house blocks.
- Enhance the public realm, improving the accessibility of sidewalks, increasing pedestrian safety, and providing green infrastructure to address the heat island effect and risk of flooding.
- Support programmed public outdoor spaces and cooling centers to create space for community/social gatherings and families.
- Promote cultural activities and opportunities for art that expresses the area's heritage.
- Support new and legacy small businesses.

KEY TRENDS

Key development and demographic trends informed the goals and strategies of PLAN: Downtown

Capacity for growth and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Before the pandemic Downtown was one of Boston's fastest growing neighborhoods. Its residential population grew by 54% from 2000 to 2017, much faster than the city's growth of 14% at the time, and the area was experiencing substantial growth in office and hotel development. Ten percent of the housing constructed in the city since 2010 was built in the neighborhood, constituting a 38.1% growth in the area's population.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many aspects of Downtown life and development, causing vacancies in office and retail spaces. Recently foot traffic Downtown (especially on weekends) however has been increasing and Downtown's residential sector has largely recovered, demonstrating a high demand for new residential housing and opportunities for growth.

Source: BPDA Research Division

Housing demand and development

As of Spring 2023, there are approximately 590 housing units approved, under construction, or under review in the development pipeline, adding on to 3,500 units that were built between 2010 and early 2023. More than half of these units will be located in Chinatown, including the recently approved 49-63 Hudson Street (R-1 Parcel project) which will provide 110 affordable units.

The Mayor has set a citywide goal to sustainably reach 800,000 residents, utilizing multiple city tools and services to support growth while preserving existing households. Downtown must continue to build on its history of contributing to the city's growth and leverage residential demand in the area to help reach this target.

Source: BPDA Research Division

Struggling office markets and flight to quality

The office market in Downtown was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and changing office culture. While office Downtown continues to experience rising vacancy and low rents, the office market has been more resilient in neighboring submarkets like Seaport and Backbay that have a more diverse mix of uses and newer buildings demonstrating an office flight to quality. Increasing other uses, especially by converting underutilized office space to residential, could make the Downtown core more desirable for residential as well as updated office use, helping to strengthen the area as a job center while also meeting residential demand and city housing goals.

Source: Boston Downtown Office Conversion Study

Commuter culture

Downtown is home to a wide range of industries, ranging from large finance and insurance businesses to smaller retail and restaurant spaces, represented throughout its 6,136 business establishments. Of those businesses, however, less than 1% of jobs in Downtown are held by Downtown residents, 22.8% of jobs are filled by workers living in other parts of Boston, and the rest belong to commuters from neighboring cities and towns. In order to bring renewed vibrancy and foot traffic to the area, Downtown must diversify its daily uses beyond work as well as support and increase small business opportunities to make Downtown a place Bostonians can truly work and live.

Source: US Census Bureau, 2017-2021 American Community Survey, LODES data 2019, BPDA Research Division

Declining Affordability

A housing crisis compounded by the pandemic has resulted in high prices and cost of living, reducing families' ability to remain in Boston. The average monthly rent of newly rented apartments in Downtown has increased 14.2% from 2020 to 2022, from \$3,662 to \$4,038.

Rent increases have been particularly pronounced in the Chinatown neighborhood, where the average rent has gone from \$2,815 to \$3,247 within the same time frame, representing a 16.6% increase. 50% of Chinatown's housing units are income restricted (1,227), compared to only 10% of income restricted units for the rest of the PLAN: Downtown study area (838).

Source: BPDA Research Division, Boston Income-Restricted Housing Report 2022

Age Distribution and Large Student Population

Downtown has a large student population with 31.1% of residents being college students, compared with approximately 16% for the entire city. This speaks to the large number of educational institutions in the neighborhood that include Emerson College, Babson College and Suffolk University, and contributes to Downtown having a higher share of 18-24 year olds than the City as a whole (27% of Downtown's population is between the ages of 18 and 24). While many students call Downtown home, Downtown has a smaller 24-65 year old population compared to the rest of the city, highlighting the need to create more housing opportunities, especially for young professionals.

Source: BPDA Research Division

Increase in family households

There are 9,876 housing units in downtown, 84% of which are occupied (8,321 occupied housing units). 73% of households are renter-occupied, although the number of owner-occupied units has grown over time.

The number of family households in downtown has increased, slightly surpassing single person households (each comprising 44.8% and 44.1% of all households in the area, respectively). This reflects a change in household composition, highlighting the need to expand on unit types, neighborhood amenities and resources for families and residents of all ages.

Source: BPDA Research Division

Diversity

Downtown is composed of 34.6% foreign-born residents, compared to about 28.1% of Boston's overall population, with Asian and Pacific Islanders the most represented in Boston's Chinatown. This is an indicator of Chinatown's significance not only for Downtown, but for the city as a whole. Meanwhile Downtown's lack of representation across other minority groups compared to the rest of Boston highlights the need to address housing and business inequity in the neighborhood and create more housing and business opportunities and spaces for BIPOC communities Downtown.

Source: BPDA Research Division



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GROWTH & PRESERVATION

Downtown Boston must build on its historic strengths to achieve a vibrant future with greater emphasis on increased affordability, residents, and shared community benefits.

Key recommendation:

- Development framework that updates zoning
- Conversion of underutilized office buildings
- Fund and conduct an updated survey of all buildings and historic assets in the study area

Mixed-use growth in Downtown can play a crucial role in revitalizing the urban core. Imagine Boston 2030 identified Downtown Boston as an important growth area for the city, highlighting its ability to bring:

- Increased affordability: Increasing the supply of residential and commercial space helps mitigate price increases and promotes greater affordability for residents and businesses.
- Job growth: Expanding leading industries fosters economic competitiveness and pathways to secure living wage jobs.
- Community benefits: Leveraging new development opportunities allows for public benefits that support both new growth and existing communities in the area.

By updating City regulations, crafting innovative development guidelines, and fostering preservation strategies, Downtown can undergo a remarkable transformation, becoming a dynamic cityscape that supports abundant new jobs and housing opportunities.

As Downtown aims for growth and development, the public has passionately emphasized the importance of protecting the historic buildings, landmarks, and cultural areas that give Downtown Boston its unique historic identity.

While regulations protect the Boston Common and Public Garden from new building shadows and protect flight paths from Logan Airport, there is limited guidance on how or where to effectively

channel new growth or implement strategies to protect Boston's historic assets. Strategies, guidelines, and regulations addressing Downtown's future must strike a balance of maintaining its cultural and architectural heritage while leveraging opportunities for development that is thoughtful and resilient.

PLAN: Downtown proposes a new development framework that identifies key areas for mixed-use growth that can enhance and support the vibrancy and rich historic urban fabric of Downtown.



The plaza outside the Old State House



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Growth & Preservation Challenges & Opportunities

Building heights

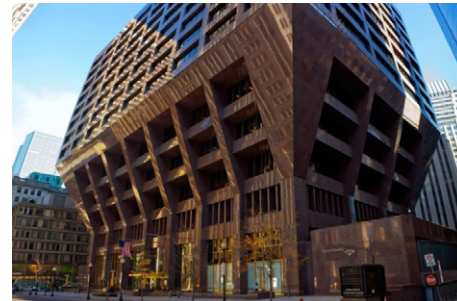
Taller buildings are concentrated in the Financial District and fronting the Rose Kennedy Greenway. This cluster steps down in height to the Boston Common and joins with the High Spine, a string of taller buildings that run along Boylston St. and Huntington Ave., in giving the city a distinctive skyline.



Buildings step down in height from the Financial District's cluster of tall buildings to the Boston Common

Buildings exceeding out-of-date zoning

The image below indicates the location of buildings that exceed current zoning restrictions. It is notable how many buildings, particularly in the Financial and Wharf Districts, are outside of current zoning parameters. This indicates the need for a new regulatory framework to direct growth to appropriate areas.



Financial District: 100 Federal Street is far over zoning limits

Land use

Downtown consists primarily of commercial uses, including office and retail space. The highest concentration of mixed-use residential areas are Chinatown and the Theatre district, which contains a great deal of student housing. Prominent institutions such as Tufts, Emerson, and Suffolk, are spread across multiple parcels Downtown.



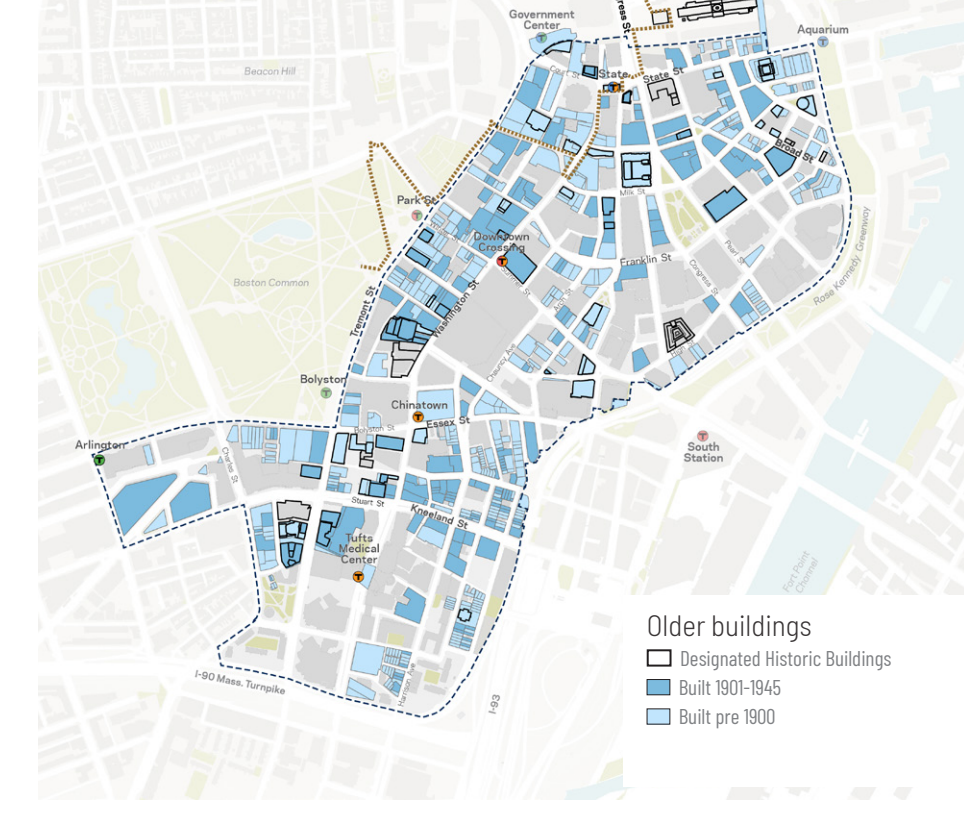
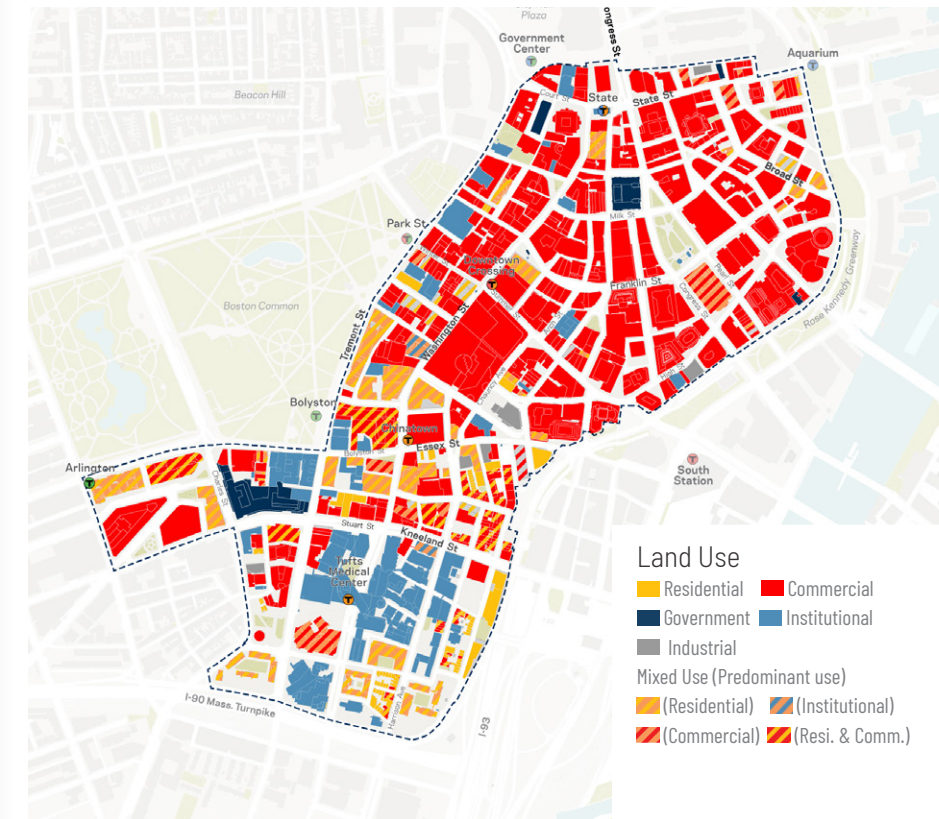
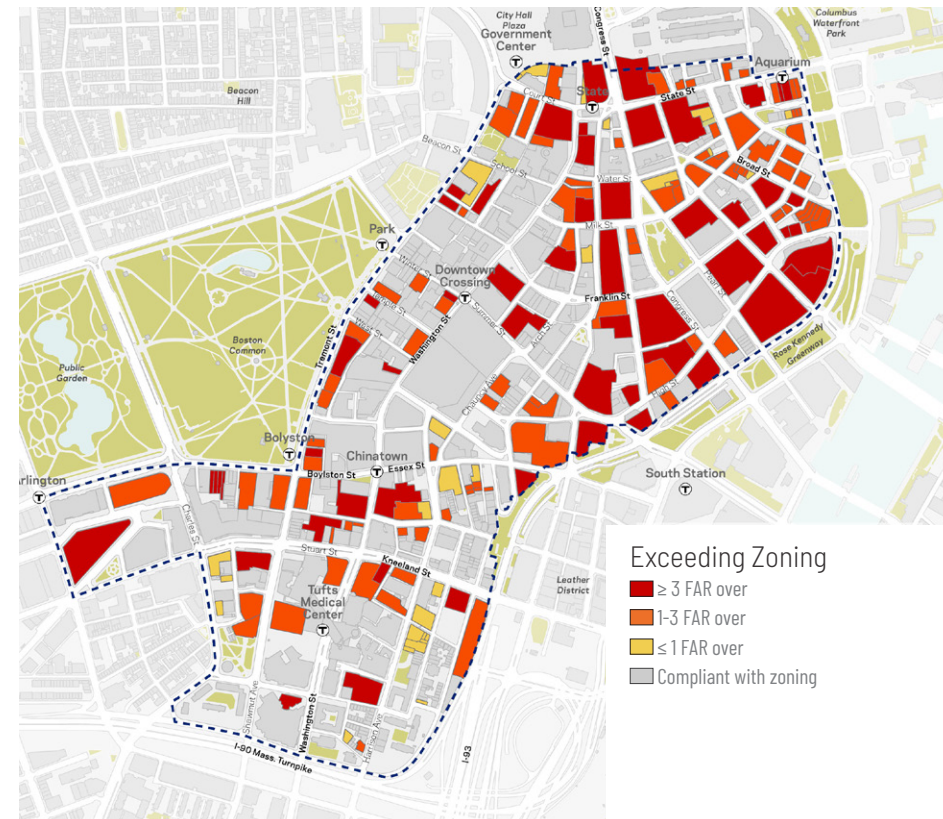
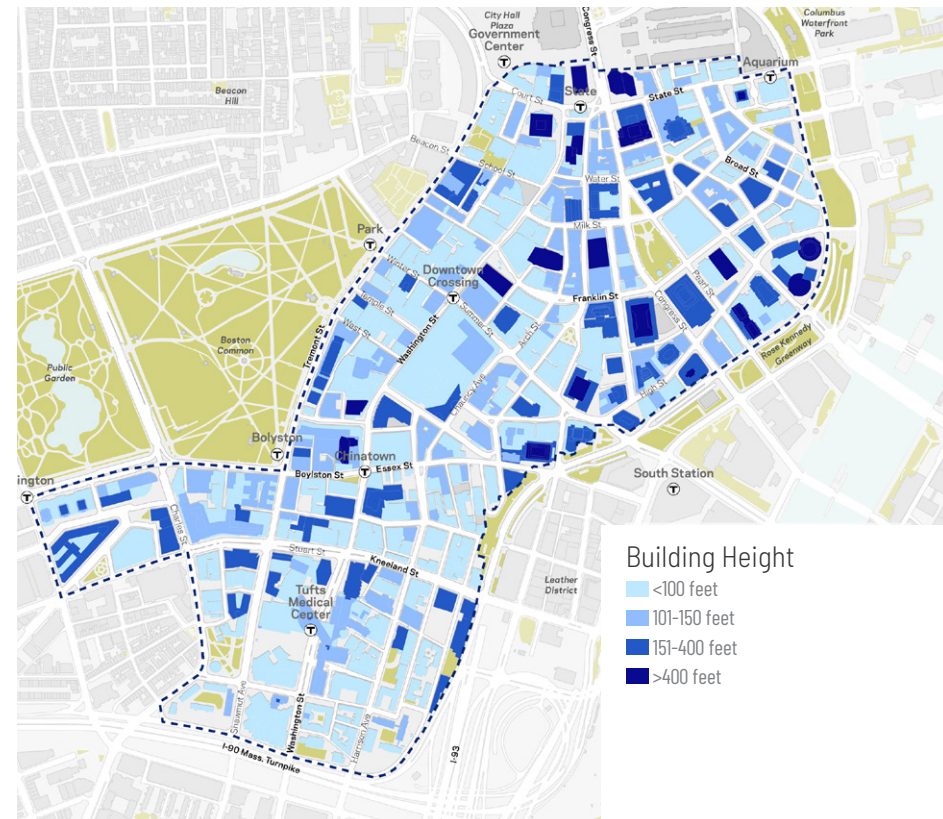
Chinatown: mixed-use residential and commercial buildings

Unprotected older buildings

There are a substantial number of older structures - pre-1900 - across the study area. The Wharf district and the Ladder blocks in Downtown Crossing, contain some of Boston's oldest buildings. Many, including several older buildings in Chinatown, do not have historic designation or protection.



Despite their historic character the Johnny Court rowhouses in Chinatown do not have any historic designations



Growth & Preservation Challenges & Opportunities

Preservation designations and limitations

There are various historic designations and policies that protect and highlight the numerous historic structures, spaces, and districts Downtown. Each of them have their own processes for designation, benefits, and limitations.

Designated Boston Landmark refers specifically to a site or property with historical, cultural, architectural, or community significance that has been officially recognized and designated by the Boston Landmark Commission (BLC) after being nominated by Boston residents through a formal petition process. While the level of preservation varies, landmarked properties often have protections from significant physical alterations or demolition and the BLC must review any proposed changes that might affect its historic character. Occupancy and use are not subject to BLC's review. There are currently 37 approved and 15 pending Boston landmarks within the study area.



Built in 1729 the Old South Meeting House is listed in the NRHP



The Modern Theatre and Opera House are designated Boston Landmarks in a National Register District and a zoning protection area

National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is a program of the United States National Park Service that identifies, evaluates, and recognizes properties, sites, and objects of local, state, or historical significance throughout the entire country. Being listed on the National Register of Historic Places does not impose strict regulations on the property's use or modifications when using private funding. It primarily serves as an honorary designation rather than a design review program, offering recognition and eligibility for certain federal and state preservation incentives and grants. The NRHP does provide limited protection if state or federal funding, licensing, or permitting is required, invoking a consultation process with the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

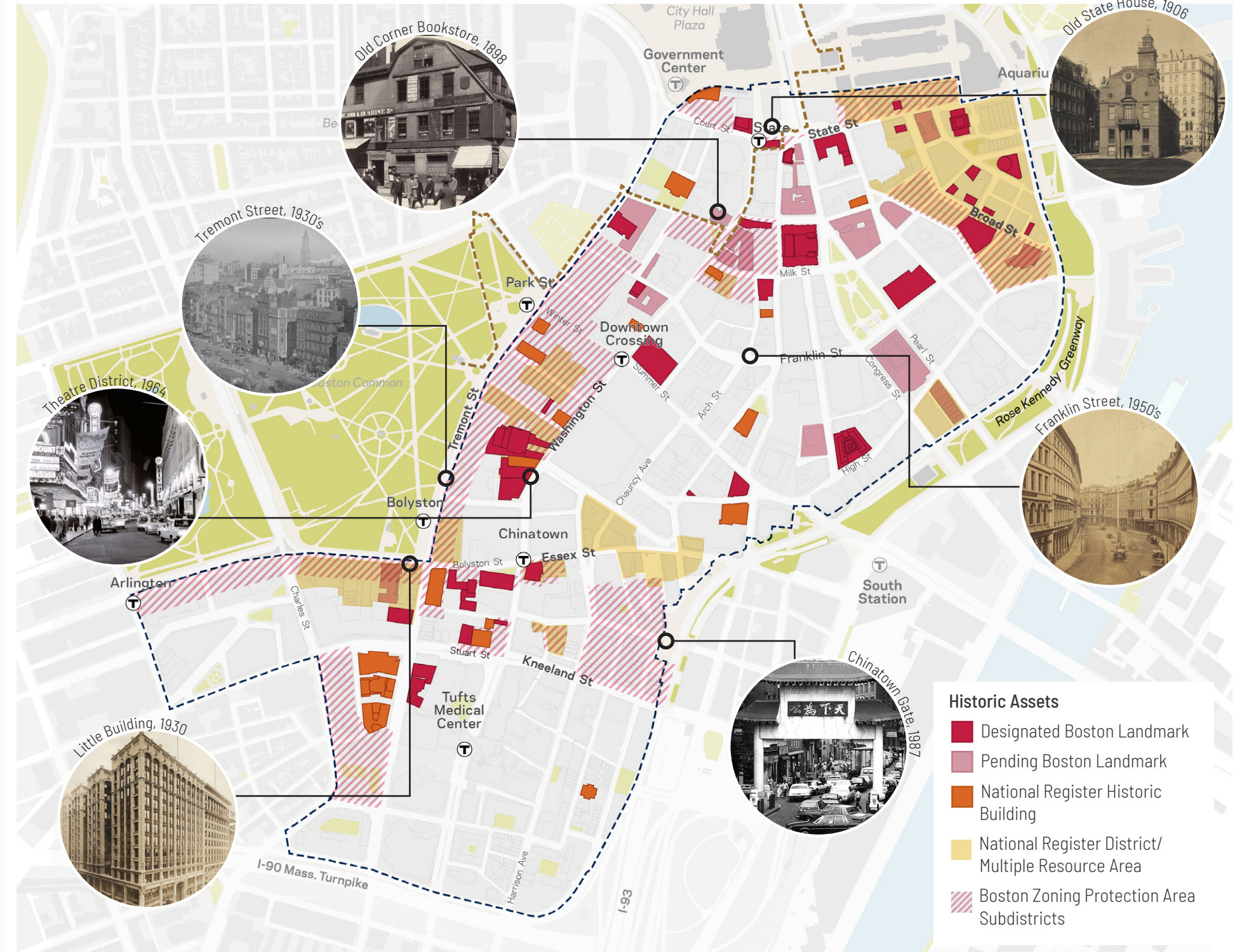
National Register Districts and Multiple Resource Areas are also a part of the National Register of Historic Places and designate a specific geographic area that has a cohesive collection of historically significant buildings or sites. This designation often provides a higher level of recognition and may offer additional

preservation incentives for property owners within the district.

Zoning Protection Areas Some specific districts are identified as "Protection Areas" within Boston's Zoning Code. In Downtown, these small districts accumulated over time to protect areas and clusters of buildings deemed historically and culturally significant but not collectively protected by the BLC or state and national designations. However, the small scale and number of these sub-districts has added to the complexity of the zoning approvals process Downtown and a regulatory system that neither incentivizes growth nor effectively and consistently preserves the historic areas and sites where it's needed.



The Proctor Building is a BLC designated landmark



Historic Assets

- Designated Boston Landmark
- Pending Boston Landmark
- National Register Historic Building
- National Register District/ Multiple Resource Area
- Boston Zoning Protection Area Subdistricts

Growth & Preservation Development Framework

By embracing new growth in the right locations, Downtown Boston will support the high-level of new housing opportunities, businesses, and job growth that the City and greater region need to thrive.

PLAN: Downtown proposes a framework to guide and incentivize mixed-use growth and enhance the places, spaces, and communities that make Downtown such a vital and historic commercial and cultural center.

This framework is tailored for each of Downtown Boston's unique areas. Some are ideal locations for new, taller development; others hold irreplaceable historic assets; a few are key to improving transportation and open space networks; several are well suited for adaptive reuse and office conversions.

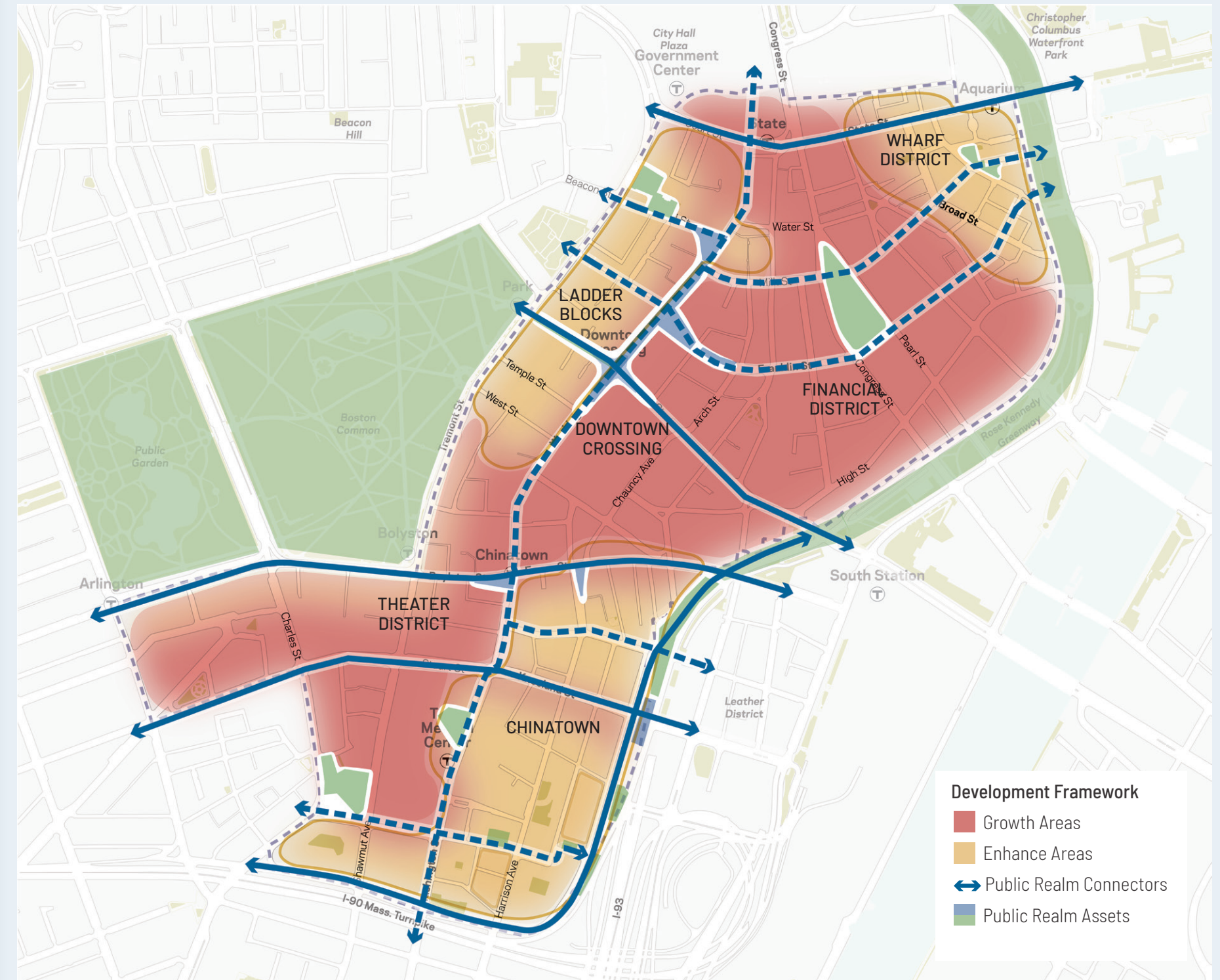
The planning strategy finds opportunities for new growth that will bring public benefits that support the larger community, including: improvements to open spaces, the public realm, mobility, climate resiliency, and affordability. This growth focuses on areas where density and height can be best accommodated and build on the layered architectural and historic fabric that is Downtown.

This revitalization strategy consists of four main spatial components: Growth Areas, Enhance Areas, Public Realm Connectors, and Public Realm Assets. Underlying all these elements is the need to ensure equity, a healthy mix of uses, sustainable development, and climate resilience.

Spatial components to guide the growth of Downtown:

- **Growth Areas**
Encourage large-scale mixed-use development opportunities that provide benefits for all of Downtown.
- **Enhance Areas**
Find opportunities to improve and elevate the area while affirming its distinct historic and cultural identity.
- ↔ **Public Realm Connectors**
Strengthen key public realm routes that connect existing public open spaces.
- **Public Realm Assets**
Improve existing public realm spaces and identify opportunities for new permanent and tactical public space Downtown.

The layered mix of character areas, buildings, uses, and scales that make up Downtown create an inevitable overlap between areas ideal for growth and those in need of preservation. These are areas that should accommodate some additional density based on the existing context while being sensitive to community needs and character, ensuring equitable and sustainable development for all.



Development Framework

- Growth Areas
- Enhance Areas
- ↔ Public Realm Connectors
- Public Realm Assets

MOBILITY

Downtown's interconnected transit, walking, and bike networks hold the potential to generate fresh economic opportunities for Downtown and the region.

Key recommendations:

- Updated street typologies to inform street utilization and future projects
- Key public realm corridors to connect open spaces
- Key ongoing and potential mobility projects to enhance mobility infrastructure and connectivity

Downtown Boston plays a vital role as a transportation hub for the city, state, and region. The bus and subway network connects residents, workers, and visitors to Downtown and various corners of Boston, New England, and the Eastern Seaboard. The diverse mix of uses and attractions that draw people Downtown, combined with the historic urban fabric, also present challenges for mobility infrastructure in effectively balancing the needs of transit riders, vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists.

Pedestrian infrastructure plays an integral role in making Downtown an vibrant place to visit, shop, work, and live. The pedestrian zone in Downtown Crossing establishes an inviting and dynamic environment for pedestrians and cyclists to explore and pass through the heart of Boston.

Despite having some of the heaviest volumes of foot traffic in the city, sidewalks in parts of Downtown and Chinatown are sometimes narrow or inaccessible. The presence of areaways (private basements that extend beneath the sidewalk) on many historic streets pose challenges to improving sidewalk conditions.

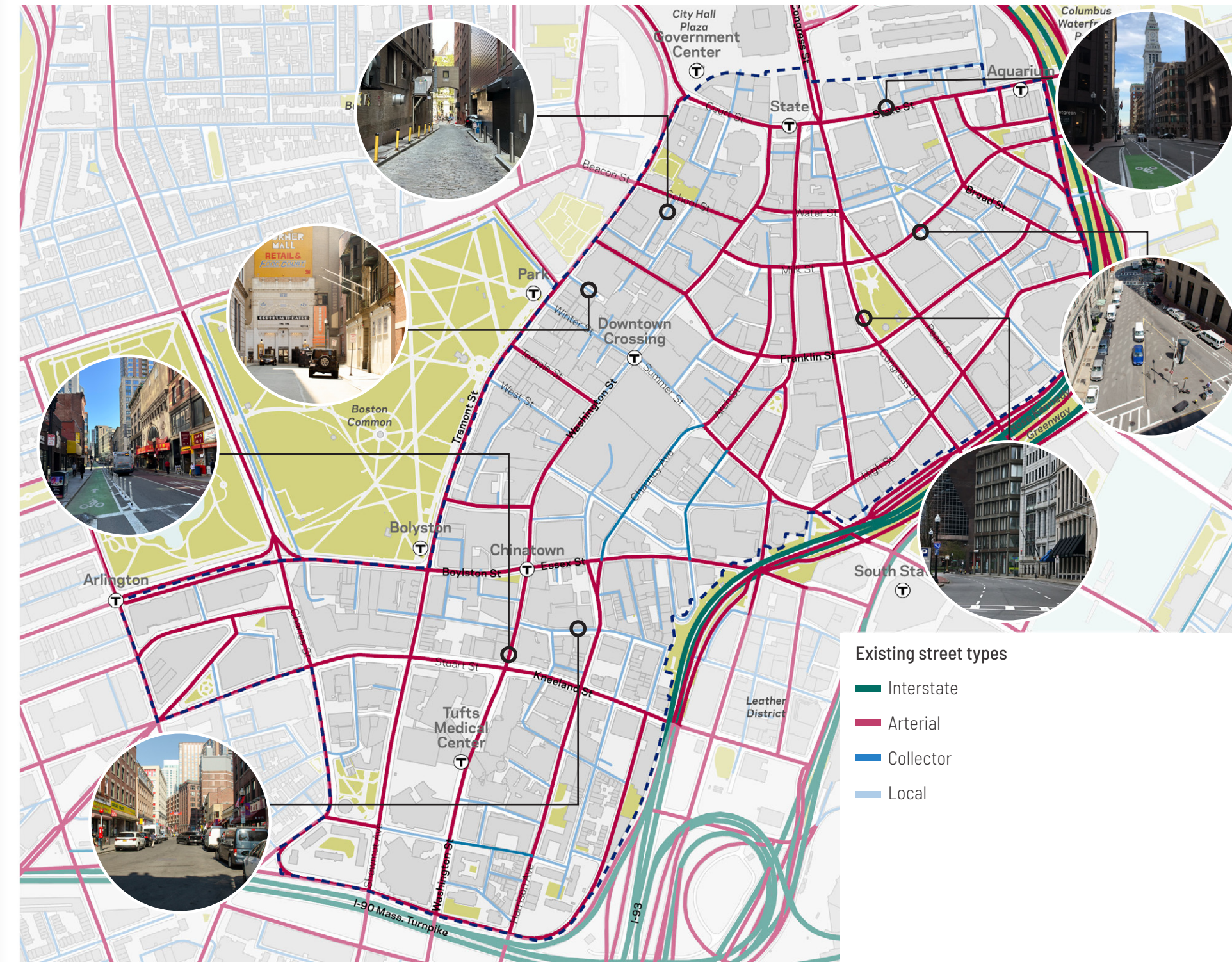
The area also faces challenges with vehicular congestion management, especially during typical mid-week rush-hours as all types of vehicles navigate a network of predominantly one-way, disconnected streets. The stark contrast between weekday and weekend conditions further complicates the situation, with less pedestrian and vehicular traffic but infrequent bus service on weekends.

Although PLAN: Downtown was put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to enhance the streetscape and public realm continued during this time. These include the addition of separated bike lanes on key streets like Washington St., Tremont St., and Boylston St., tactical bike and pedestrian safety improvements on State St., and the transformation of the Tontine Crescent tactical plaza into a permanent public space. All were implemented to improve mobility and enhance the overall urban experience.

Given the diverse mix of uses and activities Downtown, effective management of logistics and curbside uses is crucial to enhance overall mobility and address conflicts between pedestrians, vehicles, and bicycles. This is particularly important in heavily traversed areas and in the pedestrianized zone in Downtown Crossing.



A new protected bike lane was added to Tremont St. in 2020



Existing street types

- Interstate
- Arterial
- Collector
- Local

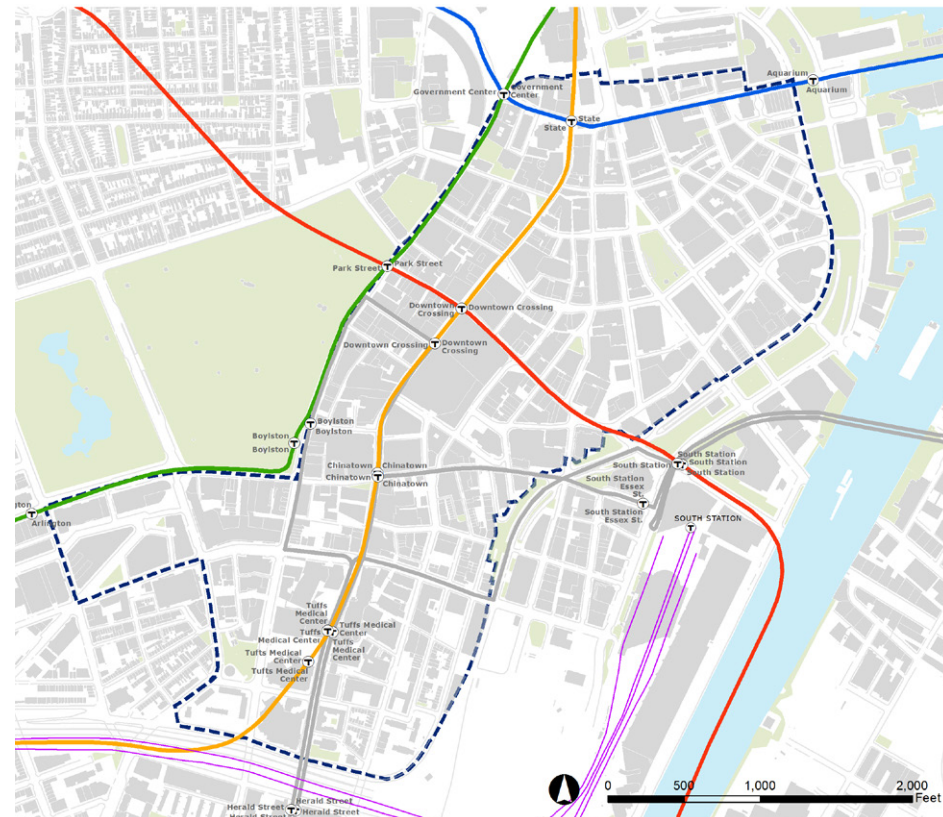
Mobility Challenges & Opportunities

T and Commuter Rail

Downtown is the hub of the regional transit network. Five subway lines come together, the regional commuter rail lines terminate at North and South Stations, and are supplemented by the bus network. However, the legibility of the relationship between ‘T’ stations, bus stops, and commuter rail, as well as the accessibility stations, require improvements to further encourage public transit usage.



The headhouse at Downtown Crossing also serves as a stage and seating area

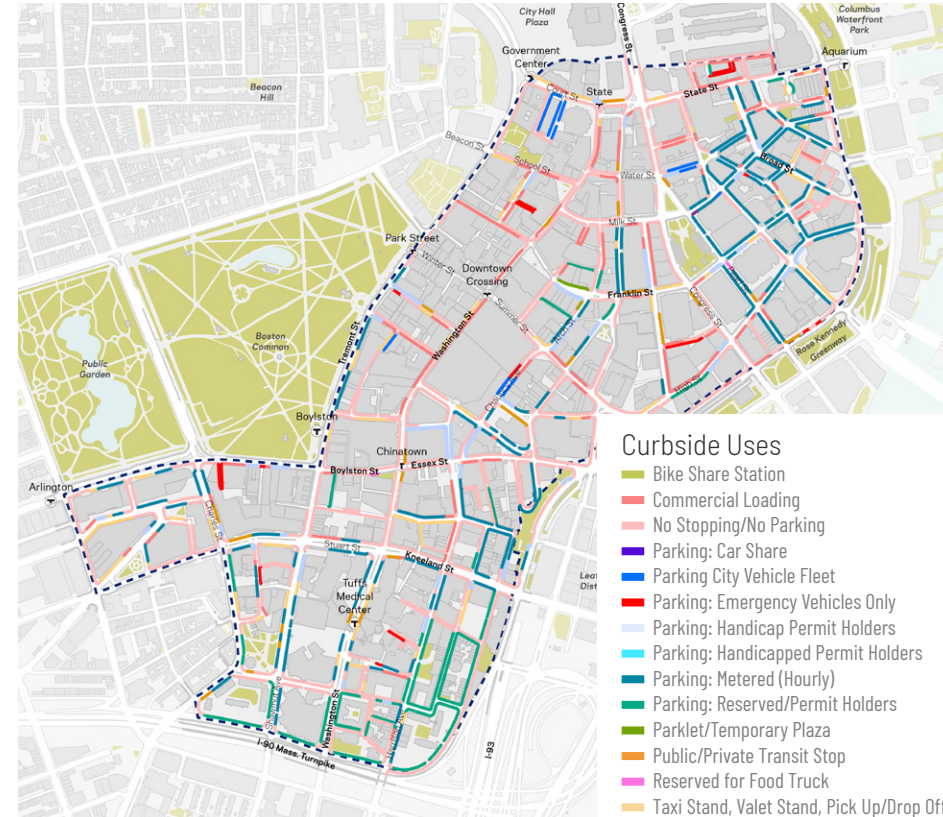


Curbside uses

Curbside space is in high demand, with competing needs for car and cycle parking, loading zones, deliveries, taxis, rideshare pick-up/drop-off points, and bus stops. Effective management of curbside space is crucial to maximize its value and minimize conflicts.

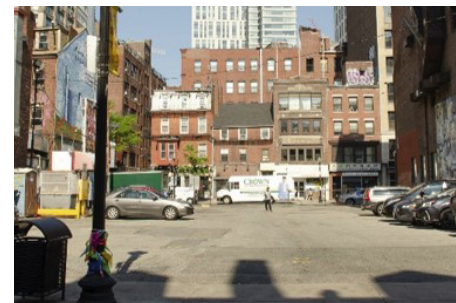


An example of the competing curb side interests along Washington Street

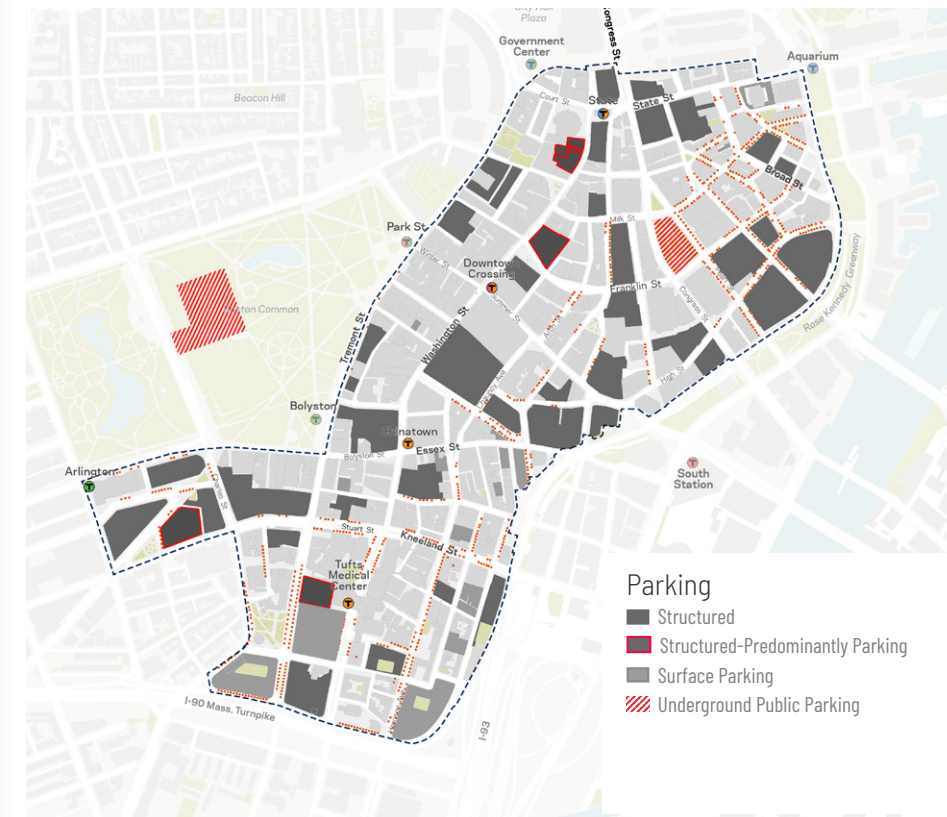


Parking

Parking poses another challenge Downtown. Numerous parking structures are underutilized, lack active ground floor uses, and detract from the pedestrian experience. Surface parking is predominantly limited to Chinatown, while underground parking facilities exist under Post Office Square and Boston Common.



Chinatown: Between Tyler Street and Harrison Avenue



Downtown Parking freeze

The Downtown Boston Parking Freeze, administered by the Boston Air Pollution Control Commission (APCC), regulates off-street non-residential parking. It applies to “Boston proper”, including the North End, West End, Back Bay and the South End, in addition to the PLAN: Downtown study area. The parking freeze caps the number of “commercial spaces” available to the general public for a fee. In capping the number of parking spaces and managing permits, it helps encourage alternative transportation options and reduce air pollution.

Under the parking freeze, non-residential parking facilities must renew their permits annually. New permits or modifications must comply with APCC’s criteria, including commitments to Transportation Demand Management (TDM), providing EV charging infrastructure, supporting bike share and car share, adhering to maximum parking ratios, and promoting sustainable mobility efforts.

Data collected from the parking freeze, detailing the daily occupancy of permitted parking facilities, can serve as a valuable tool to evaluate parking utilization in Downtown and uncover potential opportunities to revitalize and make better use of underutilized parking spaces.

Mobility

Proposed Street Typologies

Downtown's streets have evolved from cow paths to carriage routes to streetcars to the network today. The future of our downtown streets will prioritize walking, biking, and improving routes.

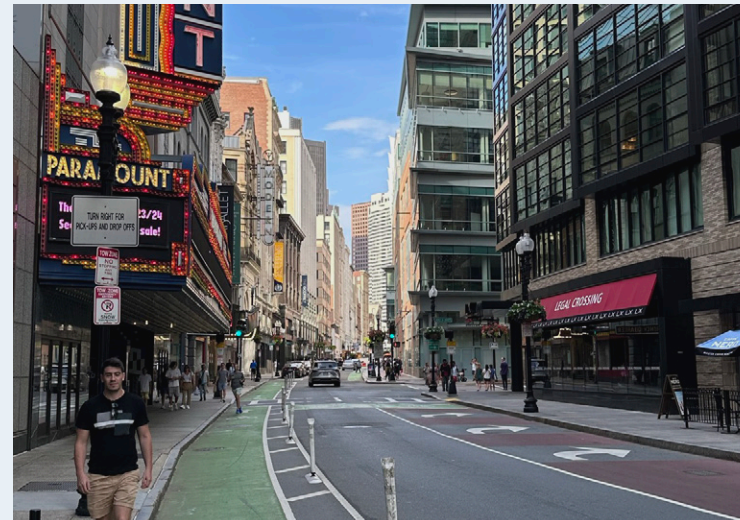
Updating Downtown's street typologies helps inform future street projects on how to best support a comfortable walking and bicycling environment, while prioritizing buses on key transit streets.

Downtown's historic and tight knit street network should adapt to better accommodate residents, visitors, and workers Downtown. The typologies provide a street hierarchy to help identify opportunities for active transportation, transit, and non-vehicular modes of transportation.

The typologies align with Boston Complete Streets and are determined on the basis of traffic flows, the potential for multi-modal activity, and the nature of adjacent uses to the streets. This facilitates how the Downtown circulation network connects with its wider context and how it can best support and adapt to increases in density and activity Downtown.



Franklin St. has been greatly improved through a 'road diet' at Tontine Crescent



Washington St. bike and bus lanes

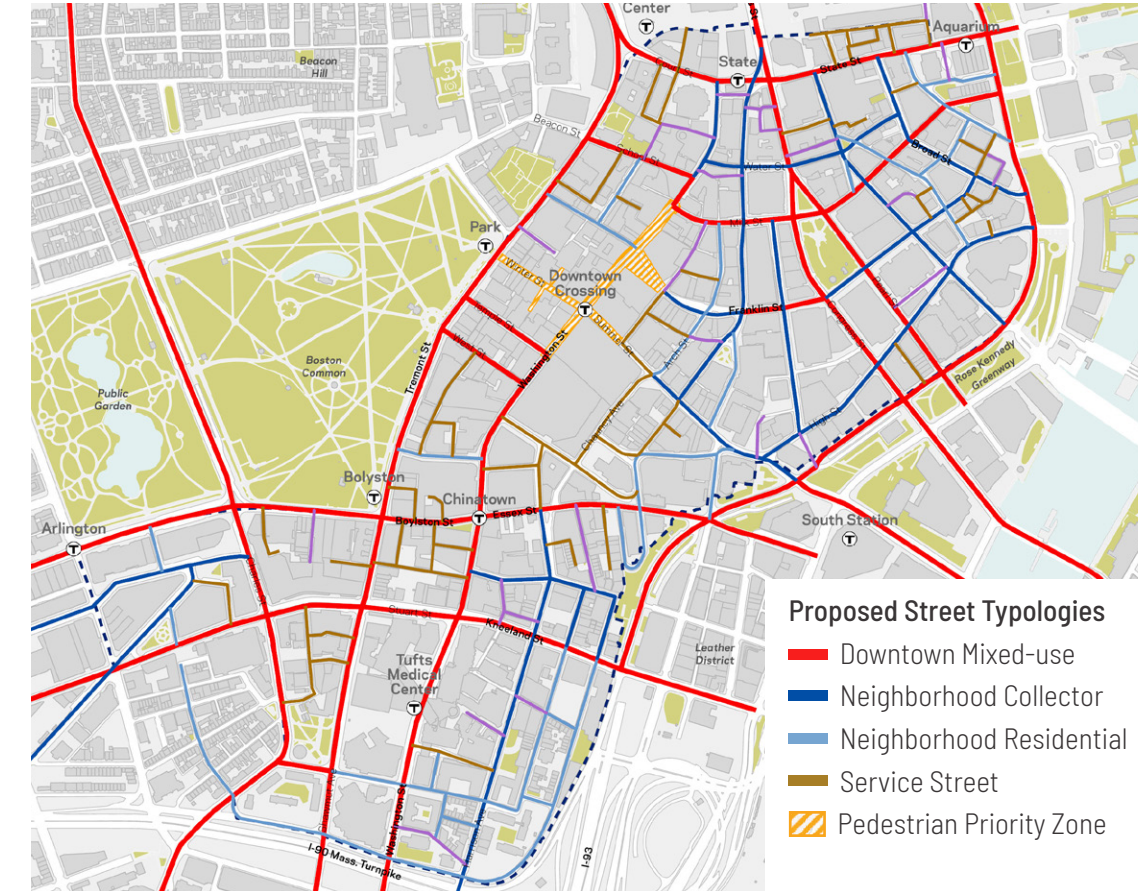
Shared Streets have a single grade or surface that is shared by people using all modes of travel at slow speeds. They are able to support a variety of land uses, making them a unique expression of the public realm: *Washington (portion), Winter, Summer (portion), Franklin (portion), Winter Place, Music Hall Pl.*

Neighborhood Connectors are through streets that traverse through several districts. They have significant flows within the study area and typically have high pedestrian comfort. They also have small-scale retail outlets with several entrances: *Summer, School, Devonshire, Water, Milk, Franklin, Temple, High, Park Plaza, Columbus Ave, Harrison Ave, Beach, Tyler, Broad.*

Neighborhood Residential Streets contribute to a high quality of life for residents of the study area. They are used primarily for local trips and are characterized by lower flows and limited retail/activity: *E.g.: Province, Bromfield, West Avery, Edinboro, Kingston, Bedford, Lincoln, Devonshire, Central, India, Custom House, Batterymarch, Tyler, Hudson, Harvard, Oak, Maple, Church, Johnny Ct, Hadassah Way.*

Active Alleys are unwelcoming to vehicles, accessible to pedestrians, hyperlocal connections, some retail: *Pi Alley, City Hall Ave, Winter Pl, Boylston Pl.*

Service Streets are used for building operations, parking access, loading and unloading: *Quaker Ln, Exchange Pl, McKinley Sq, Well, Hawley, Hamilton Pl, Oxford, Knapp, Pine, Bennet.*



Downtown Mixed-Use Streets support a mix of retail, residential, office and entertainment uses; allowing them to serve residents, visitors and workers while supporting all modes of transportation: *Tremont, Essex, Boylston, Court, Charles South, Kneeland, Stuart, Washington, Pearl, State.*

- Proposed Street Typologies**
- Downtown Mixed-use
 - Neighborhood Collector
 - Neighborhood Residential
 - Service Street
 - Pedestrian Priority Zone

Mobility Key Public Realm Connectors



In Downtown's dense network of streets, bordered on one side by the Common and on the other by the Greenway, there are significant opportunities to connect parks and plazas, all while improving accessibility, enhancing pedestrian and cyclist safety, and increasing the amount and quality of green infrastructure. PLAN: Downtown proposes two types of key streets to prioritize future public realm connections:

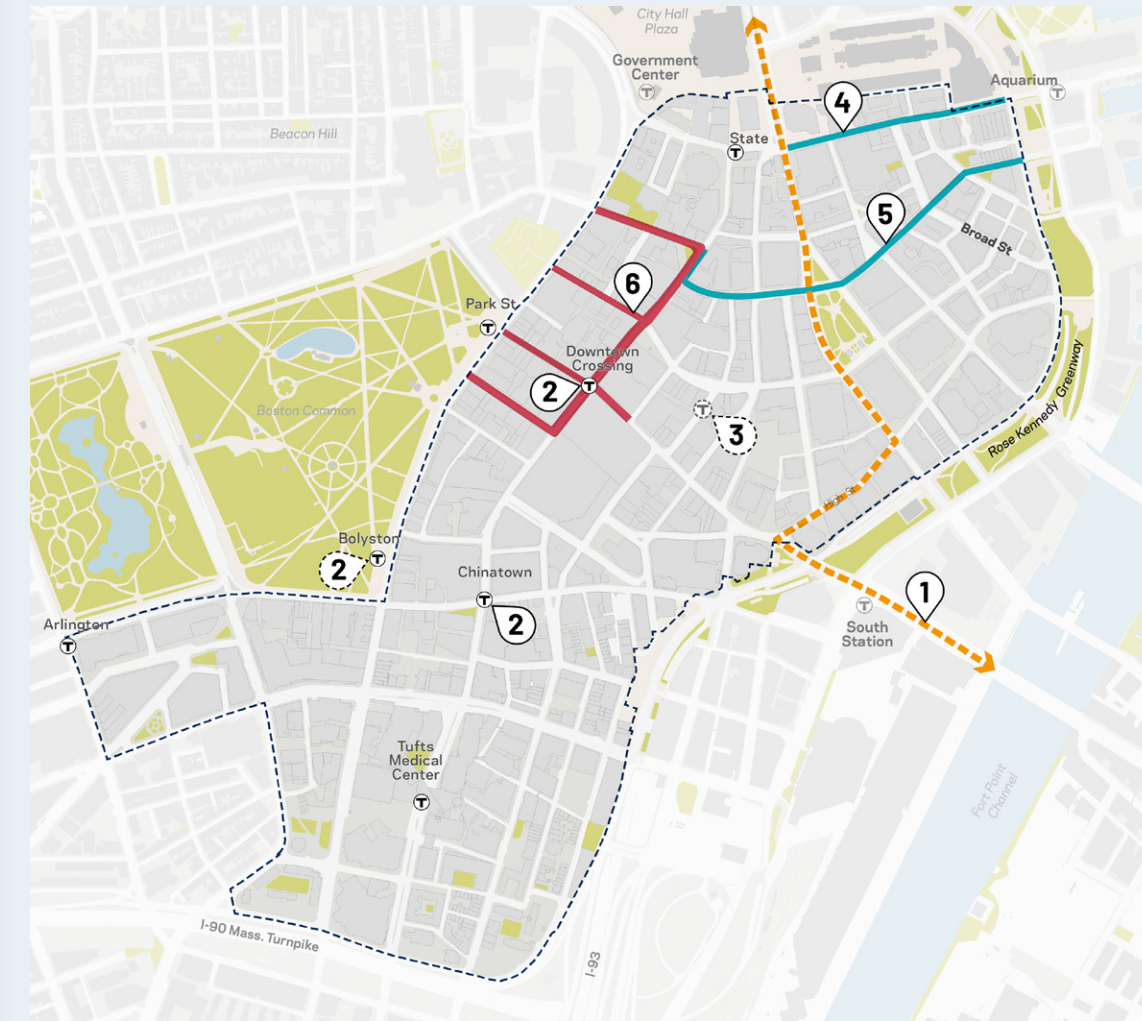
Key Public Realm Corridors
 Link to major green spaces - namely, the Rose Kennedy Greenway, Boston Common, and Public Garden. **Proposed Corridors:** Court St. to State St., Winter St. to Summer St., Bolyston St. to Essex St., Stuart St. to Kneeland St., I-90 Massachusetts Turnpike.

Key Public Realm Connectors
 Provide opportunities for "stepping stones," connecting both existing and new public open spaces. **Proposed Connectors:** Washington St., Milk St., Franklin St., Beach St., Oak St.

These streets should strive to provide connected streetscape and public realm improvements that enhance pedestrian safety and incorporate green infrastructure, such as street trees, whenever possible.

Along many of these streets, "areaways" impede streetscape improvements. It will be crucial to identify and address these areaways in order to enhance accessibility and green infrastructure in the areas that need it most.

Mobility Key Mobility Projects



A series of ongoing and potential future mobility projects will enhance Downtown's mobility infrastructure and connectivity. These projects address opportunities across a range of transportation modes, including buses, the T, bicycles, and pedestrian pathways. In combination they can improve accessibility, efficiency, and safety for commuters, visitors, and residents.

- Transit**
1. North Station to Seaport Multimodal Corridor: to provide direct bus service & other multimodal enhancements between North Station, South Station, and the Seaport.
 2. Station accessibility improvements to Downtown Crossing, Chinatown, State Street, and potentially Bolyston T stations.
 3. Changes from Bus Network Redesign (BNRD) and City Recommended Adjusted Silver Line routing to improve transit connectivity.

- Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure**
4. State St. Reconstruction project to implement permanent pedestrian and bike network improvements.
 5. Milk St. improvements and bike lanes that will expand the city's protected bike lane network and improve bike and pedestrian safety.

- Pedestrian Infrastructure**
6. Downtown Crossing Pedestrian Zone Improvement Project to redesign key streets in the heart of Boston, prioritizing pedestrians, accessibility, and placemaking.

OPEN SPACE & PUBLIC REALM

New public spaces will knit together landmark spaces and smaller, more intimate ones into a public realm network that welcomes everyone year-round.

Downtown borders some of the most significant green assets in the city, including the Boston Common, the Public Garden, and the Rose Kennedy Greenway. Between them is a variety of smaller public spaces and pedestrianized areas and hubs of activity in Downtown Crossing and Chinatown (Chin Park and Mary Soo Hoo Park). While Downtown has major green open spaces at its edges, Downtown's public realm is otherwise heavily dominated by hardscape, with the exception of Post Office Square and a few smaller parks like Eliot Norton Park. This exacerbates resilience challenges as temperatures are predicted to rise in the area, especially in Chinatown where there is little tree canopy.

In addition to a lack of trees and green infrastructure, some smaller public spaces also struggle with programming and amenities and have the potential to do more to activate the area. During the Plan's community engagement process, community stakeholders repeatedly expressed the need for more green spaces, increased gathering and seating areas, and places to relax and find shelter especially for families and different age groups. They also emphasized the necessity of public programming, art, improved lighting, and streetscape improvements that addressed safety and security concerns.

Downtown's public realm and pedestrian network also have the potential to enhance connectivity. Streets such as Essex, Franklin, Summer, and State connect to the highest number of pedestrian hardscape/plazas and temporary interventions, and can be

strengthened to provide better links to the area's public spaces. Through road diets and reconfigurations, new public spaces could be created that connect to existing ones, particularly in areas that currently lack sufficient open or green space. For example, streets with unnecessary traffic islands, such as Kilby St. and Milk St. or Liberty Square, could be transformed into activated public plazas.

With its collection of existing public spaces and prospective new ones, Downtown's public realm has the potential to create a more engaging, lively, greener, healthier, and connected Downtown that can support existing communities and become a more enticing destination for workers and new residents.



Shoppers Plaza - this is a successful public space, both hosting events and providing a place to relax

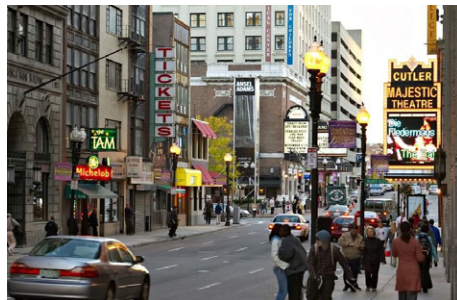
- Key recommendations:
- Public realm improvements to existing spaces
 - New permanent and temporary public spaces



Open Space & Public Realm Challenges & Opportunities

Building entrances

Frequent building entrances contributes to a dynamic public realm and increase the sense of safety. On arterial streets, there are generally entrances every few feet. However, on many smaller streets the frequency declines, particularly in alleys.



Tremont Street has frequent entrances along its length

Blank frontages

Vacant shopfronts and blank walls create an uninviting environment within the public realm. Pedestrians experience less visual interest along streets with blank walls, and are therefore less likely to walk along them, in turn reinforcing these as unsafe routes.



Josiah Quincy School: an inhospitable facade, especially for a community use

Publicly accessible interior spaces

There are few publicly accessible interior spaces in the study area. Lobbies are increasingly being made publicly accessible, particularly in the Financial District. However, interior routes/spaces are usually poorly indicated and do not take advantage of connections to the wider network of passages.



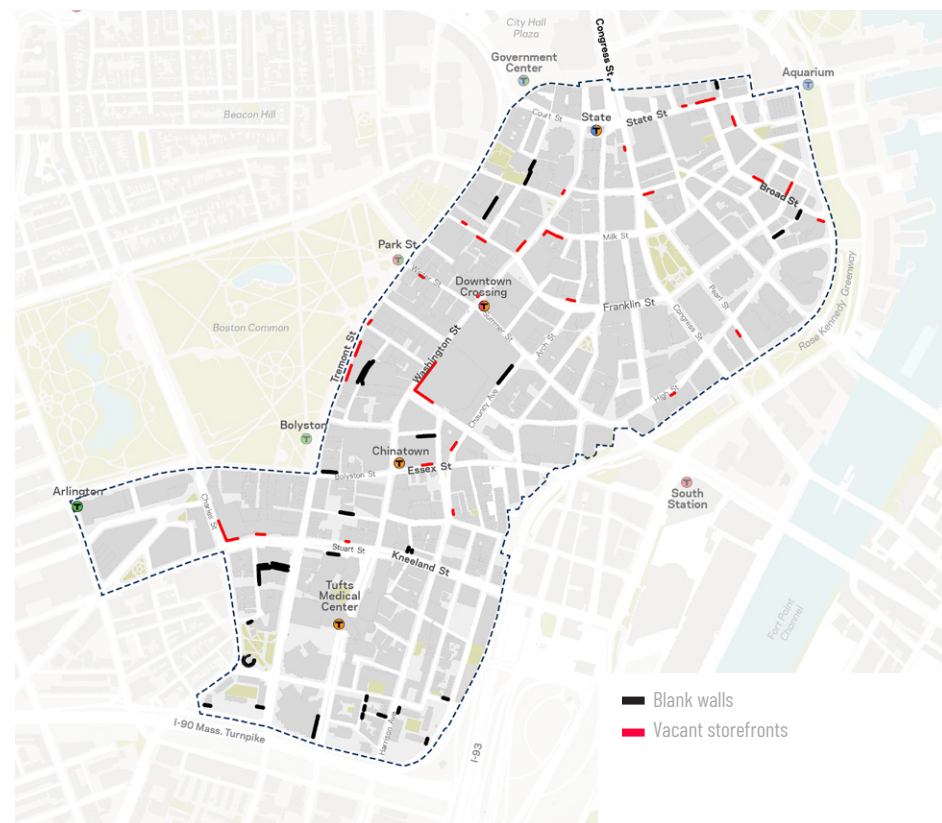
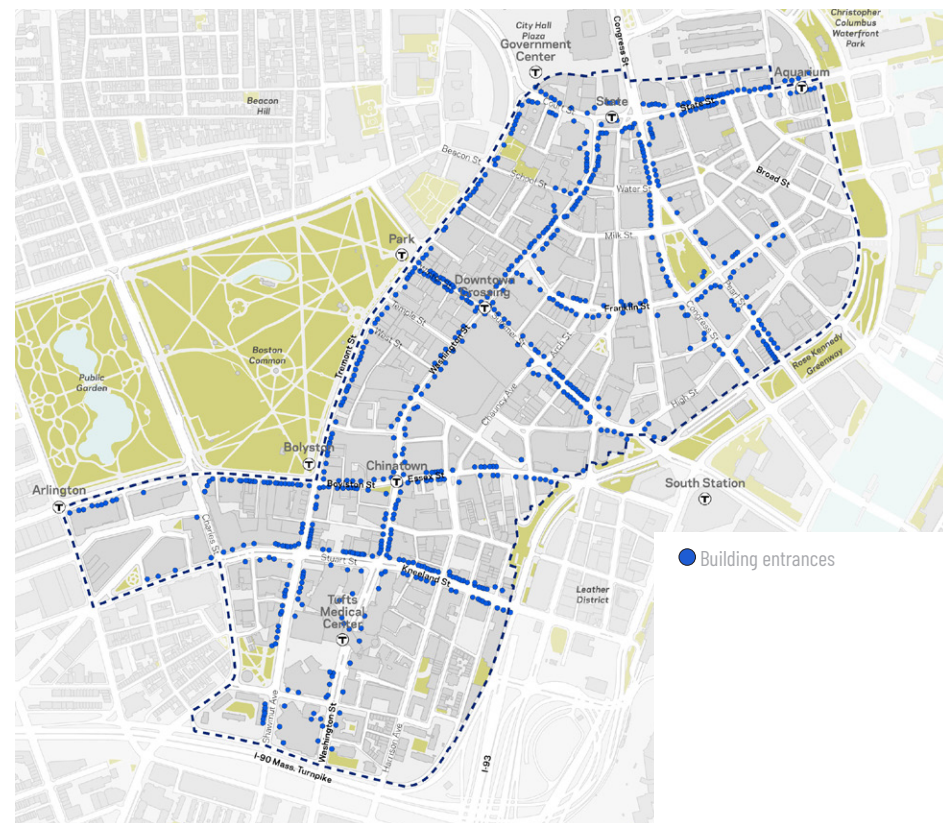
One International Place in the Financial District provides a publicly accessible interior space and passages

Daylight, wind, & shadows

While Downtown's unique urban fabric contributes to its distinctive character, the fine grain and orientation of its streets lead to limited sun exposure and heightened wind effects. It becomes essential for new development to carefully consider the impact of shadows and wind on the area's public realm throughout the year.



In the Financial District, Milk St has limited direct sun exposure



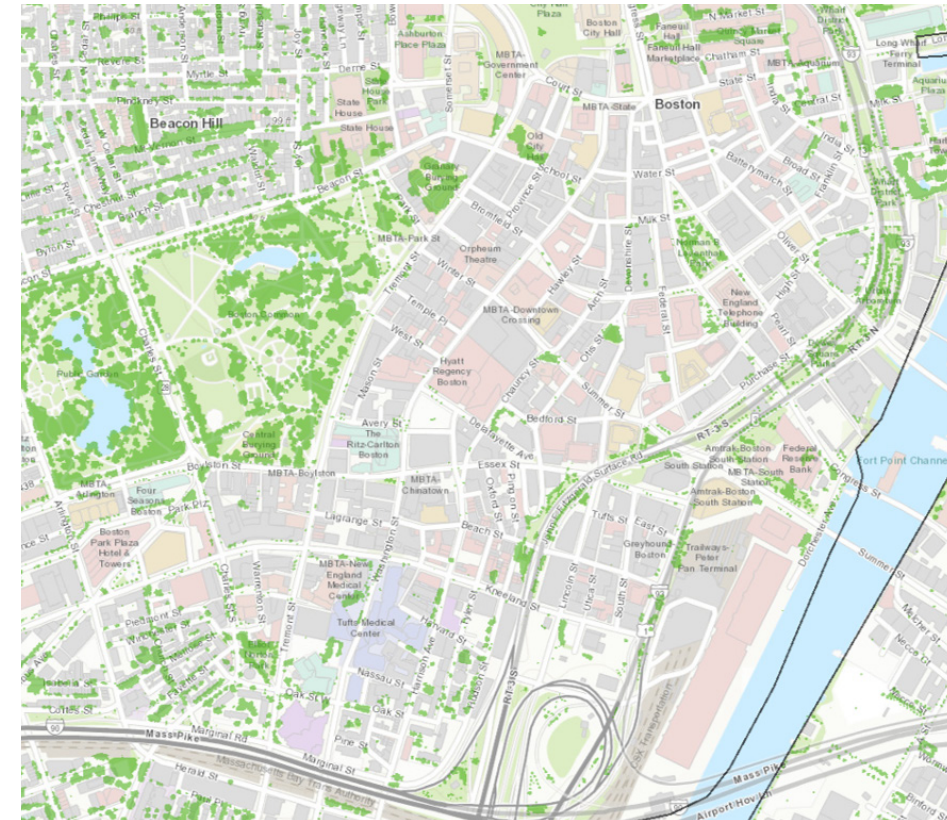
Open Space & Public Realm Challenges & Opportunities

Tree canopy

Very few streets have consistent tree plantings and some streets are severely constrained by areaways. The Boston Common and Rose Kennedy Greenway ensure that the Downtown study area is flanked by generous well-treed green spaces but other than Post Office Square, green infrastructure and shade trees are few and far between, especially in Chinatown.



Post Office Square

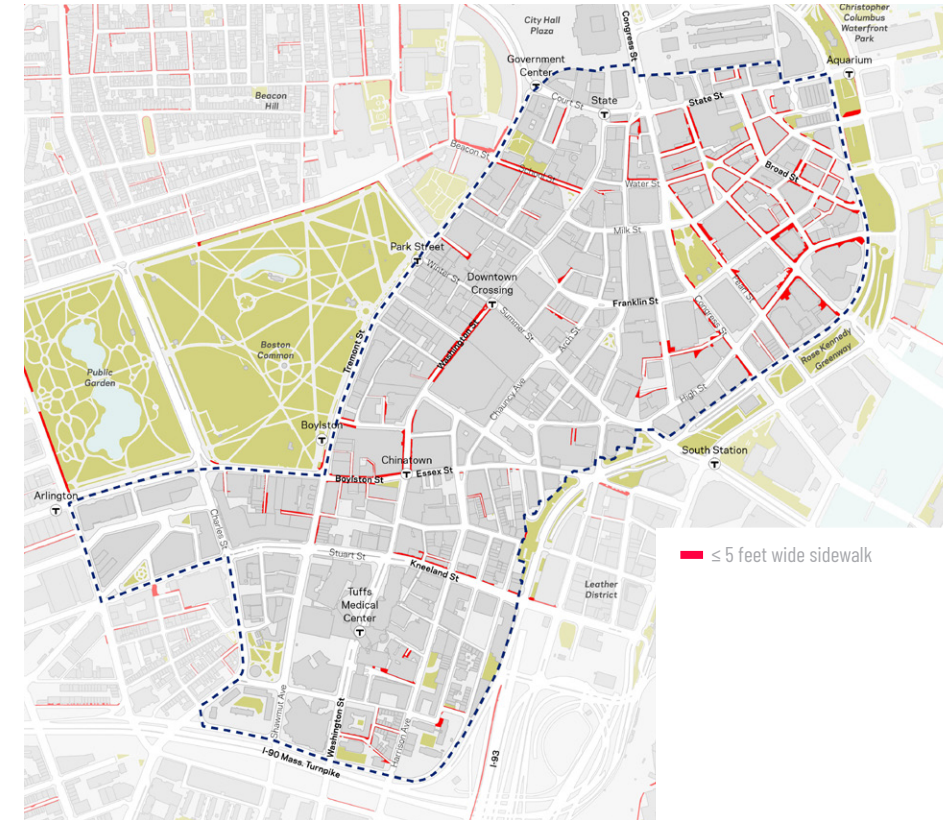


Narrow sidewalks

Narrow sidewalks result in safety and comfort challenges. Many Downtown sidewalks are constrained, especially in the Wharf and Financial Districts. Walking space competes with street furniture, trees, and other streetscape amenities.



The combination of a narrow sidewalk, signposts and railings contribute to an inaccessible and unpleasant pedestrian experience.



Areaways

Areaways (also referred to as “hollow sidewalks” or “sidewalk vaults”) exist throughout the city, but are concentrated in Downtown and Chinatown, where their impact on the built environment is most pronounced. Areaways are stretches of sidewalk that contain privately-owned vaults and extensions of the adjoining building’s basement, below.

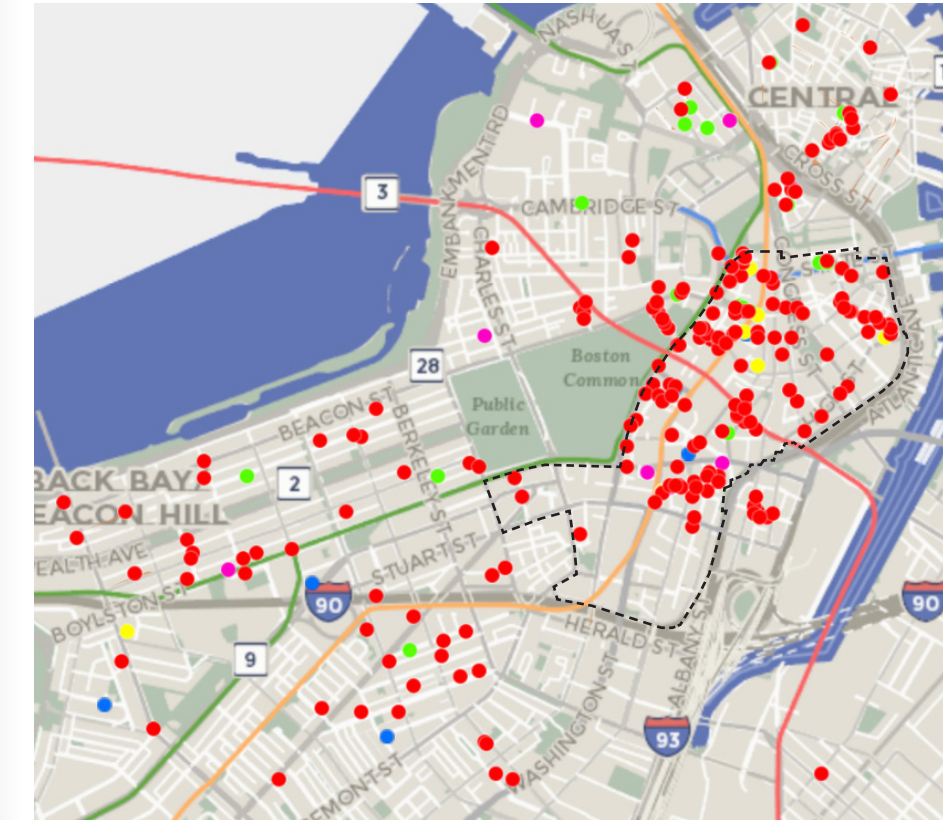
Areaways create safety hazards by preventing vital accessibility improvements and prevent other types of public realm improvements, such as green infrastructure, street trees, and rain gardens.

As a condition of encroaching upon the public right-of-way, the owner of the areaway is responsible for keeping both

the underground support structure and the sidewalk above in good repair according to municipal code. Most areaway owners, however, do not know they have this legal responsibility—or they may not even know that part of their basement is an areaway. Individual property owners are also not in the business of designing and repairing sidewalks. This results in a patchwork of small, one-time fixes and major differences in the quality of the sidewalks from building to building.

The City has established an interdepartmental Areaways Working Group as part of the Downtown Reconstruction Project to review the legal considerations around areaways and create new policies to work collaboratively with owners to accelerate sidewalk improvements.

The map displays locations of 311 requests for sidewalk improvements that were closed by Public Works employees noting that the sidewalk is likely above an areaway and the property owner’s responsibility to maintain.



Sidewalk in Chinatown with areaways underneath



An areaway uncovered on Franklin St

Open Space & Public Realm Priority Improvements

Amidst the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic to activity Downtown, the City has the opportunity to improve and create new public spaces that will create greener, more engaging, and lively destinations year-round for all Bostonians.



Phillips Square Tactical Plaza (Courtesy of Traffic engineering for Livable Communities)

Improvements should respond to and incorporate the identity and character of the area and include:

- Greenery wherever possible
- Improved seating and sheltered areas
- Playable landscapes
- Reduced impervious surfaces
- Integrated public art
- Space for families and different age groups
- Integrated public art
- Enhanced lighting

Priority public realm improvement sites include:

Existing public realm improvement sites on public land:

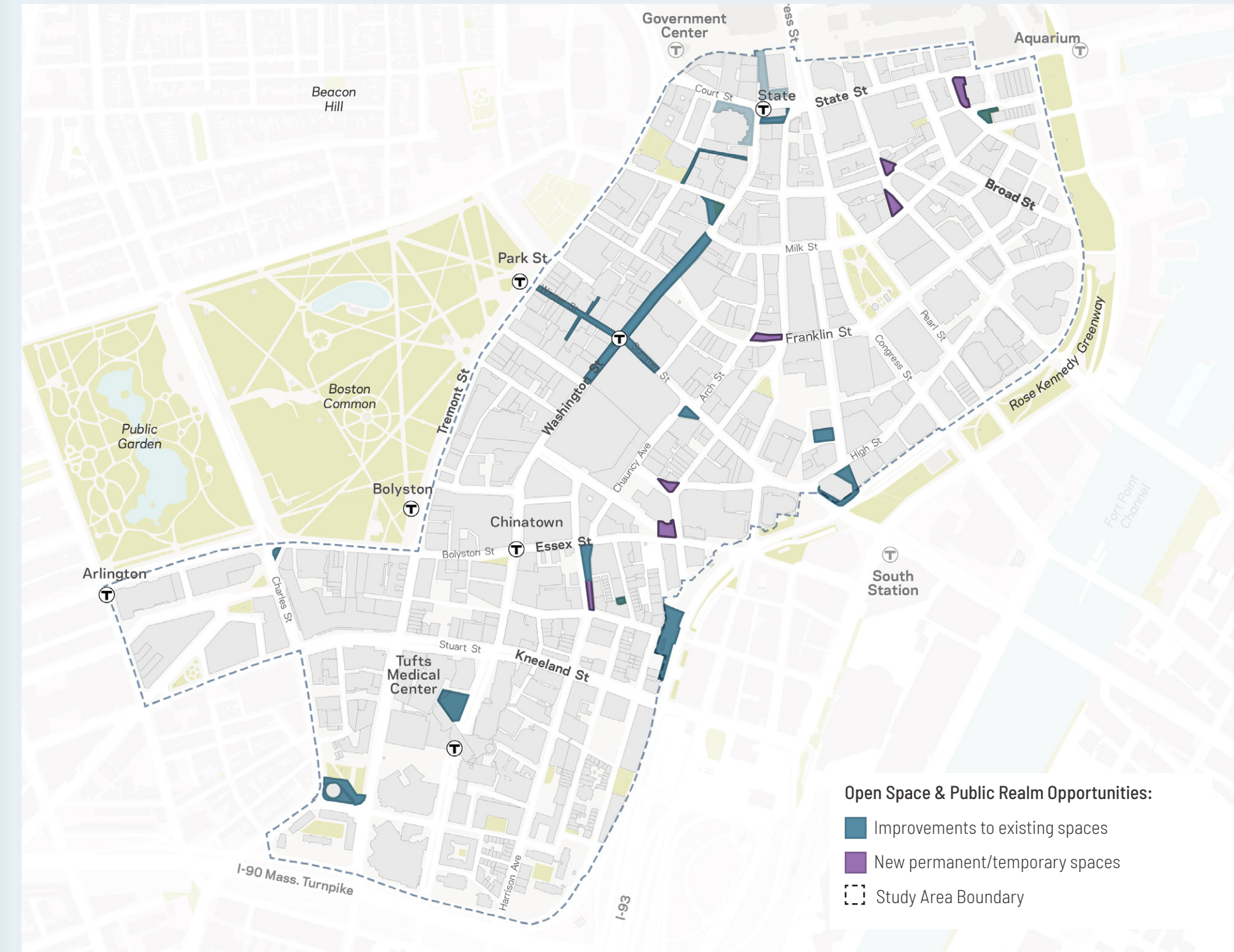
- Eliot Norton Park, Oxford Place Playground, Reader's Park, Jenny Plaza, and Custom House Plaza.

Potential road diet and traffic island transformation sites:

- Franklin St.; Bedford St. and Kingston St.; Kilby St. and Milk St.; Liberty Square; Phillips Square.

Potential new green edges:

- Streetscape improvements and a greenway along Marginal and Hudson street that provides a green edge to Chinatown.

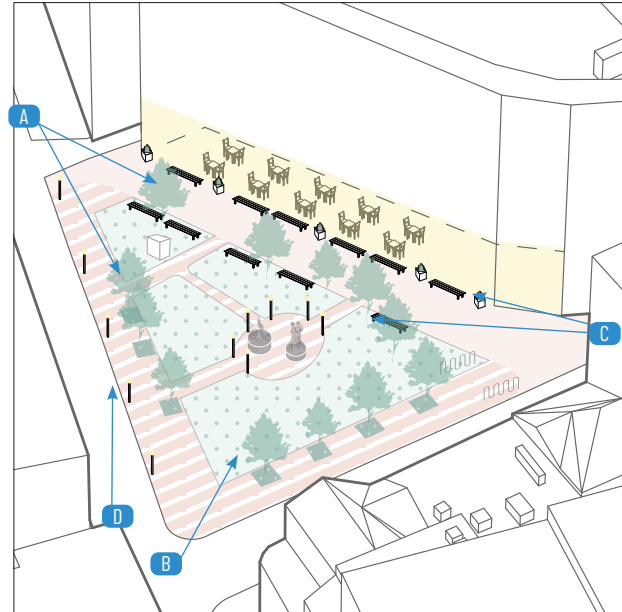


Open Space & Public Realm Opportunities:

- Improvements to existing spaces
- New permanent/temporary spaces
- ⋮ Study Area Boundary

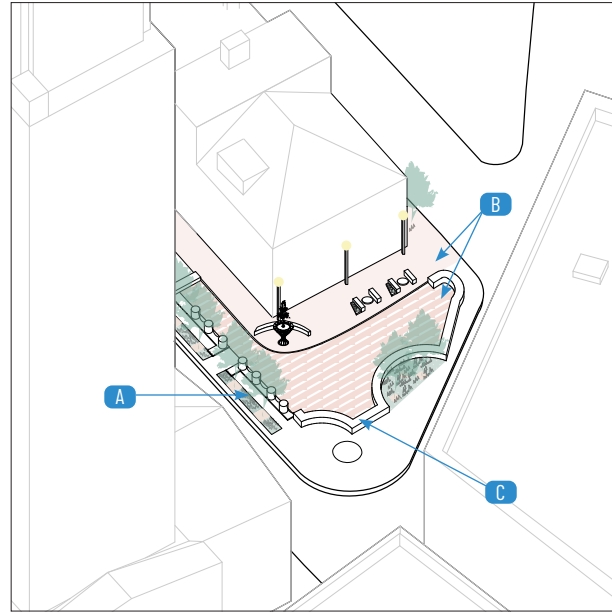
Open Space & Public Realm Priority Improvements

Reader's Park Downtown



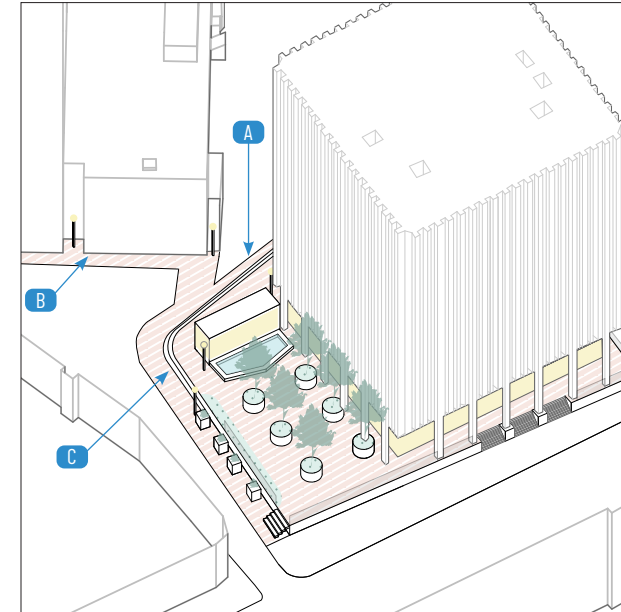
- A. Add more shade trees, potentially demarcating the perimeter of the abutting streets.
- B. Provide usable green space through mix species planting.
- C. Provide more and well-located seating and ensure universal accessibility.
- D. Consider raising Washington St to the level of plaza/sidewalk to communicate pedestrian priority and to "pull" the Old South Meeting House and MBTA entrance into the plaza.

Jenney Plaza Wharf District



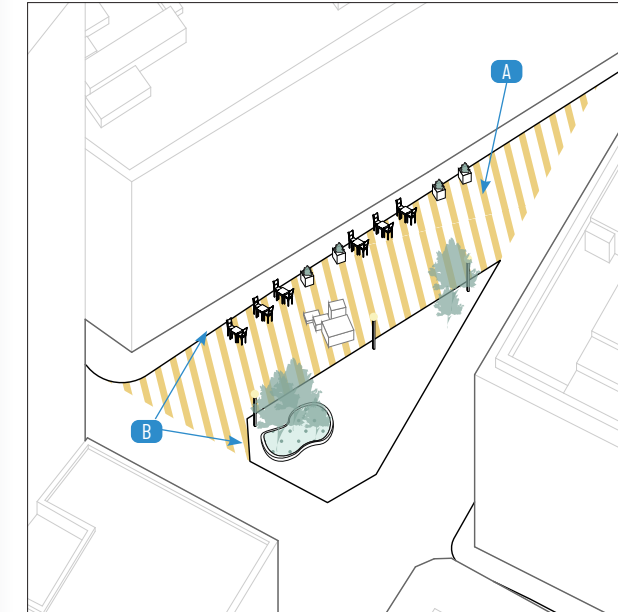
- A. Thin existing planting in Jenney Plaza to improve sightlines and sun exposure.
- B. Replace paving with lighter tones while ensuring reflectivity.
- C. Improve accessibility and comfort by removing bollards and chains, while using level changes to incorporate seating.

Milton Place Financial District



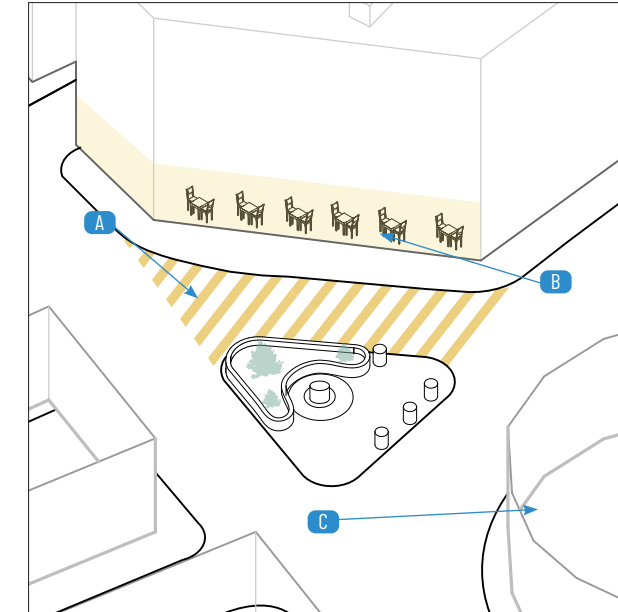
- A. Improve connections to existing and proposed public spaces including Winthrop Square, Devonshire St. and the Leather District Park.
- B. Provide a clear connection to Summer St. by continuing paving from 100 Summer St. Plaza and increasing lighting.
- C. Create a more welcoming 'back' to Milton Pl. by creating a more seamless level change and incorporating public art onto blank water feature walls.

Kilby/Milk Streets Financial District



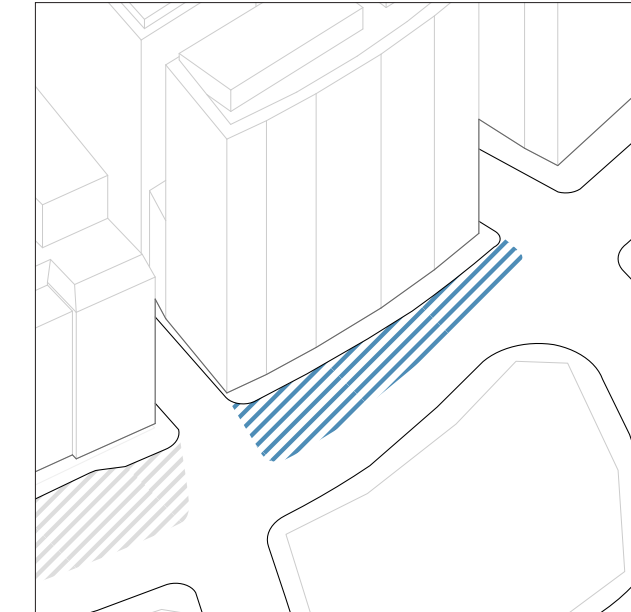
- A. At Kilby St. and Milk St., merge the existing traffic island with the sidewalk to the west.
- B. Provide a comfortable public space with seating and tree planters.

Liberty Square Financial District



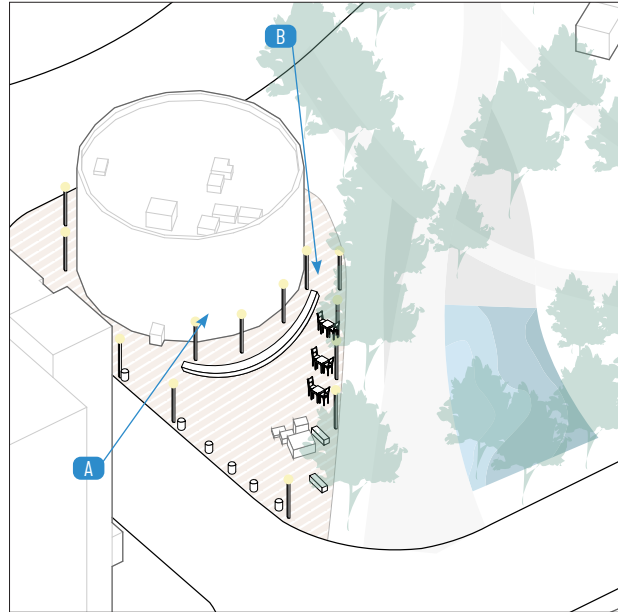
- A. At Water St. and Hawes St., (Liberty Square) merge the traffic island with the sidewalk to the north.
- B. The new public space should allow spill out for the neighboring ground floor commercial uses such as outdoor dining.
- C. Ensure the new public space allows for the appreciation of One Liberty Square, and other iconic buildings in the immediate surroundings.

Franklin Street Financial District



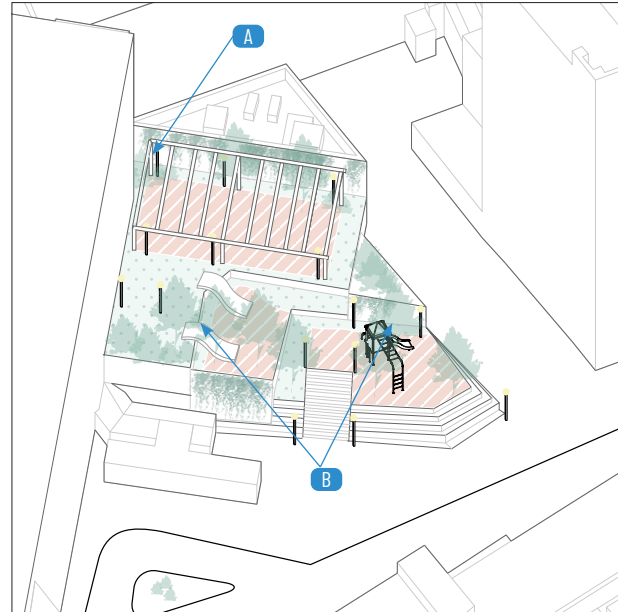
- Extending the existing Tontine Plaza west to the block between Arch St. and Devonshire St. and include outdoor seating, public art, and plantings.

Eliot Norton Park
Chinatown



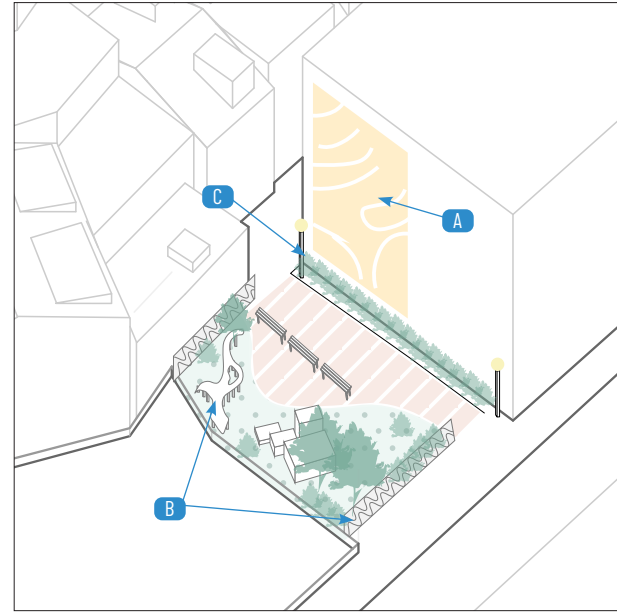
- A. Ensure legible sightlines and routes between the playground and the existing building.
- B. Improve lighting to provide even illumination and ensure a sense of safety.

Tufts Medical Center
Chinatown



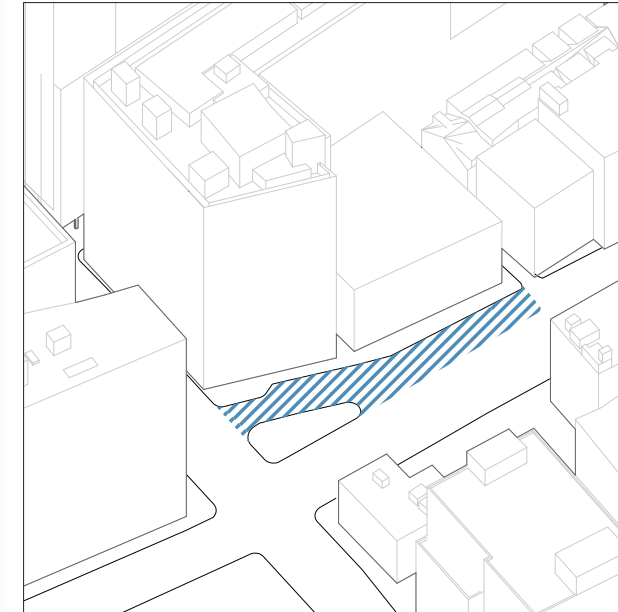
- A. Provide a clear, well-lit and welcoming connection to Tremont St.
- B. Integrate playable landscape and fixed seating; improve lighting to ensure a sense of safety and highlight route to Tremont St.

Oxford Street Playground
Chinatown District



- A. Retain mural reflective of local Chinese culture.
- B. Provide playable landscape and play structures, incorporating the existing utility box and perimeter fencing.
- C. Provide uniform lighting that illuminates the interior area of Oxford Place to improve the perception of safety.

Phillips Square
Chinatown



- A. Make Phillips Square a permanent public space with a possible expansion south along Harrison Ave.
- B. Include opportunities for art and cultural installations.
- C. Provide a comfortable public space with seating and tree planters.

Marginal Road/Hudson Street
Chinatown



- A. Extend the Greenway along Marginal and Hudson Streets incrementally, beginning with a road diet and with a goal of full pedestrianization between Tai Tung St. and Tremont St.
- B. Coordinate with studies examining creating a park on Parcel 21, above the highway and rail lines between Shawmut Ave. and Washington St.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

By implementing resilient solutions, projects, and policies that address climate change impacts, Downtown will thrive for generations to come.

- Key recommendations:
- Align with citywide resilience and sustainability initiatives including Climate Ready Boston and Carbon Free Boston goals
 - Reduce impervious surfaces and increase green surfaces and plantings
 - Support building performance upgrades, renovations, and adaptive reuse

Boston's Downtown is a highly urbanized coastal economic center. Given its built environment and shoreline location, it is very vulnerable to the effects of climate change – in particular, coastal flooding, extreme storms, and extreme heat. In response, PLAN: Downtown, builds upon Boston's existing climate ready initiatives, identifies the areas' key climate vulnerabilities and sets out sustainable development and climate adaptation strategies to address the impact of climate change and adapt to the area's future climate conditions.

PLAN: Downtown builds off of Boston's citywide plans and initiatives, notably the Climate Ready Boston, Resilient Boston Harbor, Carbon Free Boston Report 2019, and the City of Boston Climate Action Plan 2019, which identify critical strategies and specific actions for Boston to achieve its goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.



Boston Harbor Flooding



Historic building fabric like Water Street, must be protected through climate preparedness measures

Sustainable Development

With approximately 71% of the city's carbon emissions coming from its buildings, sustainable development is crucial to minimize adverse environmental impacts from the built environment and reduce a significant portion of the city's carbon emissions.

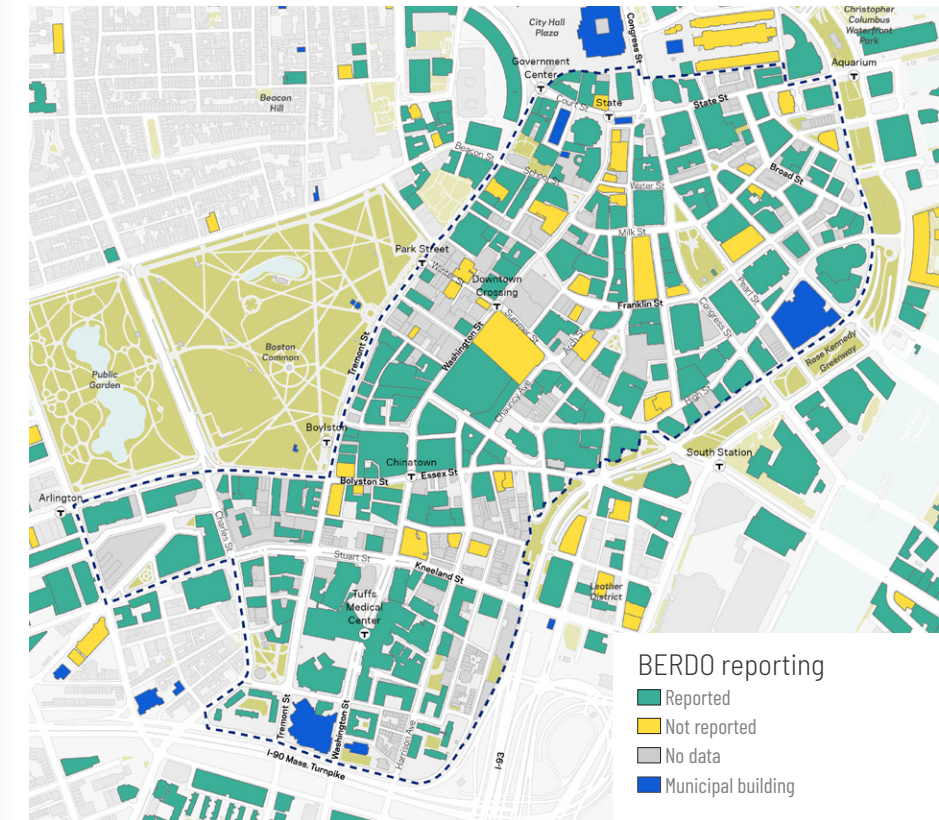
The City is actively working on citywide zoning and policy updates, new standards, and best practices including Zero Net Carbon guidelines to ensure that all future development address sustainable development and considers the project's environmental impacts and reduces carbon emissions. Climate Ready Boston sets forth a directive for new buildings to align with the City's zero net carbon goals by 2030, and for 80% or more of existing buildings to be retrofitted and electrified by 2050.

Considering the unique composition and uses of Downtown, the study area's greatest potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions lies in its built environment and transportation sectors. It's unique and historic building fabric lends itself to adaptive reuse opportunities that can lower embodied carbon and . By focusing on this potential, Downtown can make substantial strides in advancing its sustainable development and environmental goals.

Building Energy Reporting and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO)

The Building Energy Reporting and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO) is a citywide regulation in Boston that requires certain buildings to report their energy usage and carbon emissions, aiming to promote energy efficiency and sustainability across the city. Downtown buildings, though occupying only 0.78% of the city's land

area, represent a substantial 17.5% of the total square footage reported under BERDO, providing an excellent opportunity to drive impactful change with a smaller subset of owners responsible for a larger proportion of emissions.

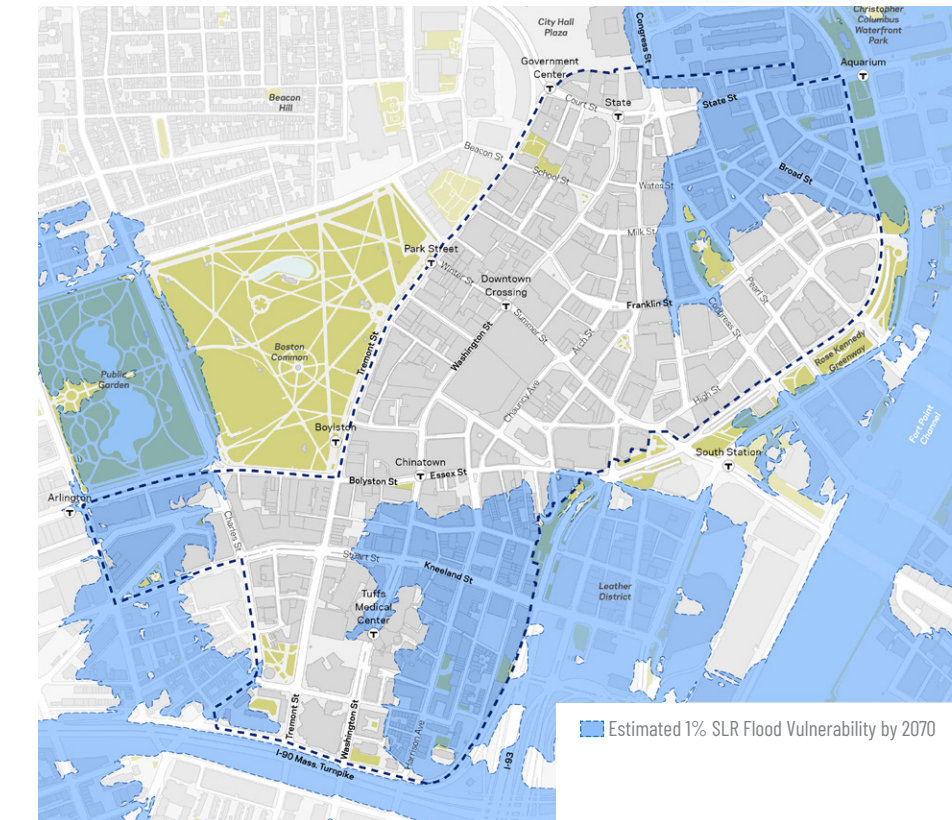


2070 Flood vulnerability

About 30% of the study area is in the Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District and will be vulnerable to flooding by the year 2070. The Wharf District will be the most susceptible area followed by Chinatown.



Extreme precipitation could effect some areas of Downtown



Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development

Climate Vulnerability

Over the last several years, the City of Boston has placed a high priority on its resilience efforts. Downtown Boston is particularly vulnerable to extreme flooding, precipitation, and heat. Consequently, PLAN: Downtown's policy actions and design guidelines build off of the city's key climate adaptation documents (Coastal Resilience Solutions, Coastal Floor Resilience Guidelines, the Zoning Code, and Heat Resilience Solutions).

In particular, PLAN: Downtown has concentrated on identifying opportunities to adapt to the impacts of extreme heat and precipitation at the neighborhood scale. According to the Heat Resilience Solutions For Boston released in 2022, Downtown and Chinatown are more likely to suffer from the impacts of extreme heat island and heat duration events than other neighborhoods in Boston. Chinatown's hotter microclimate can largely be attributed to its lack of green space, wide streets with limited street trees, and a larger concentration of brick and concrete buildings, which absorb heat during the day and slowly release it overnight. These physical characteristics are particularly notable as trees and parks have cooling effects on their surroundings due to shading and evaporative cooling, which reduce air and surface temperatures.

In the near term (2030s-2050s), coastal and riverine flood exposure will be concentrated in Downtown, South Boston, East Boston, and Charlestown. Across the city, a severe flood with a 1% annual chance of occurring would inundate 2,100 buildings, representing \$20 billion in real estate value, including the homes

of 16,000 Bostonians. Such an event would cause an estimated \$2.3 billion in physical damages to buildings and property and other economic losses, including relocation and lost productivity. 70% of economic losses would be concentrated in Downtown and South Boston

Additionally, due to the vast expanse of impervious surfaces and the scarcity of green space and tree canopy, Downtown is more susceptible to precipitation-based flooding given the area's limited capacity for water absorption.

Incorporating green infrastructure into capital improvements, new construction and retrofits is essential to not only mitigate urban heat island but also impacts of increased precipitation, which could be as high as 10-20% by 2050.



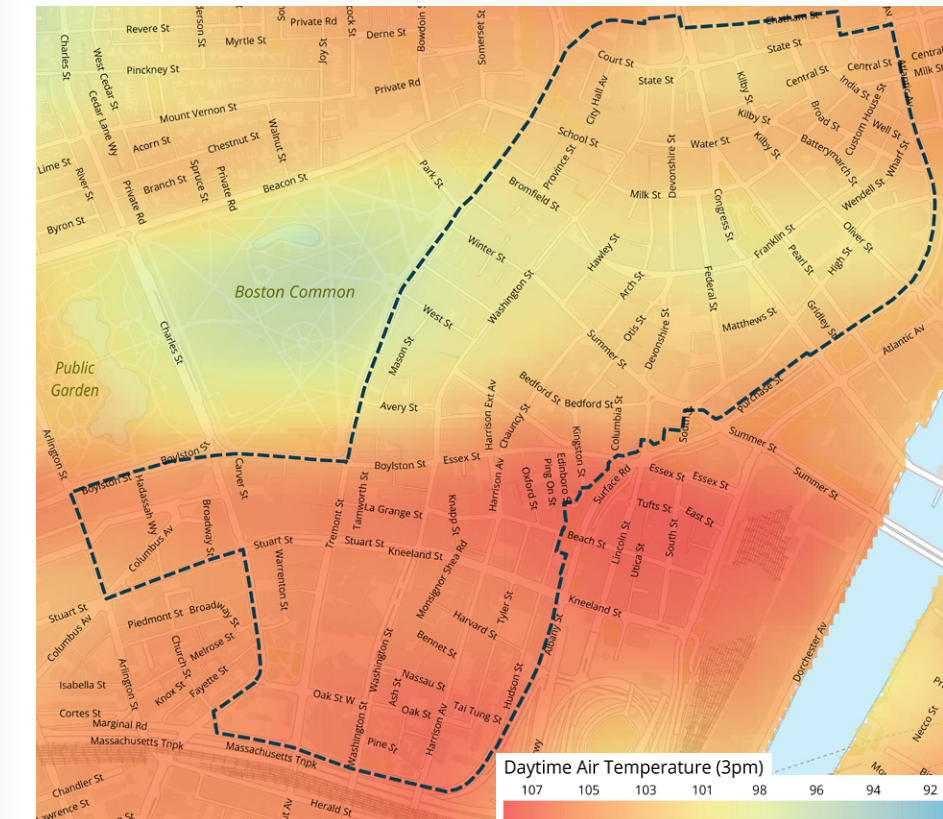
Efficient building systems lead to less utility costs and emissions

Land surface temperature

Like many other downtown urban environments, Downtown has densely developed buildings, asphalt, pavement, dark roofs, and other heat sinks that store and release heat on a hot day, resulting in average temperatures that are higher than surrounding communities.

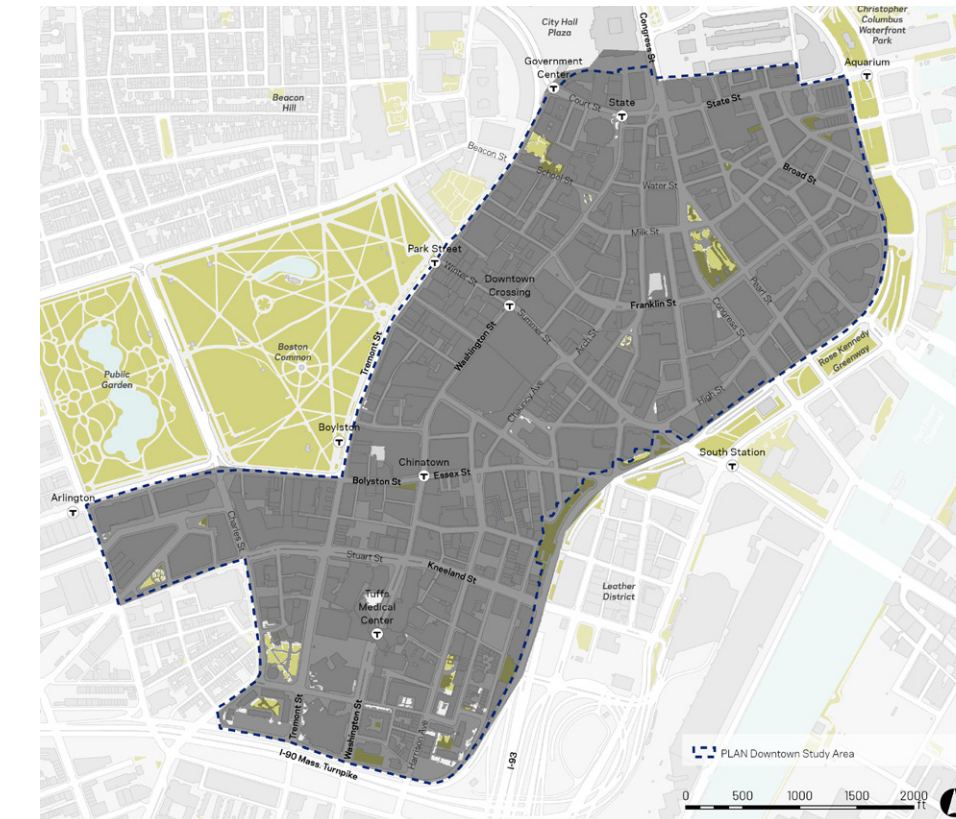


More tree shade would reduce the land surface temperature



Impervious surfaces

Impervious surfaces are surfaces that allow little or no storm water infiltration into the ground. This results in increased stormwater runoff, which increases flood vulnerability. Examples include streets, roofs, parking lots, walkways, asphalt, and concrete. 98.5% of Downtown is currently considered impervious surface.





IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

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POLICY ACTIONS

PLAN: Downtown outlines a comprehensive set of policies and actions the City can take to address the unique opportunities and challenges facing Downtown today and implement the goals and recommendations in this plan. These policy actions are based on significant input from community members and encompass new, ongoing and potential programs, plans, and projects. Collectively, they form a coordinated approach for how City departments and agencies can work together to implement and fulfill the goals of the Downtown community and create a more vibrant and equitable neighborhood for all Bostonians.

The policies and actions are organized by the 6 themes of PLAN: Downtown



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



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



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



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



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



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

Policy Actions



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

Actions

- Incentivize the growth of a small business support program that is funded by new development and redevelopment. **BDPA, OEI**
- Create low- or rent-free spaces in vacant upperfloor office spaces, both temporarily and permanently, for startups, nonprofits, and small businesses. **BDPA, OEI**
- Expedite/streamline inspection services for first-time brick-and-mortar retail businesses. **BDPA, ISD, OEI**
- Facilitate the location of short-term and temporary uses in vacant ground floor retail spaces by streamlining the permitting process for short-term occupation. **BDPA, ISD, OEI**
- Develop a new process for licensing or permitting Food & Beverage businesses to improve access for M/WBEs and first-time brick-and-mortar businesses, advocating for change to state-level regulations as needed. **BDPA, ISD, OEI**
- Proactively engage communities throughout Downtown, informing them of economic development opportunities Downtown, via OEI and local non-profit organizations. **BDPA, OEI**
- Inventory vacant ground floor spaces at semi-annual intervals to track trends and help connect potential tenants with landlords. **OEI**
- Incentivize new uses for underutilized parking garages that create opportunities for public amenities and spaces. **BDPA**
- Encourage a diversity of uses in the Financial District by incentivizing small business. **BDPA**
- Reserve space in new projects or on publicly owned parcels for rotating artists' space; spaces should include necessary infrastructure (water, electric, data) and a public-facing component (either visible from public realm or prominent signage). **BDPA, MOAC**
- Incentivize placement of community infrastructure such as schools, libraries, and recreation centers alongside or as part of proposed development. **BDPA**

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy timeline to be added in the final plan



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

Actions

- Accelerate the permitting of income-restricted housing by prioritizing and simplifying the review and approvals of income restricted housing including establishing streamlined procedures in Article 80 of Boston's Zoning code for the review of Affordable Housing Developments. [BDPA](#)
- Offer tax and fee incentives to start construction of residential projects that meet PLAN: Downtown and the City's goals. [BDPA](#)
- Continue devoting underutilized public land to the production of new affordable housing following the guidance of the Citywide Land Audit, 2022. [BDPA](#)
- Seek opportunities to create new housing models for middle-income seniors, those with incomes and/or assets above the traditional income-restricted housing framework but with limited quality choices on the market. [BDPA, MOH](#)
- Continue to explore increasing the number and range of housing options with a priority on low- and middle-income family housing in accordance with the Chinatown Neighborhood Master Plan 2020. [BDPA, MOH](#)
- Seek opportunities to create new housing models for middle-income seniors, those with incomes and/or assets above the traditional income-restricted housing framework but with limited quality choices on the market. [BDPA, MOH](#)
- Apply Acquisition Opportunity (loans to help affordable housing investor-owners buy occupied, multi-family rental properties – they are able to pre-qualify for a set amount of funding) program to Class C office and other lower-rent or higher-vacancy spaces. [BDPA, MOH](#)
- Further study alternative development models that make housing more affordable – i.e. co-housing, custom build housing, community land trusts – and their viability and feasibility in Downtown. [BDPA, MOH](#)
- Explore a vacancy tax on those who buy housing without occupying or leasing the unit. [BDPA, MOH](#)

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy timeline to be added in the final plan



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

Actions

- Support the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture in creating the Chinatown Cultural Plan which is updating an inventory of the neighborhood's cultural assets and developing strategies to preserve and expand cultural and artistic vitality in Chinatown. [BDPA, MOAC](#)
- Fund and conduct an updated survey of all buildings and historic assets in Downtown and Chinatown. [BDPA, BLC](#)
- Create a fund that new development and redevelopment projects contribute to that is allocated to cultural and community uses and organizations and to historic preservation. [BDPA](#)
- Strengthen the Theater District as a cultural hub by continuing to incentivize development of affordable performance, production, and exhibition spaces. [BDPA](#)
- Utilize the PLAN: Downtown design guidelines to inform how new development can respect and enhance the surrounding public realm and buildings. [BDPA](#)
- Continue to promote public art on walls and blank facades, as well as in streets, public spaces, and active alleys. Encourage private partnerships with local artists and community groups. [BDPA, MOAC](#)
- Incorporate art by local artists and makers in wayfinding and streetscape furniture design. [BDPA, MOAC, PWD](#)

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy timeline to be added in the final plan



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

Ongoing & Potential Projects

Pedestrian and Public Realm

- Support BTD/PWD’s Downtown Crossing Pedestrian Zone Improvement Project - Redesign of key streets in the heart of Boston, prioritizing pedestrians, accessibility, and placemaking. [BTD, PWD](#)
- Advance pedestrian, public realm and resilience improvements to the Marginal St. corridor and coordinate with planning efforts for the Turnpike parcels from Washington St. to Arlington St. [BTD, PWD](#)
- Support the implementation of the permanent pedestrian and bike network improvements on State St. [BTD, PWD](#)
- Continue to explore and advance pedestrian improvements to the Beach St. corridor. [BTD, PWD](#)

Bike Network

- Support the implementation of permanent pedestrian and bike network improvements on State St. [BTD](#)
- Support the expansion of the City’s protected bike lane network throughout Downtown. This includes completing the network improvements identified in “Connect Downtown” and the Milk St. corridor as identified in the “Safe Streets” program. [BTD](#)

Bus Network

- Support implementation of the MBTA’s Bus Network Redesign and it’s service and capacity improvements, with the City’s recommended improvements to Silver Line routing via Surface Road and associated bus priority elements. [BTD, MBTA](#)
- Support bus prioritization on city streets throughout Downtown. Ongoing implementation efforts include BTD’s “North Station to Seaport Multimodal Corridor” - Direct bus service and multimodal enhancements between North Station, South Station, and the Seaport. [BTD](#)
- Continue to advocate for the advancement of Silver Line Phase III, which would provide a direct below grade connection for the Silver Line’s Washington Street service and the South Boston Seaport’s service at South Station. [BTD, MBTA](#)

Rail Network

- Support Rail Vision - the MBTA’s long-term vision for improved rail service in Greater Boston and beyond. [BTD, MBTA](#)
- Support South Station Expansion to enable the growth and improve the reliability and resiliency of the regional rail network. [BTD, MBTA](#)
- Fairmount Line/Indigo Line - Explore options for better Fairmount Line service to better connect Downtown with Boston’s neighborhoods, including Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan and Hyde Park. [BTD, MBTA](#)
- Visionary expansion for rail services - Continue to explore options for the North/South Rail Link and Cross Harbor Rail Link to enable transformational rail expansion that would benefit Boston and the entire Northeast Region. [BTD, MBTA](#)

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy Actions & Improvements

- Explore expansion of the City’s Pedestrian Zone to other areas of the district. [BTD, PWD](#)
- Develop a management regime across the Downtown area that stipulates when deliveries and servicing can occur (and via which routes). [BTD](#)
- Ensure that the loading occurs on service streets or otherwise off-street based on the proposed street typologies. [BTD](#)
- Geofence specific areas to consolidate ride share activity. [BTD](#)
- Explore directionality changes to streets to improve bus transit priority, enhanced stops/stations, and pedestrian improvements. [BTD](#)
- Support MBTA’s efforts for accessibility improvements to the Downtown Crossing, Chinatown and State Street Stations. [BTD, MBTA](#)
- Advocate for accessibility improvements to Boylston Station. [BTD, MBTA](#)
- Advocate for the creation of new design standards for entrances to T stations within Downtown, focusing on legibility. [BTD, MBTA](#)
- Increase access to carshare for residents including electric vehicle car share and affordable pricing structures to reduce car ownership rates. [BTD](#)
- Encourage employers to provide fully subsidized transit passes for commuter rail and LinkPasses, remove any parking subsidies by employers, and ensure all off- street parking charges current “market rates.” [BTD](#)
- Follow the PLAN: Downtown proposed street typologies when considering streetscape and transportation improvements. [BTD](#)
- Ensure that the Downtown has consistent lighting based on the light levels and color temperature recommendations of Plan: Downtown. [BPDA](#)
- All new development project’s must comply with the City’s “EV Readiness Policy”, which includes charging infrastructure for 25% of new parking spaces and the remaining 75% being “EV ready.” [BPDA](#)
- Ensure compliance with the City’s Downtown Parking Freeze and support the Air Pollution Control Commission’s efforts to refine and improve the program’s regulations in alignment with citywide transportation goals as adopted in Go Boston 2030 and Downtown goals as adopted in this PLAN. [BTD, BPDA](#)
- Develop a “parking and curb use plan” to reallocate curb space according to the highest and best use in relation to each area in Downtown. This would help to manage TNC pick-up/drop-off activity, prioritize transit accessibility and priority, provide for care share services, public Ev charging, bike parking and bike lanes, more efficient commercial loading and food take-out and delivery. On-street parking should be metered and priced to encourage frequent turnover, with priority given to ADA accessible parking needs. [BTD](#)
- Assess parking utilization in Downtown and Chinatown. [BTD, BPDA](#)
- Continue advocating the MBTA for subway reliability, frequency, and service hour improvements. [BTD, MBTA](#)

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy timeline to be added in the final plan



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

Actions

- Create new policies around areaways to accelerate sidewalk improvements in these locations. [BPDA, BTD, PWD, ISD](#)
- Enhance the context around transit connections through Downtown – making transit areas efficient and legible. [BPDA, BTD, MBTA](#)
- Support improved connections to the waterfront. [BPDA, BTD, PWD](#)
- Provide interior publicly accessible routes in instances where long blocks inhibit connections between existing exterior or interior passages. [BPDA](#)
- Improve the existing privately owned public spaces (POPS)/ public realm by revitalizing parks and plazas based on the recommendations in Plan: Downtown. On private land, these improvements could include: [Tufts Medical Center, Milton Plaza, Chauncy St./Summer St.](#) [BPDA, PWD](#)
- Create new POPS. This could include: [Fiduciary Trust Building.](#) [BPDA](#)
- Update standards for clear signage indicating all privately-owned spaces that are open to the public. [BPDA, PWD](#)
- Strengthen street character and hierarchy based on their role connecting public spaces as proposed by PLAN: Downtown’s Key Open Space Corridors & Connectors. [BTD, PWD](#)
- Expand existing wayfinding scheme, focusing on highlighting public transit entrances and visual cues at key intersections. [BTD, MBTA, PWD, BPDA](#)
- Improve the existing public realm by revitalizing parks and plazas based on the recommendations in Plan: Downtown. On public land, these improvements could include: [Chin Park, Eliot Norton Park, Oxford Place Playground, Reader’s Park, Jenny Plaza, and Custom House Plaza.](#) [BPDA, PWD](#)
- Expand existing public realm by creating new parks and plazas based on the recommendations of Plan: Downtown. These could include: [Franklin St., Bedford St. Kingston St. - traffic island transformation, Kilby St. and Milk St. - traffic island transformation, Liberty Square - traffic island transformation.](#) [BTD, PWD, BPDA](#)
- Use temporary interventions in Phillips Square to guide a permanent change to the public realm to increase pedestrian and green space. [BTD, PWD, BPDA](#)
- Extend Greenway along Marginal/Hudson St. incrementally, beginning with a road diet and with a goal of full pedestrianization between Tai Tung St. and Tremont St. [BTD, PWD, BPDA](#)
- Encourage and facilitate pilot projects similar to Tontine Crescent. Projects can include, but are not limited to, intersection redesign, traffic islands transforming to public space peninsulas, corner redesign, and/or road diets. [BTD, PWD, BPDA](#)

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy timeline to be added in the final plan



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

Actions

- Incentivize private investment in vulnerable historic buildings, referring to the Resilient Historic Buildings Design Guide for specific strategies. [BPDA](#)
- Support ongoing existing building performance upgrades and renovations using Boston’s Retrofit Resource Hub. [BPDA](#)
- Incentivize investment in green infrastructure that addresses multiple needs, including urban heat island effects and stormwater management, as part of redevelopment and the design of capital projects. [BPDA](#)
- Buildings should meet or exceed LEED Platinum, Zero Net Carbon Building, Heat Island reduction, Stormwater above 1.5” cubic retention to receive a density bonus. [BPDA](#)
- Increase district tree canopy wherever possible and Green Infrastructure via Bioswale, Pollinator Beds or Rain Gardens. [BPDA, BTD, PWD](#)
- Increase Cool Pavement or Pavers with a Solar Reflective Index of 29 or greater. [BPDA, BTD, PWD](#)
- Minimize at grade or below grade utility conflicts to support long term tree and plant growth. [BPDA, BTD, PWD](#)
- Consider misting zones for evaporative cooling. [BPDA, PWD](#)
- Consider loggias and/or canopies to provide shade when vegetation is not a viable option. [BPDA, PWD](#)

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy timeline to be added in the final plan

DESIGN GUIDELINES

These design guidelines provide direction on how new projects can respectfully enhance Downtown's unique and historic urban fabric, effectively activate the area and revitalize the public realm, and achieve sustainability and resiliency goals.

The guidelines are intended for City staff as well as developers, architects, and community members to help shape and evaluate projects in the area.

The guidelines focus on 4 key areas:

1. Scale, Massing, & Articulation
2. Active Ground Floors & Loading
3. Public Realm
4. Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development

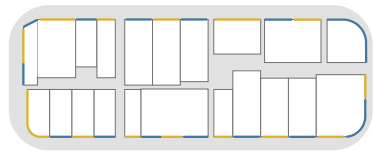


1. Scale, Massing, & Articulation

1.1 Block Size

Reduce the scale of large blocks wherever possible to maintain permeability and shape sites and buildings to respond to the prevailing scale of the area.

- a. When possible, preserve the width of existing storefronts and retain existing buildings, or building frontages in the case where existing buildings are in poor condition.



City block with different sized storefronts ✓



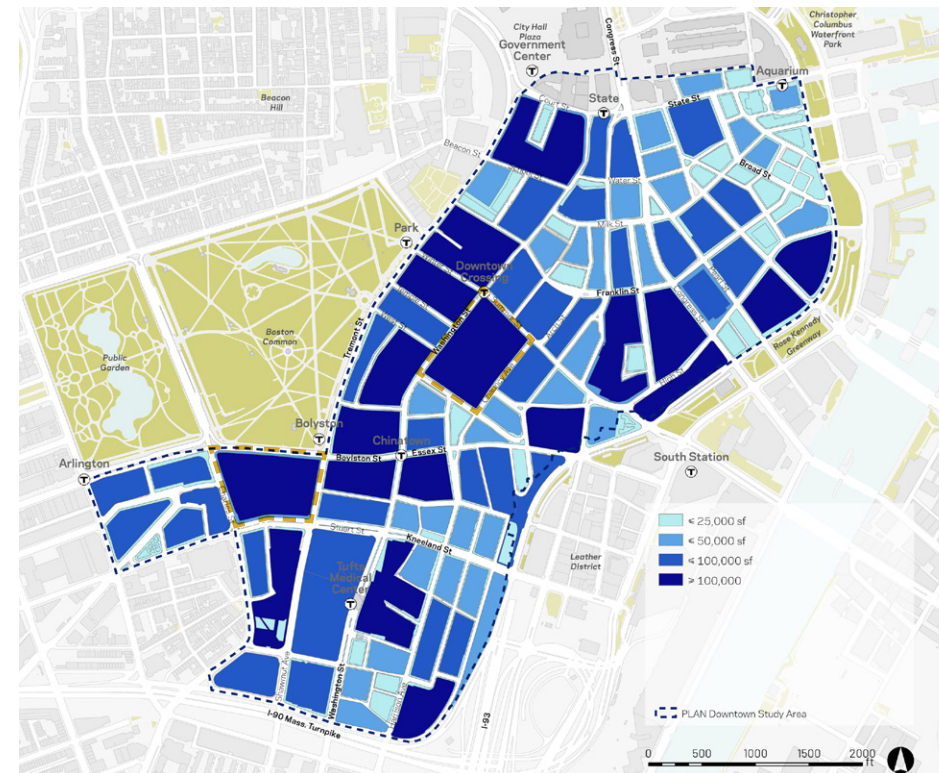
Large city block without interior public passages X

- b. Maintain existing passages and alleys or provide an interior public passage along the same or similar alignment.
- c. Seize site design opportunities for both buildings and the public realm to celebrate and reinforce alignments and irregularities in downtown's historic urban fabric.
- d. Site and building design should establish, respect, or enhance mid-block open space.

Chinatown: Include mid-block open space when developing existing surface car parking lots in Chinatown.

- e. Provide new streets, mid-block alleys, pedestrian paths, courtyards, and plazas that connect with other streets and public or common open spaces.

Downtown and Theater District: In the case of re-development, find long-term opportunities for new mid-block connections and exterior pedestrian routes with respect to Lafayette Place and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation building.

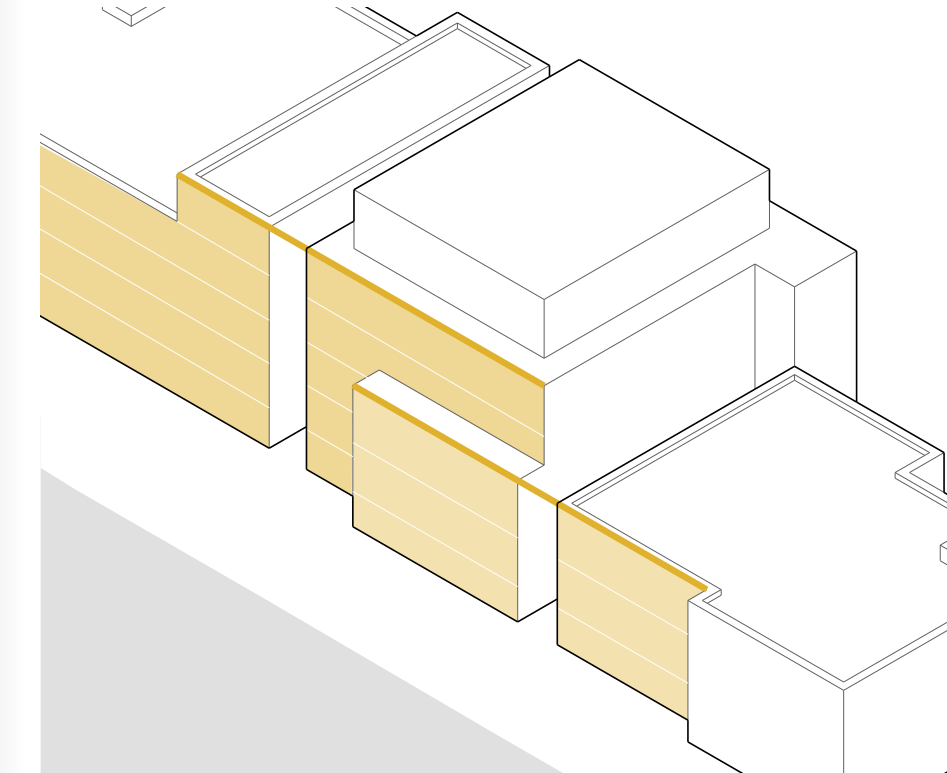


Range of block sizes in the study area

1.2 Building Massing

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

- a. 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.



- b. 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.
- c. Ensure tall buildings minimize wind impacts at the street level through massing changes and architectural elements.
- d. Introduce setbacks, floor plate reduction and back-to-back lightwells to maximize access to light and air to adjacent buildings and the public realm.
- e. Minimize casting additional shadows on streets that leave them completely shaded throughout the day and throughout the year.

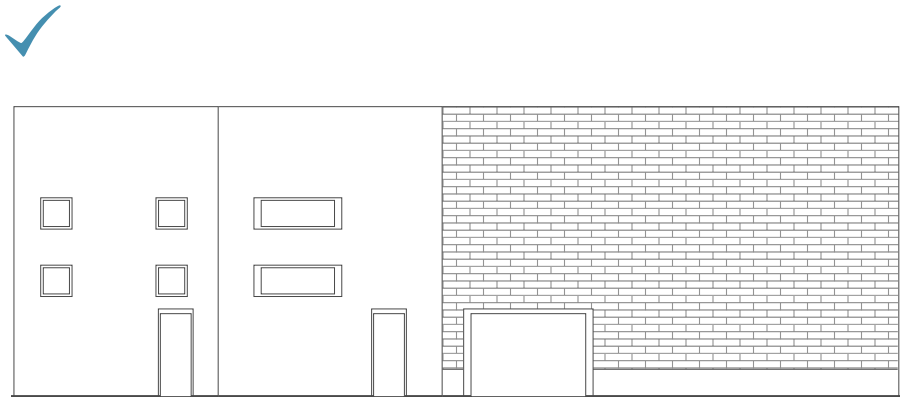
Design Guidelines

1. Scale, Massing, & Articulation

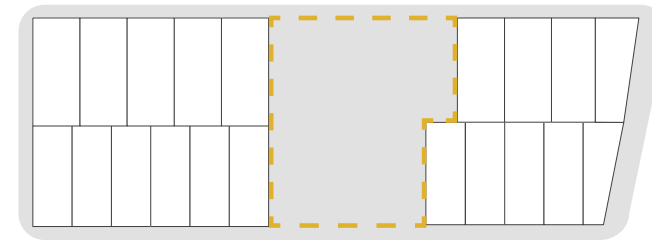
1.3 Architectural Articulation

Materials, facade articulation, and architectural features should be utilized to respect and enhance the character and vibrancy of the surrounding context and buildings.

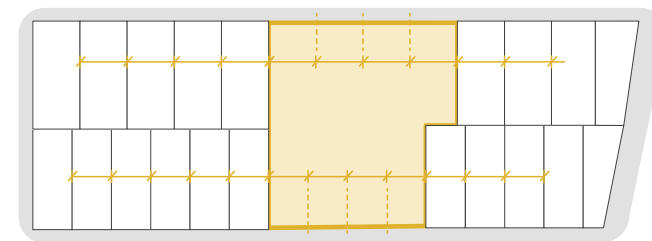
- a. Avoid large expanses of undifferentiated blank surfaces and incorporate human-scaled detailing, components, and features. In general no façade should present a blank wall for more than 30 ft. Simple changes of color or material in the same plane are rarely sufficient.



- b. Creatively incorporate mechanicals in building design and minimize their visual, noise, and shadow impact on the surrounding context and public realm. For life-science buildings follow the Life Science Building Design Guidelines.
- c. Adopt Character Area-prevailing lot widths and proportions and size of architectural elements in the scaling and ordering of the proposed building.



Example of development site



Proposed building can articulate the existing façade rhythm and dimensions of the surrounding context.

Downtown Crossing /Ladder Blocks/Chinatown/Wharf District: Consider the rhythm, datum lines and materials of the existing shopfronts when introducing new development or redevelopment.

- d. Ensure glass and other building materials do not cause adverse reflections on adjacent buildings and the public realm.
- e. Respond to the ornamental context of adjacent buildings, but avoid direct mimicry and imitation of historic features.
- f. New development should consider the prevailing materiality, scale, solid to void ratio, and facade alignment of the surrounding buildings and character area.

Financial District



Wharf District



Downtown Crossing and Ladder Blocks



Theater District



Chinatown

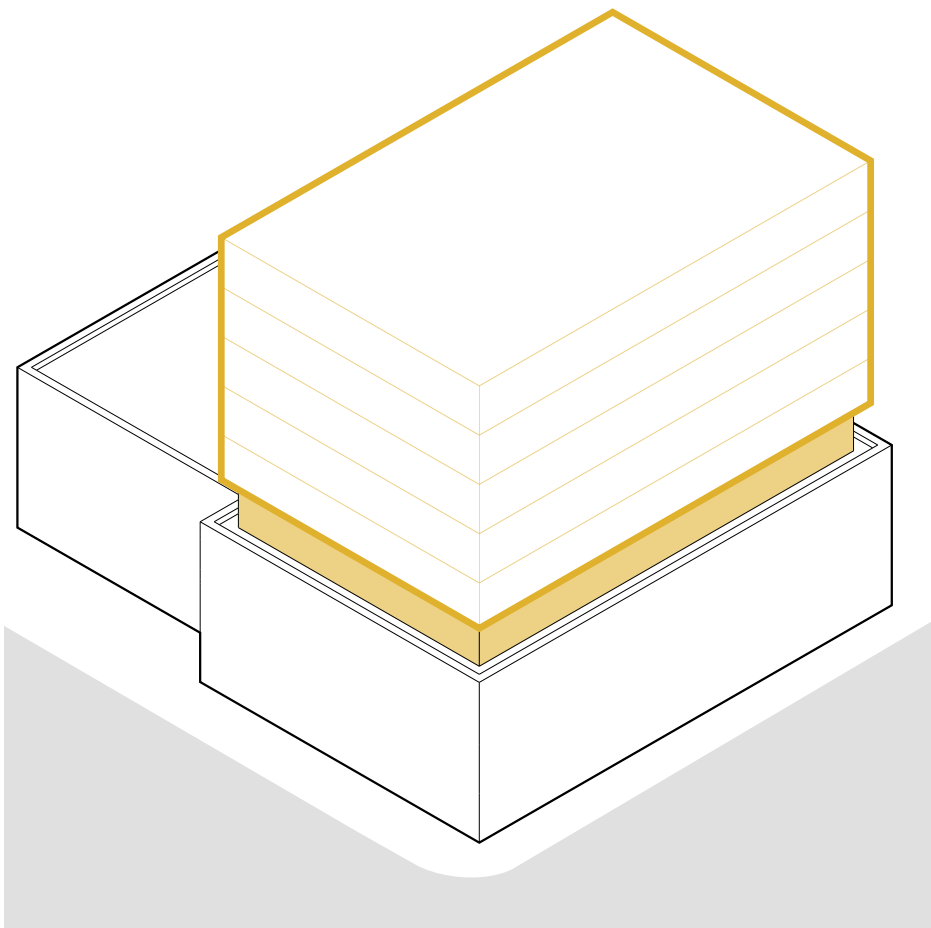


1. Scale, Massing, & Articulation

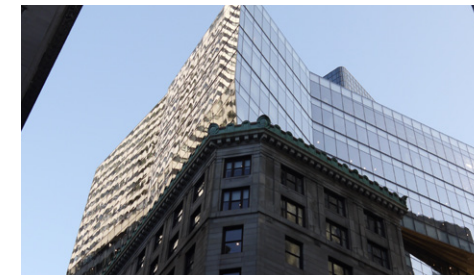
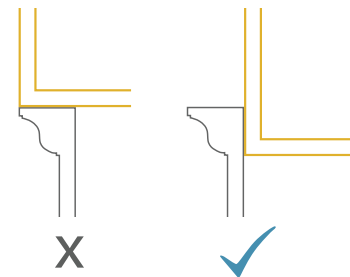
1.4 Vertical Building Additions

Distinguish vertical building additions from the existing building.

- a. Create a distinct horizontal or vertical break in the façade between the new and existing portions of the building.



- b. Setback the addition at the top of the building from the existing facades; locate the addition inside the cornice when it exists.



Setback cornice - Boston, USA

- c. Consider sightlines along key streets when making an addition to an existing building to ensure it does not obscure important views.



New York, USA



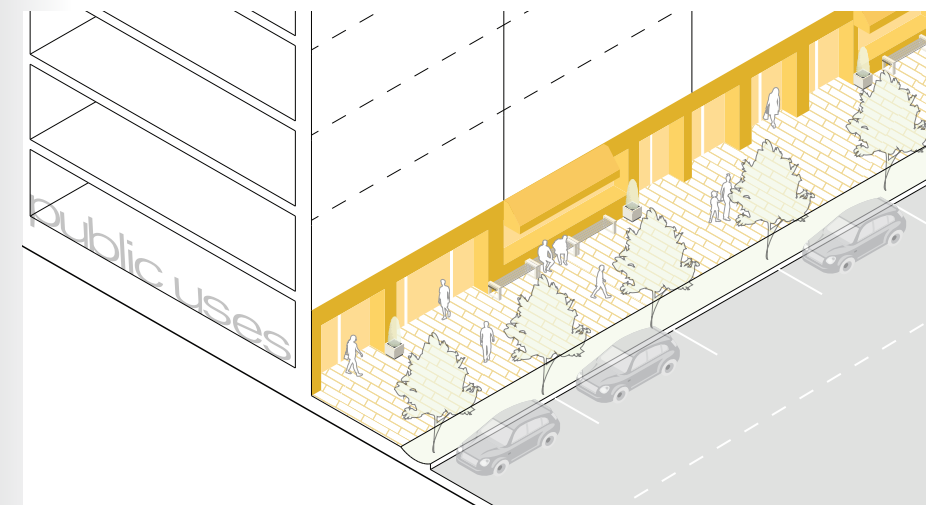
Oviedo, Spain

2. Active Ground Floors & Loading

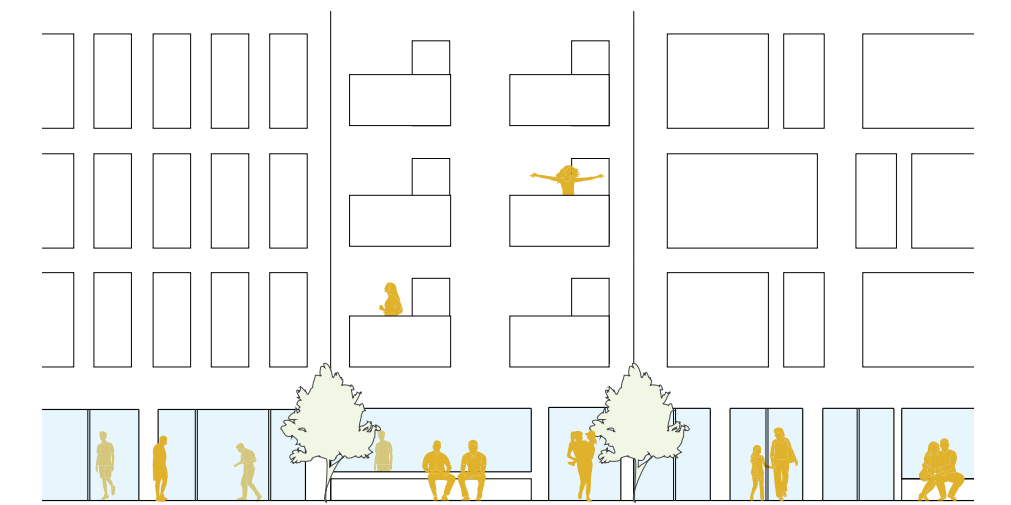
2.1 Active Uses

Design ground floors to include and feature active ground floor uses that support pedestrian-oriented activity and serve the local community and Downtown visitors.

- a. Active and public uses include, but are not limited to: retail, creative workspaces, small enterprise businesses, cultural venues and institutions, services for the public, and community spaces.
- b. Designing for and providing space (especially small scale affordable commercial space) to small, locally-owned, and diverse-owned businesses is encouraged.
- c. Publicly accessible, active ground floor uses should be available on every block that is not service-oriented, and placed as frequently as possible to support a diversity of experiences.



- d. Maximize the transparency of ground floor commercial facades such as with operable windows and take clues from adjacent older storefronts in terms of fenestration, signage location and doorways.
- e. Orient and integrate courts, entries, lobbies, large windows and balconies to face streets, public parks, plazas and open spaces to provide more opportunity for safety and interaction.
- f. Ensure privacy to ground floor residential units either through raising the ground floor or provide a horizontal buffer while maintaining the street frontage alignment.



2.2 Building Entrances

Locate primary building entries on active primary streets and oriented to the public realm.

- Design entrance lobbies to create a transition between the street and interior. They should be clearly identifiable and more visible and significant than garage or service entrances.
- Incorporate lighting, landscaping, and public realm enhancements at building entrances wherever possible.
- Utilize signage to call out entrances and follow the Downtown Crossing Signage Guidelines.
- Corner developments should locate main building entries on the main streets listed below, prioritizing retail, arts, and cultural spaces over office lobbies.

Downtown: Washington Street. This will contribute to the activation of the pedestrian-priority zone.

Theater District: Tremont Street and Washington Street.

Chinatown: Essex Street and Kneeland Street. In terms of north-south streets, Harrison Avenue should be considered as the major street where entrances are concentrated.

Financial District: Congress Street, Pearl Street and the 'Busy Local Streets' identified in the street typologies.

Wharf District: State Street and Broad Street.

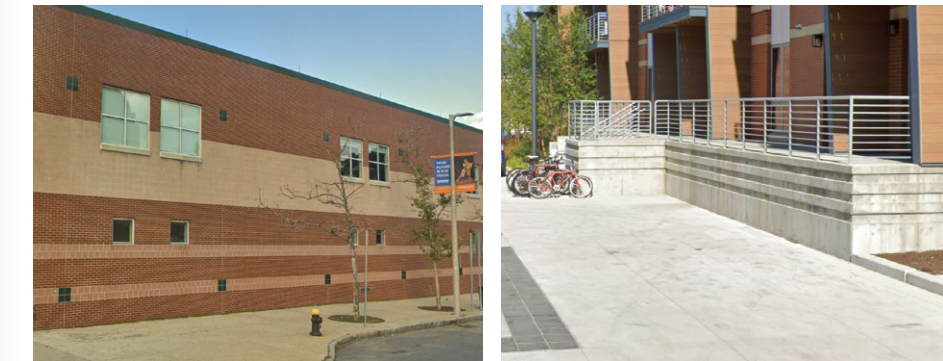
- Distance between entrances should fit a common neighborhood pattern and avoid long frontages without active entries.



2.3 Screening & In-Active Frontages

Minimize inactive frontages such as those dedicated to utilities, storage, services and parking access and integrate them with the overall character and design of the building.

- Unbuilt areas such as surface parking or courtyards should be screened with a 'green' edge or a decorative fence or wall that complements or extends the design of adjacent buildings. Chain-link, vinyl and plastic fences are strongly discouraged.
- Where above-grade parking is allowed, the ground floor should be enveloped with active uses. When not possible, provide an aesthetically pleasing facade. Upper levels of a garage should be screened.
- Where possible, locate trash rooms below grade or off an alley, place transformers at the interior of the site, and enclose all utilities and protect them from flood impacts.



In-active blank walls and areas on the ground floor, creating uninviting facades - Boston

2.4 Parking Access, Loading, & Service

Minimize the impact of parking access, loading, and service areas on the public realm, transit, and bicycle and pedestrian circulation.

- Wherever feasible, locate parking access, loading and servicing areas on side streets or, preferably, alleyways, away from primary streets.
- Location of loading, servicing, and delivery should follow any relevant City guidelines.
- Driveway turnaround and vehicle drop-off facilities along public streets are strongly discouraged to avoid disrupting the continuity of the sidewalk. Ideally, truck maneuvers to access loading areas should be accommodated on site and should not require trucks to back up on public streets.
- Minimize curb cuts as much as possible. Those wider than 24 feet require PIC approval. Loading/servicing/delivery/parking entrances should be consolidated as much as possible, ideally resulting in no more than one curb cut per block face.
- Loading/servicing/delivery/parking entrances should be consolidated as much as possible, ideally resulting in no more than one curb cut per block face.
- Access drives to loading areas should be built at the same elevation of the sidewalk to maintain a continuous grade across them for pedestrians.
- Integrate loading and service bays into the overall building design and facade composition

3.1 Public Realm Activation

Wherever possible enhance and expand the public realm and create publicly accessible permanent or temporary open space that activates the streetscape and promotes use year-round.

- a. Design elements to maximize physical comfort. Consider solar orientation, shade, wind, light levels, flood protection throughout all seasons.
- b. Encourage a variety of shading and rain protection structures in places with high solar exposure, especially where tree planting is less viable.
- c. Utilize flexible furniture and seating paired with building awnings and plantings to encourage use.
- d. Program privately-owned public spaces such as dining and cafe seating to support adjacent active ground floor uses and avoid designs that appear to privatize open space or streetscape elements.
- e. Find opportunities to provide additional, or increase existing, planting that will address the desire for a ‘greener’ Downtown.
- f. Enhance ground floor activation, access, and safety by integrating the design of windows, balconies, entryways, and awnings with the design of plazas and gathering spaces.
- g. Provide spaces that support different types of activation including community events and play areas for a variety of ages and groups.

3.2 Public Art

Find opportunities to include public art and integrate features that highlight the history and culture of local communities.

- a. Incorporate art, murals, and local artifacts as key public features, located with attention to visibility.

Chinatown: Work with the Chinatown community organizations and artists to identify opportunities for the integration of public art that highlights the history and culture of Chinatown.



“Where We Belong” mural in Chinatown by Ponnappa Prakkamakul

3.3 Building Lighting

Design lighting to reinforce pedestrian comfort and safety at the ground level while enhancing building features.

- a. Selection of lighting fixtures that fall within the right-of-way should be coordinated with PWD Street Lighting Division.
- b. Use lighting to highlight significant building features, especially with respect to National Register Historic Buildings and City of Boston Landmarks.
- c. Do not over-light buildings nor project light into the sky. Employ sustainable or “dark sky” measures to reduce illumination when not needed or visible.
- d. Lighting should not be placed such that it will disturb neighboring buildings, especially residential uses.
- e. Use lighting to help highlight entrances and information along facades where there are many elements or uses.



Academy of Music - Philadelphia, USA



Montreal, Canada

3.4 Plantings

Increase plantings and introduce new street trees whenever possible to create a greener and healthier Downtown.

- a. Maximize opportunities for sustainable landscaping that include plant materials and permeable surfaces wherever possible and keeping in mind the location of areaways.
- b. While maintaining the overall existing street edge, use front setbacks to accommodate landscaping where sidewalk space prevents landscaping or tree planting.
- c. Selected trees and plantings should be adaptable to stressful urban conditions. Refer to Boston Parks and Recreation recommended list of street trees.
- d. Design large enough root zones around street trees to facilitate more rooting capacity.
- e. Diversify planting strategies to add aesthetic value and improve planting performance and long term health.
- f. Alternative groundcover and natural meadow grasses should be prioritized over lawn wherever possible.



3.5 Shape and respect view corridors

View corridors should be used and shaped to help enhance connections to green spaces or showcase architecturally or historically significant buildings.

- Respect and enhance existing view corridors towards historic assets.
- Find opportunities to enhance and create more views that connect open spaces and help provide wayfinding.
- Identify and respect view sheds that afford a 'layered' view of the architectural history of downtown.
- Street views should not terminate in blank facades or exposed parking



View to Post Office Square from Franklin Street.



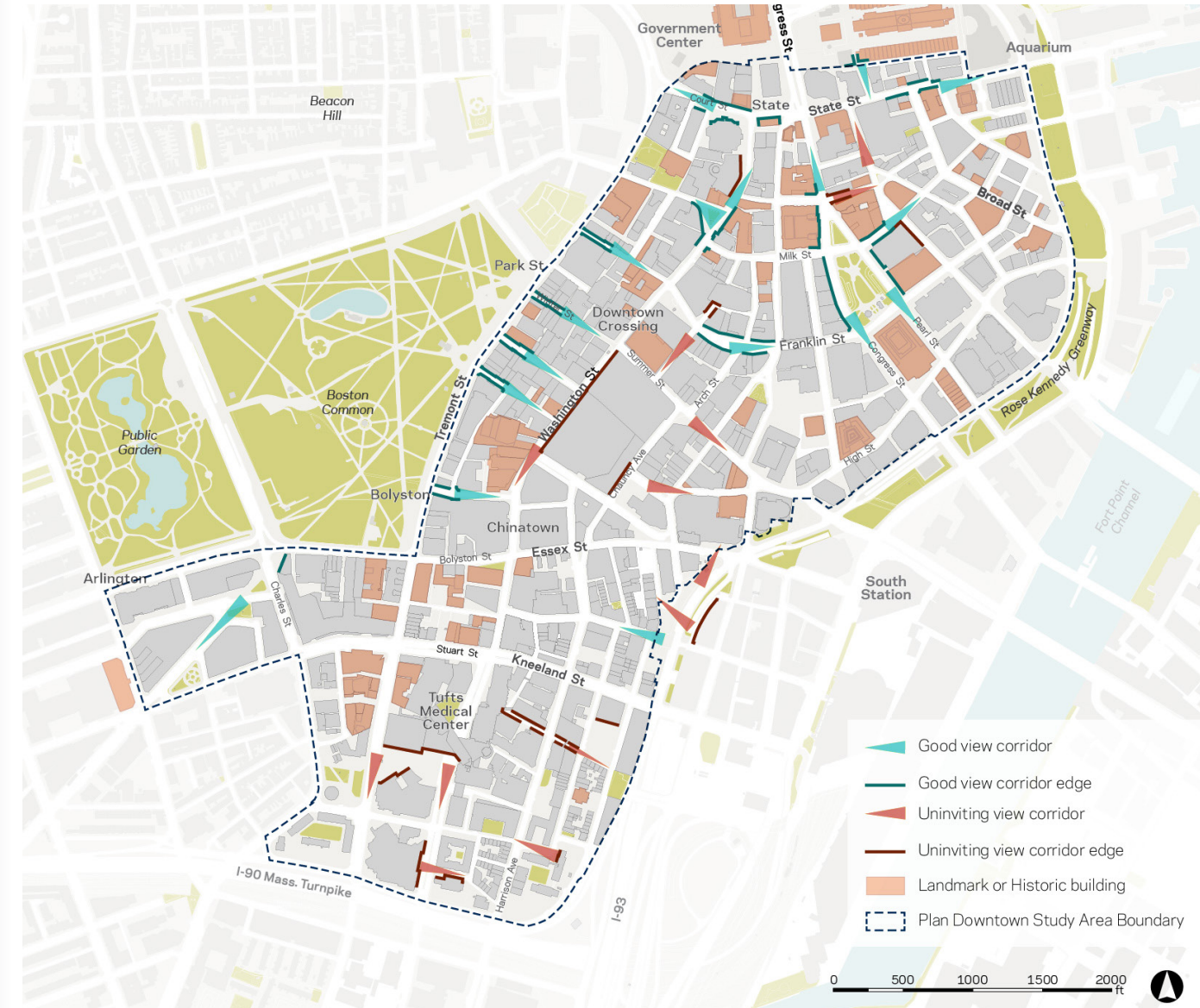
Buildings of different periods and scales define Reader's Square edge.



Old South Meeting House among buildings from different periods.



View to structured parking at end of Water Street



Open Space and City Views
Financial District: Respect views from the Greenway towards Post Office Square along Milk, Franklin and Congress Streets
Downtown Crossing: Ensure clear views through Reader's Park toward the Old South Meeting House.
Financial District: Ensure the open space around the State House is maintained.
Chinatown: Respect views on Beach Street to and from Chinatown Gate

"Layered" Views
Downtown Crossing: Respect the view looking south along School Street from Tremont Street, taking advantage of views of Old City Hall, Readers' Plaza and Old South Meeting House.
Financial District: Respect the view along Pearl Street north past Post Office Square to Congress Street.
Wharf District: Respect the view along Broad Street looking north from the Greenway

Uninviting views
Downtown Crossing: Improve the terminus of the view north along Hawley Street
Financial District: Improve the view along Water Street that currently terminates in a parking garage on Washington St. (Pi Alley).

Design Guidelines

3. Public Realm

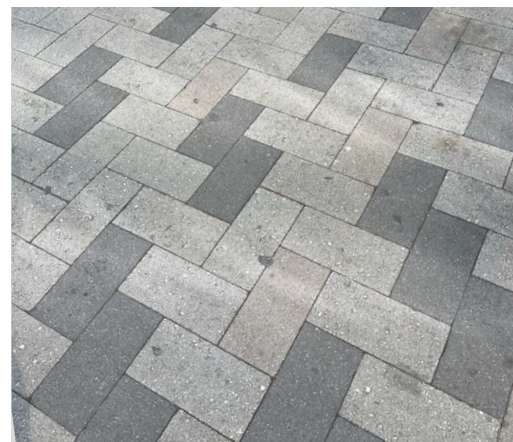
3.5 Pavement

Pavement materials should create an accessible and inviting streetscape, helping define public spaces, create a consistent Downtown character, and manage water run-off.

- Poured in place concrete paving should match Boston Public Works Department concrete sidewalk specifications. Broom finish should be applied last to avoid a border created by a concrete tool.
- When space allows, permeable pavers are recommended on the street edge of sidewalks to provide water to street trees or, at a minimum, capture water run-off from poured-in-place sidewalks.
- All pavers must comply with the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Plazas and expanded public realm areas should utilize a combination of precast and permeable concrete pavers. Pavers should adhere to the pattern, color, and size utilized in Tontine Crescent and Shopper's Plaza.



Shopper's Plaza pavement



3.6 Furnishings

Street furniture should enhance access to Downtown and support pedestrian comfort and year-round activation.

- Use of movable and temporary furniture is encouraged to give visitors and occupants flexibility of use and allow for seasonal operations and maintenance of publicly accessible spaces. Consider maintenance and storage solutions in the design.
- Furniture should not obstruct, obscure, or disrupt the pedestrian zone and should aim to reduce visual and physical clutter.
- Trash and recycling receptacles should be located in amenity zones near street crossings and intersections or in other high traffic areas.
- Bike racks, and other forms of bicycle infrastructure including bike storage and repair station(s) are strongly encouraged and should adhere to City's Bike Parking Guidelines.
- Locate bike racks and seating near building entrances, open spaces, and intersections, but avoid impeding primary paths of travel for pedestrians.

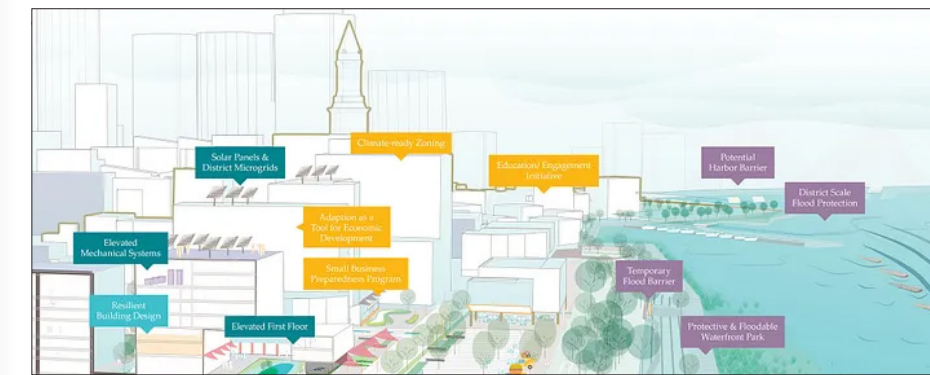
Design Guidelines

4. Sustainability & Climate Resilience

4.1 Existing Standards

Adhere to existing green building and sustainable and resilient development standards including:

- Article 37 of the Boston Zoning Code sustainability standards and LEED rating system (required for all buildings subject to Article 80)
- Zero Net Carbon (ZNC) policy and standards
- Smart Utilities Policy (BSU)
- Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO) (required for all building >20,000 sf)
- Zero Waste Boston Initiative
- Heat Resilience Solutions For Boston Plan
- Groundwater Conservation Overlay District (where applicable)
- Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District (as codified in Article 25A)
- Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines
- Mayor's Office of Housing Design Standards
- City of Boston Green Infrastructure Standards
- Massachusetts Stormwater Handbook and Stormwater Standards

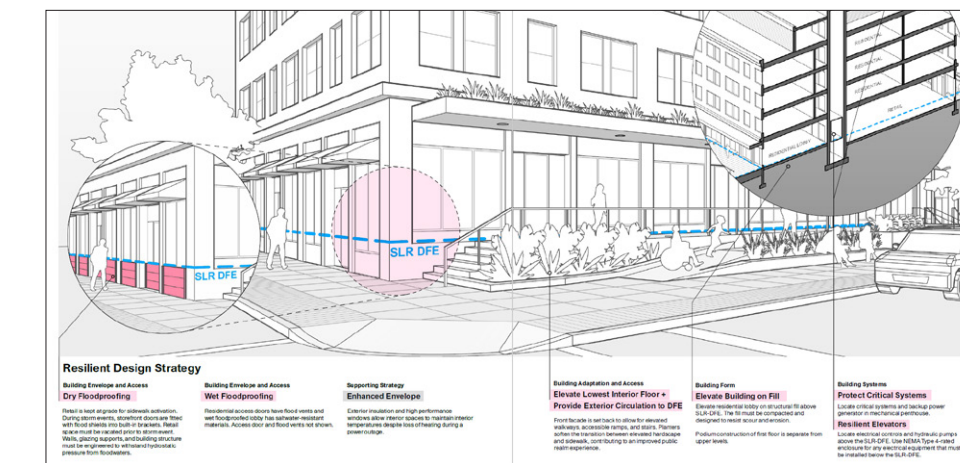


Climate Ready Boston

4.2 Design Strategies

Buildings should mitigate energy needs and be designed to prepare for, easily recover from, and adapt to site-relevant climate hazards:

- Flat roofs should have a Solar Reflective Index** of 78 or greater
- Buildings should have green, white, and/or blue roofs to minimize heat island effect and stormwater impact
- Vegetate as much as possible available open space including roofs, balconies, and setbacks.
- Implement Cool Wall facades when possible. "Cool-wall material" must be opaque to sunlight, exhibit an initial solar reflectance of at least 0.60, and exhibit an initial thermal emittance of at least 0.75. (LEED v4.1 Heat Island Mitigation via cool walls pilot credit)
- Include building projections, shading devices, canopies, and overhangs (that do not interfere with tree plantings) to decrease cooling loads and solar heat gain



Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines



ZONING UPDATES

Changes to the zoning and development review process will create a more transparent framework for development and growth that will result in public benefits for the community. These changes will encourage mixed-use growth, with a focus on residential development and affordability; guide growth to the locations that can accommodate additional height and density; and align zoning boundaries with character areas so there is a clear and contextual regulatory framework.

Recommendations

New District Boundaries

- Create new sub-districts that more closely reflect Downtown character area boundaries as defined by the community.
- Continue the Chinatown zoning process and build on the findings of PLAN: Downtown.

Height and density

- Change as-of-right heights to match the scale of Downtown's character areas and planned-for growth.
- Allow taller bonus-heights where density is most appropriate and transitions from high to low areas.
- Require a floor plate reduction for buildings exceeding the height of the surrounding context to reduce the visual impact of taller buildings on the public realm.

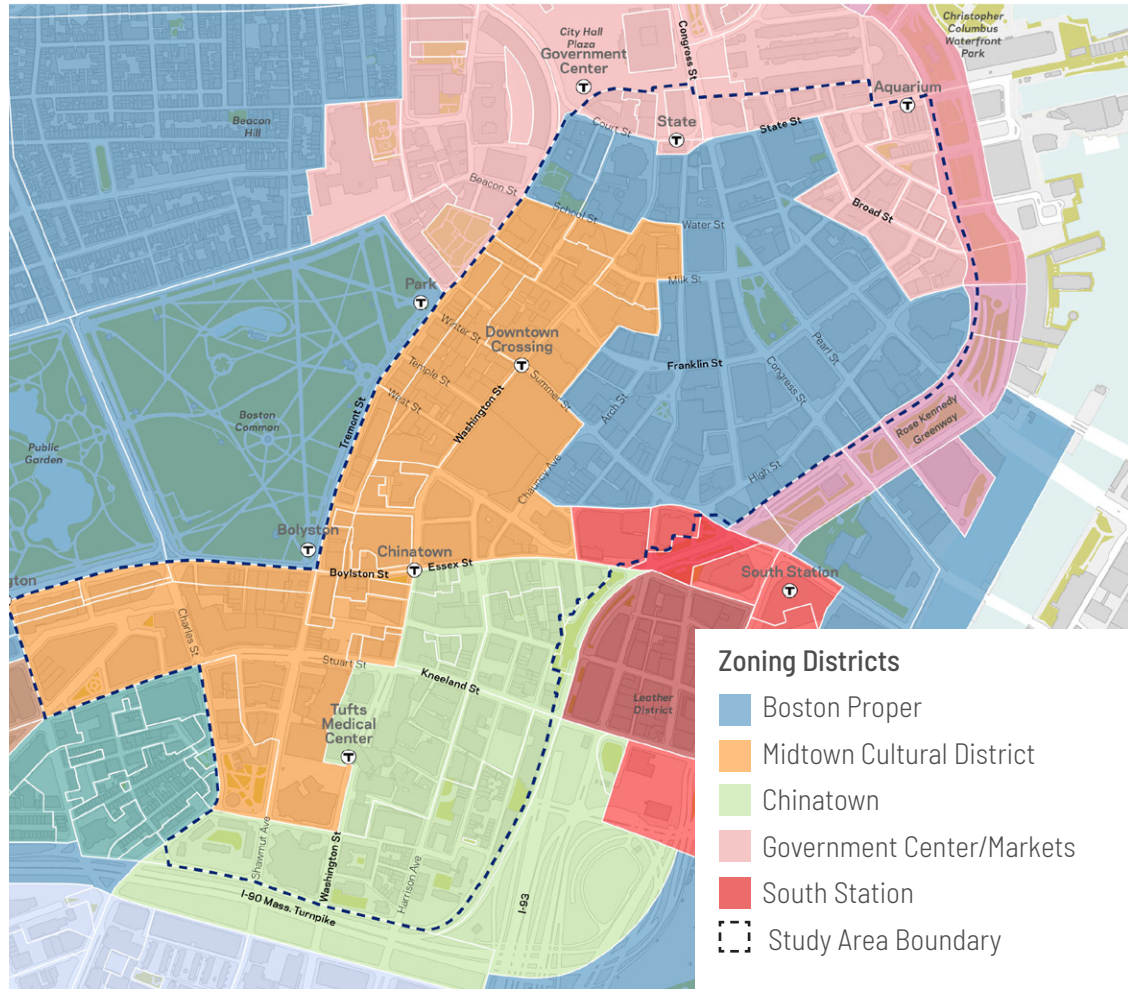
Uses

- Create zoning pathways to streamline residential development, particularly affordable residential development, within Downtown through the office conversion program, the height-bonus program, and base zoning changes.
- Refine inconsistent and prohibitive use definitions and tables in the zoning code to lower barriers for existing and new retail and services, especially on ground floors, and encourage new and diverse businesses and entertainment uses to thrive and expand.
- Ensure existing theaters continue to be prioritized in zoning and development review.

Height-bonus program

- Implement a height-bonus program and public benefit system that streamlines project mitigation, incentivizes mixed-use development where it is most appropriate, and directly funds priority public projects outlined in PLAN: Downtown.

Existing Zoning



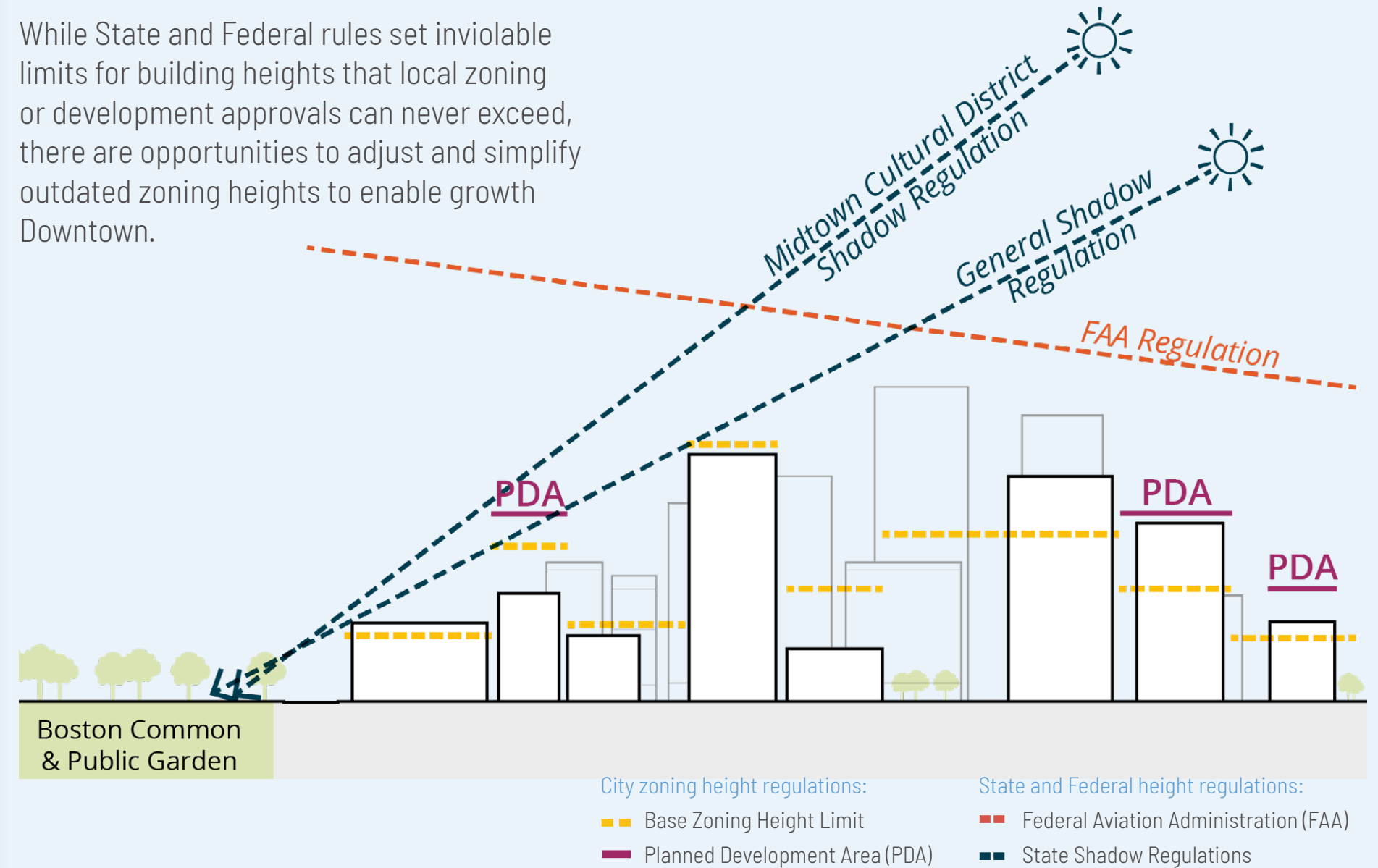
Existing zoning boundaries date back to the 1950's. Over time they have accumulated many small-scale subdistricts in Chinatown, the Midtown Cultural District, as well as Planned Development Areas (PDAs). More than 20 different height limits exist today. This accumulation of zoning districts, PDAs, and height restrictions has resulted in a regulatory context that is difficult to understand and does not effectively promote re-development. This leads to unpredictable distribution of mitigation and benefits across the neighborhood.

Under current zoning, development is primarily regulated by height restrictions under various zoning districts, PDAs, Federal Aviation Administration height limits, and State shadow laws that prohibit new shadows on the Boston Common and the Public Garden at certain times of day.

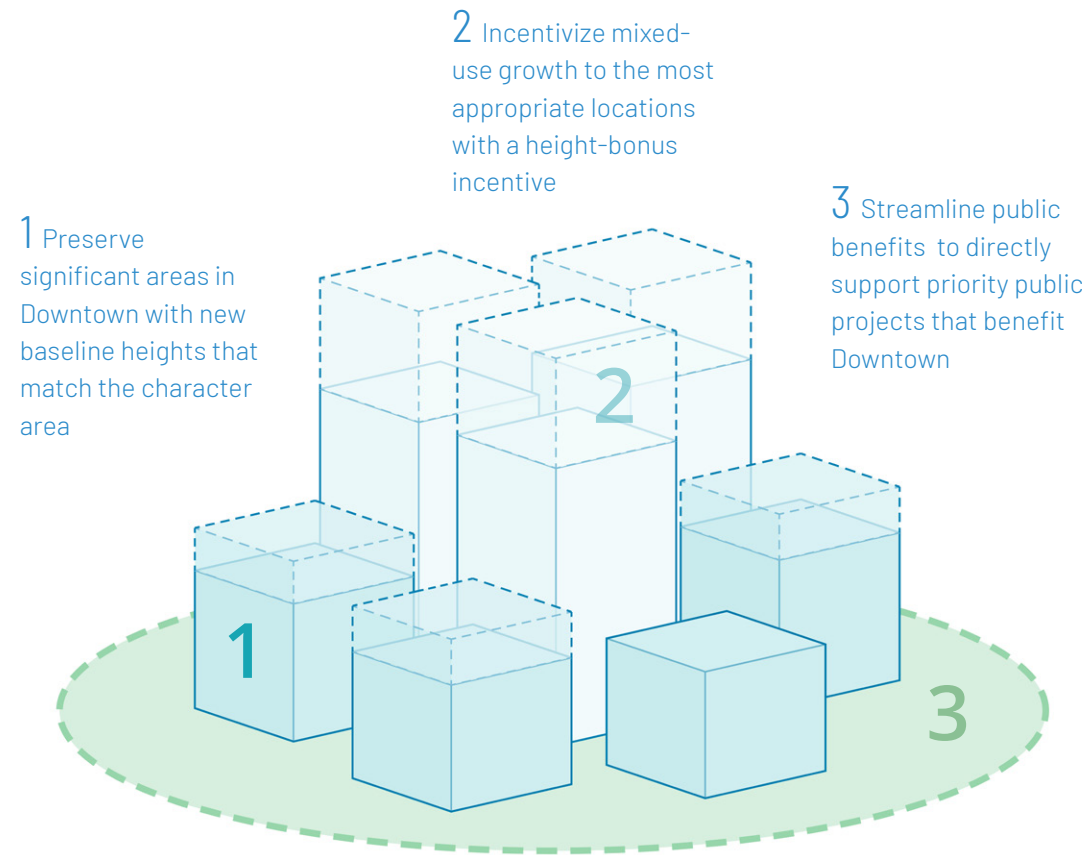
There are two shadow regulations that impact Downtown. The Midtown Cultural District and the General Shadow Regulations. Both are based on the Boston Common Shadow Law and Public Garden Shadow Law. Midtown Cultural District Shadow Regulations apply to buildings in the Midtown Cultural District and are slightly more permissive than General Shadow Regulations, the latter intersects with FAA regulations at which point FAA regulations become more restrictive.

While projects cannot exceed fixed FAA and shadow restrictions, development rarely conforms to "as-of-right" zoning resulting in large projects often being negotiated on a case-by-case basis, with PDAs being utilized as the preferred zoning mechanism.

While State and Federal rules set inviolable limits for building heights that local zoning or development approvals can never exceed, there are opportunities to adjust and simplify outdated zoning heights to enable growth Downtown.



Zoning Recommendations



Height-Bonus Program

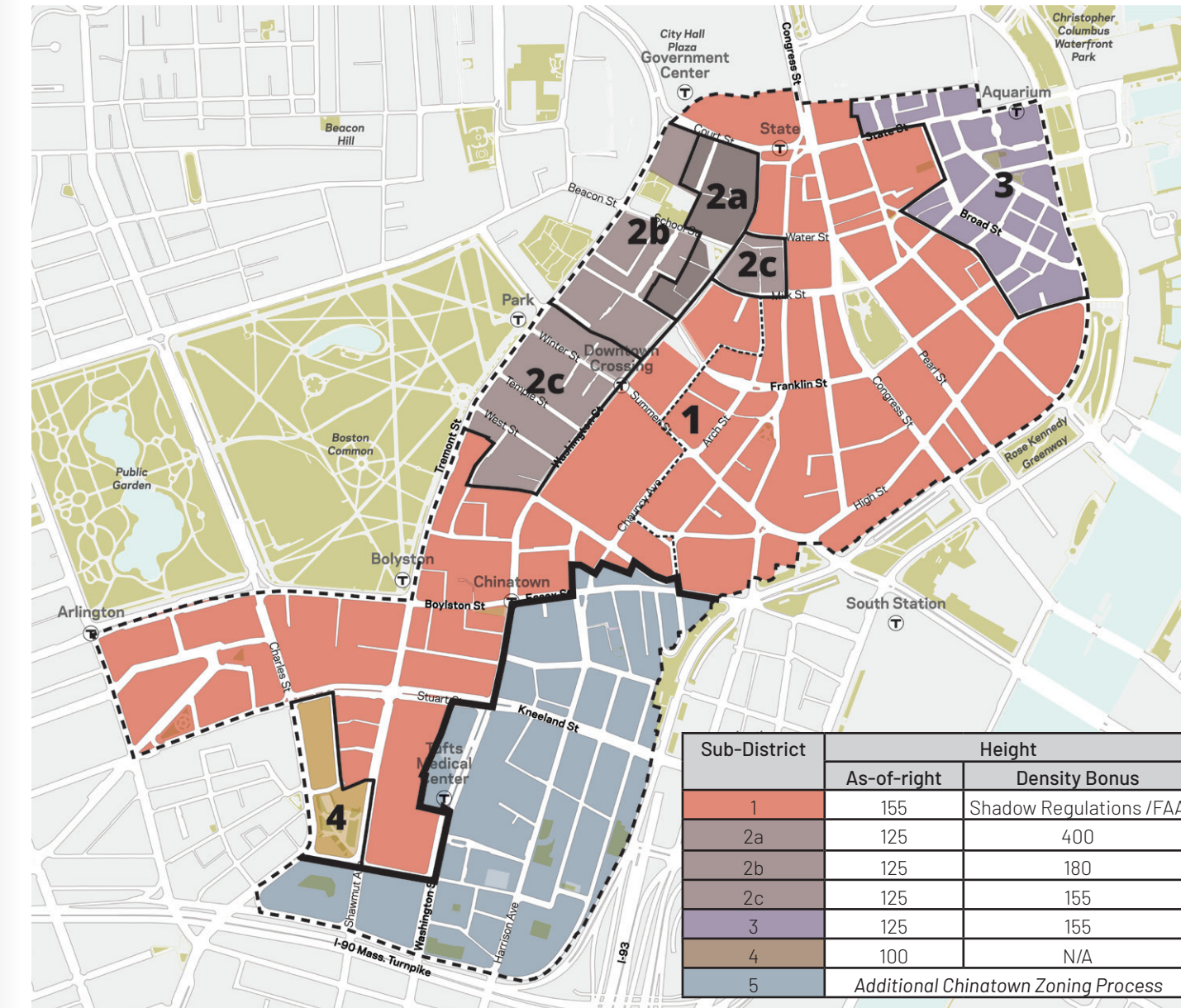
Throughout the planning process, public, private, and resident stakeholders voiced interest in a development process that is more predictable and consistent, as well as one that could be leveraged to support long-standing needs Downtown that not one project can solve.

The proposed regulatory framework aims at increasing predictability and encouraging mixed-use growth while preserving and investing in the community and places that make Downtown unique. The core of this process will be a streamlined, simplified height-bonus program that allows the City to channel investment into projects that benefit Downtown.

With new consistent and fair baseline and bonus heights, developers can mitigate additional density up to established clear maximum building heights in exchange for contribution to a pre-established fund for Downtown projects. Density bonus contributions will be calculated based on the amount of additional square footage the developer is seeking. Through the density bonus fund, revenue will be used to directly support projects, organized by public benefit categories, that benefit Downtown.

The public benefit categories established in this planning process include: [Open Space and Public Realm Improvements](#), [Local Transit and Mobility Infrastructure](#), [Climate and Resilience Infrastructure](#), [Small Business Support and Retail Activation](#), [Historic Preservation Investment](#).

Proposed Zoning Districts

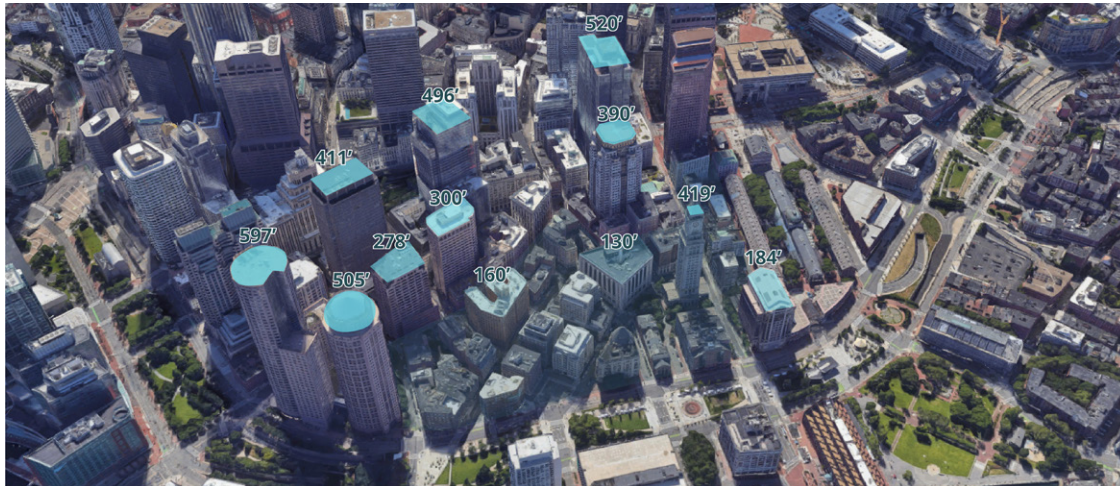


Create new zoning sub-districts that more closely reflect Downtown character area boundaries as defined by the community.

The proposed zoning districts simplify existing zoning boundaries and create a new Downtown District and Chinatown Cultural District with sub-districts that relate to the height and character of the area. The Downtown District contains the 4 sub-districts: (1) Downtown Crossing, Theatre District, and Financial District, (2) Ladder Blocks, (3) Wharf District, and (4) Bay Village.

Create the Chinatown zoning process and build on the findings of PLAN: Downtown.

It became clear during the PLAN: Downtown planning process that a future **Chinatown Zoning Study** is needed to address the specific needs of the neighborhood as a vital cultural and community hub. The additional zoning process will continue to refine the Chinatown recommendations that have been explored throughout the PLAN: Downtown process including updated height restrictions, small business support, and affordable housing regulations to help guide growth.



Building heights step down noticeably between the Financial District and older Wharf District buildings



There are clusters of taller buildings at either end of the Ladder Blocks

Height and Density

Change as-of-right heights to match the scale of Downtown's character areas

The as-of-right heights proposed in the more historic districts of the Ladder Blocks, Wharf District, and Bay Village are lower than the 155' as-of-right height proposed in Downtown Crossing, Theatre District, and Financial District.

Allow taller bonus-heights where density is most appropriate

Bonus-heights that are a part of the height-bonus program are maximized in subdistrict 1 (Downtown Crossing, Theatre District, and Financial District) to the limit of Shadow and FAA regulations. In other districts they help transition new development from existing high to low areas- most notably in subdistrict 2 (Ladder Blocks) where heights step down from the cluster of existing taller buildings on the northern end of Washington Street down to Boston Common.

Require a floor plate reduction for buildings exceeding the height of the surrounding context to reduce the visual impact of taller buildings on the public realm

The maximum floor plate area for floors above the trigger for additional height (baseline height) must be reduced by 15% for non-residential buildings and 10% for residential buildings. The percent reduction can be averaged above all plates above baseline height, but no single floor plate size can exceed the floor plate size at baseline height. Buildings with a footprint less than or equal to 6,000 gsf would be exempt from this requirement.

Uses

Refine inconsistent and prohibitive use definitions and tables in the zoning code to lower barriers for existing and new retail and services, especially on ground floors, and encourage new and diverse businesses and entertainment uses to thrive and expand.

Existing use definitions and tables are inconsistent across districts creating obstacles for new retail and entertainment uses that could help activate the streetscape. In some areas narrow definitions for retail prohibit coffee shops or restaurants that have take-out or yoga studios. Lowering these regulatory barriers will create more flexibility for new and diverse businesses to thrive, expand, and fill vacant spaces consistently across Downtown.

Ensure existing theaters continue to be prioritized in zoning and development review

Theater uses are currently protected within the Midtown Cultural District and Chinatown. Protection provisions should continue in the new districts to ensure remaining theater spaces are preserved.

DOWNTOWN OFFICE CONVERSION

The conversion of underutilized office buildings to other uses is one strategy that, combined with other policy actions, can revitalize Boston's Downtown, advance sustainable development, and create more housing in the urban core.

Rising office and retail vacancy rates in Downtown Boston, precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, present a unique opportunity for Boston. It's older office buildings are less desirable to office tenants, but have locations and often smaller floorplate sizes well suited to adaptive use to productive uses, such as housing.

The physical and financial challenges of converting office space to other uses can be immense. Feasibility is highly dependent on several factors specific to an individual building, including its physical attributes and location, the construction cost to convert, current building occupancy and performance, as well as broader market conditions and regulatory requirements.

The Downtown Office Conversion Study was initiated in conjunction with PLAN: Downtown to identify ways to repopulate and reactivate underutilized office space in Downtown through actionable land use and funding strategies. The Office Conversion Study determined that the Ladder Blocks, Financial District, and

Wharf District within the PLAN: Downtown study area have a high concentration of potentially viable office buildings based on their physical attributes. The Financial District has the greatest need for more diverse mix of uses to activate the area, while the Ladder Blocks and Wharf District possess some of Downtown's most historic structures.

The Office Conversion Study helped inform the City's "Downtown Office to Residential Conversion Pilot Program," announced on July 13th, 2023. The public-private partnership program offers a tax abatement and a streamlined approval process to incentivize the conversion of underutilized office buildings to residential uses Downtown.

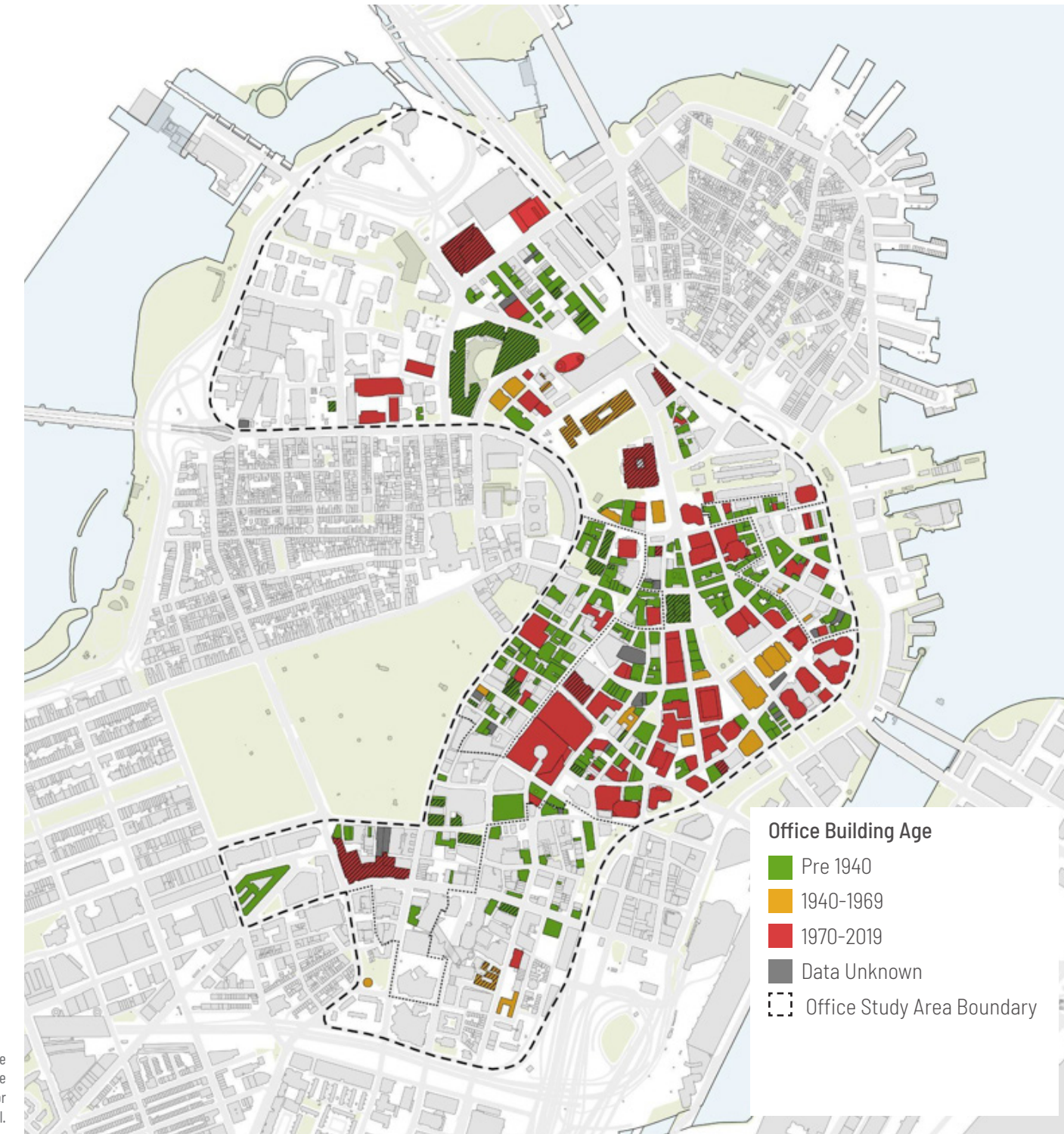
The program incorporates a combination of policy tools that can be used as market conditions change to encourage the conversions of different building types. These include tax tools- reducing property taxes for a period following conversion- and process tools- lower barriers for conversions with expedited approvals and development process improvements.

Now is a critical moment to provide the tools needed for outdated office spaces to adapt and become new productive uses, while supporting the vibrancy of the city's business districts as Boston's center of commerce. Even just two or three office buildings converting Downtown would be a significant step in creating a more active and revitalized Downtown.



Downtown already features successful examples of office conversion such as the Godfrey Hotel (top) office to hotel conversion in the Ladder Blocks or the 120 Milk St. (bottom) office to residential conversion.

Downtown has a mix of older Class B and C office buildings. Older pre-1940 buildings often have smaller narrow floorplates that are suitable for conversion to residential.



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PRIOR PLAN SUMMARIES



Revive and Reimagine - Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown

Published September 2022

This report centered on strategies the City can use to drive the economic recovery and revitalization of Downtown. The report included a detailed analytical baseline to understand how the pandemic affected foot traffic and economic activity in the downtown region. Through a variety of policy recommendations, it presented the challenge of post-pandemic recovery as an opportunity for the City to reimagine Downtown Boston as a more diverse and vibrant neighborhood. Two priority actions recommended by the report included the relaunch of PLAN: Downtown and supporting office conversions.



Imagine Boston 2030: A Plan for the Future of Boston

Published July 2017

Extensive community engagement and studies identified major initiatives that would benefit all Bostonians. It identified key areas for action such as: creating a sustainable waterfront, improving access to historically underserved neighborhoods, expanding and intensifying neighborhoods to provide more jobs and housing. This report specifically encouraged mixed-use growth in the urban core - Downtown Boston.

Planning Context Prior Plan Summaries



Go Boston 2030: Imagining our Transportation Future

Published March 2017

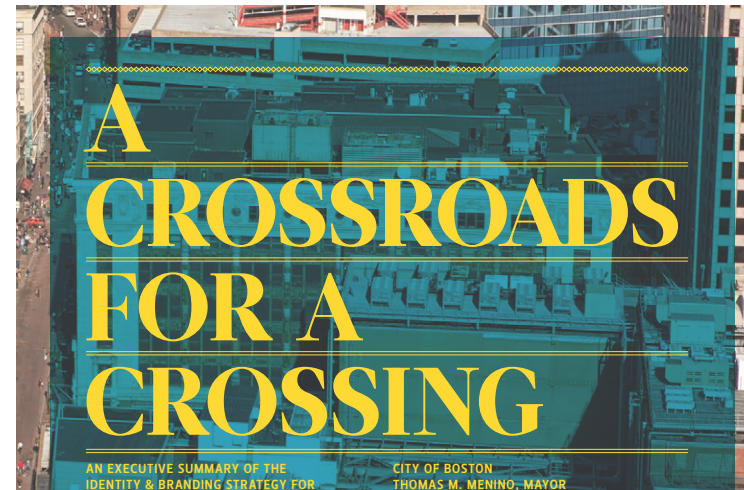
This plan looks for ways that the City can provide opportunities for more trips to be taken by public transit, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare the transportation system for severe weather. It aims to reduce collisions on every street through education, enforcement, and designs that reallocate street space to prioritize moving people safely rather than faster - it will prioritize travel space to be equitably shared by every person who rides transit, drives, walks, and bikes. The report begins to delineate how greater interconnectivity between neighborhoods can benefit all. Downtown must embody these goals.



Climate Ready Boston

Published December 2016

The report suggests several resilience initiatives for the Downtown: outreach to vulnerable populations and expansion of Boston's small business preparedness program, land use planning for future flood protection systems, infrastructure adaptation planning, development of financing strategies and governance structures, adapting buildings, including incorporating climate change into area plans and zoning amendments, promoting climate adaptation in the development pipeline and with municipal facilities, and educating property owners local involvement in design and decision-making.



A Crossroads for a Crossing

Published July 2008

The plan articulates a vision for Downtown Crossing: “Downtown Crossing is Boston’s meeting place. It’s an urban neighborhood where commerce and leisure intersect and a diverse mix of people are encouraged to innovate, interact, and explore.” The most relevant core principles include: create social spaces, capitalize on the distinct character of unique areas, foster mixed-use development, promote Downtown Crossing as a meeting place in the city for play and work; prioritize the pedestrian experience; and celebrate innovation in commercial uses and local diversity.



Resilient Boston: An Equitable and Connected City

Published July 2017

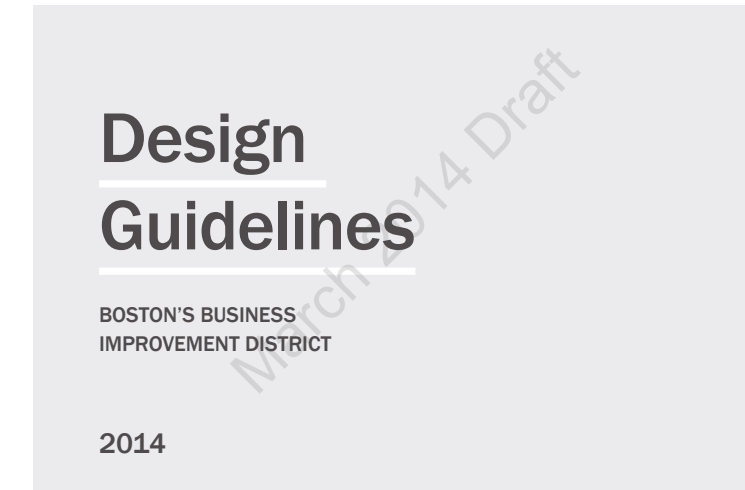
Resilient Boston seeks to address the racial equity threats facing the City of Boston and is organized around 4 long-term visions for the City: a Boston that reflects upon its history and confronts present realities of racism in daily life, an inclusive and collaborative City government culture that offers residents a meaningful role in decision-making processes, access to economic and social pathways that support closing the wealth gap, increased connectivity of communities of color, while adequately preparing for threats to infrastructure used by all Bostonians.



Economic Equity and Inclusion Agenda

Published February 2016

This agenda articulates the City’s values of economic inclusion and equity across City departments and provides a detailed overview of the ongoing programs, policies, and initiatives to address racial and economic disparities in Boston. It provides context for the City’s work across four themes: income and employment, wealth creation, business development, and economic mobility. Notably it introduces a new initiative to support women entrepreneurs.



Downtown Boston Business Improvement Guidelines

Published January 2014

The draft plan analyzes the public realm and provides recommendations for improvements. Some key recommendations include: subdividing large spaces to address a human scale, using patterns on the street to unify space, utilizing pavers and paving materials that provide more detailed patterns, and ensuring smooth paths of travel that are at least 8 feet wide. The plan includes specific detailed recommendations concerning tactical interventions, landscaping and planting, street furniture, infrastructure and specific pedestrian realms in the downtown.

DOWNTOWN OFFICE CONVERSION STUDY



Downtown Office Conversion Study

Introduction | Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to identify ways to repopulate and reactivate underutilized office space in Downtown Boston to create a more vibrant neighborhood.

The BPDA contracted HR&A Advisors, Inc., working with Utile Inc. and PM&C, to assess the immediate and long-term opportunities of converting vacant office space Downtown and **identify actionable funding and land use strategies to help conversions.**

The study was conducted in conjunction with the BPDA's planning initiative, PLAN: Downtown. It furthers PLAN: Downtown's goals to grow, enhance, and preserve Downtown while balancing the importance of a dynamic mix of uses, sustainable development, a vibrant public realm, and affordability.

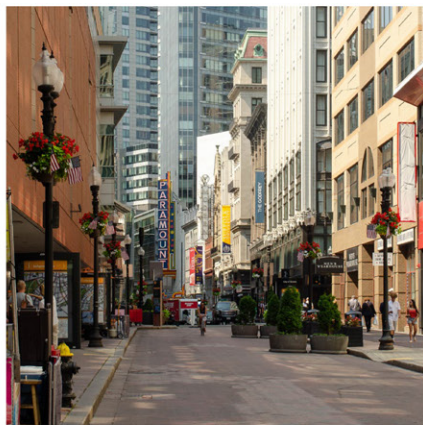


Introduction | **Downtown Revitalization**

Office conversion is one tool that can be utilized in combination with other City actions to revitalize Boston's Downtown.



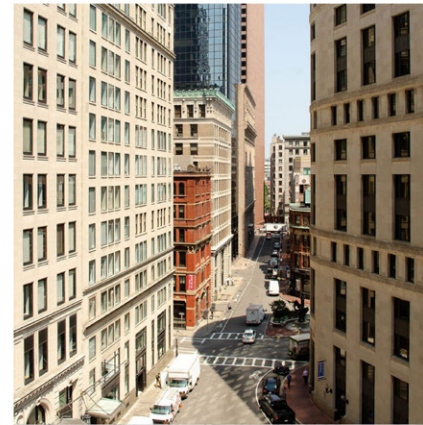
Respond to **the changing streetscape and work environment** impacted by the pandemic



Encourage diverse uses to drive foot traffic throughout the day and create a more **vibrant urban core**



Achieve sustainability goals through the **adaptive reuse of buildings**



Leverage building typologies specific to Boston's Downtown

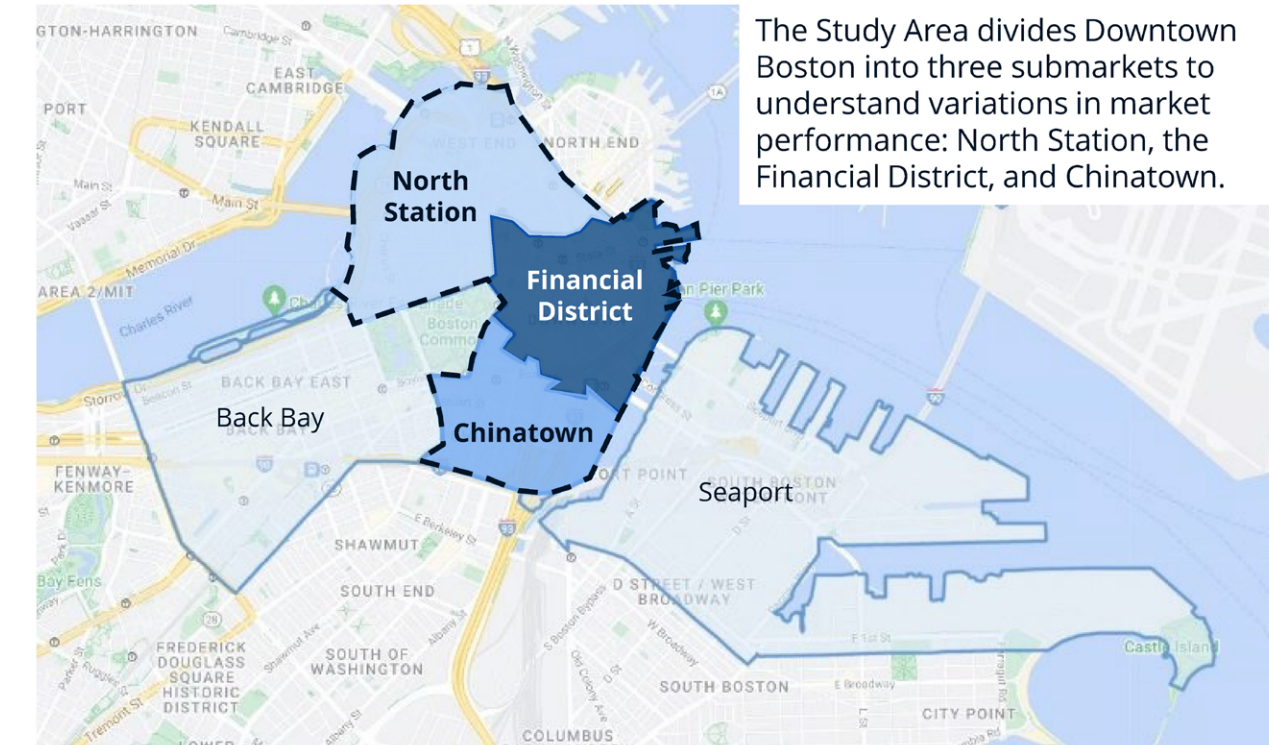
← **Responsive to the City's policy objectives** →

Market Analysis | **Study Area and Key Questions**

HR&A's analysis uses North Station, the Financial District, and Chinatown to represent the "Study Area". The Study Area will be compared to the Back Bay and Seaport.

The study is driven by the following questions:

- How is the **existing office stock** performing?
- Is the **current mix of uses** in Downtown Boston appropriate or can it be altered to create a stronger downtown?
- Why aren't office conversions currently happening at scale? **What are the barriers preventing developers from converting office space to other uses?**
- What **policy tools** can be used to spur conversions while achieving the **goal of creating a dense, mixed-use development downtown?**



Market Analysis | Key Findings: Overall

The Study Area does not have the desired mix of uses nor quality of office to compete with neighboring submarkets. Conversion of existing stock could make it as desirable.

- Offices are faring better in the Seaport and Back Bay, demonstrating **a flight to quality both in terms of building class and neighborhood quality and amenities. Within the Study Area, office performance has been weak since 2019** with rising vacancy and low rents.
- The **residential market has performed very well in Boston and the Study Area** in the past four years, with demand for more. When residential is offered in the study area, it is quickly absorbed, demonstrating demand for more residential if it could be delivered.
- **The hotel market is rebounding well**, although still below pre-pandemic levels as business travel has yet to recover. The Financial District in particular has an appropriate mix of tourist attractions, historic assets, and access to transit to support more hotel deliveries.
- After an uptick in leasing and development activity, **the lab market started slowing down in 2022Q3**, with increasing vacancy rates and lower-than-expected absorption of new deliveries. Boston (with concentration of lab space in Seaport and Fenway) lags the Cambridge and suburban submarkets. **In the near-term, lab space/life sciences is unlikely to be viable in the Study Area.** However, this needs to be verified via developer roundtables, stakeholder interviews, and financial analysis to account for data limitations.

Market Analysis | Key Findings: Office Market

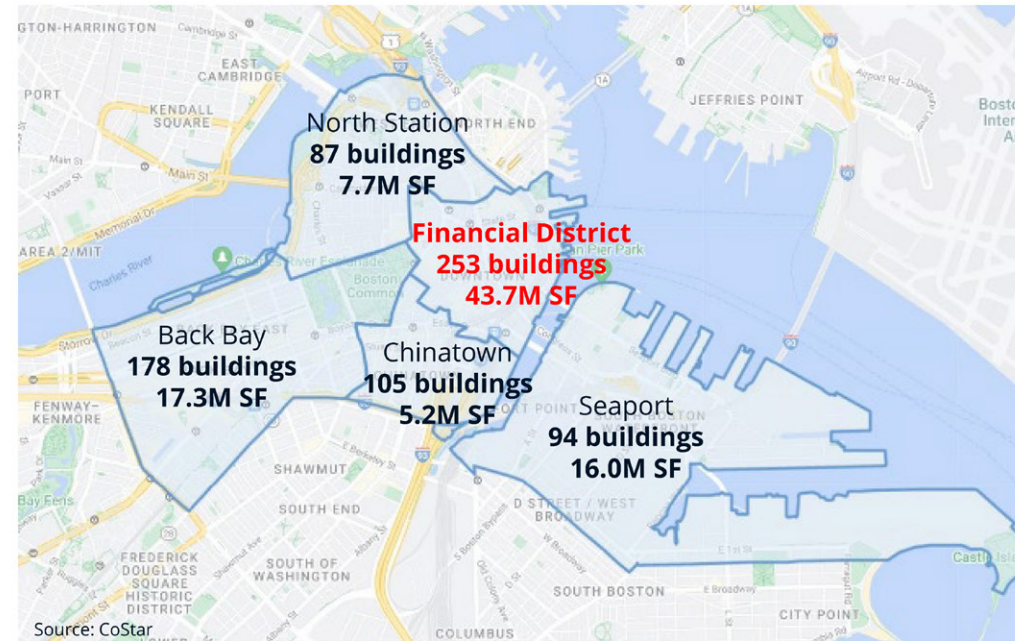
The office market has seen a flight to quality not just in terms of building class but also neighborhood quality and amenities.

- Vacancy is lowest and rents are highest in the submarkets that have a strong mix of uses and newer buildings, especially with respect to office.
- Within the study area, only North Station has experienced any new development since 2011. The Seaport is showing signs of market resilience because almost all new office deliveries have been in the Seaport.
- Although Back Bay has a similar mix of office building class as the other submarkets, it has a more diverse mix of uses which makes it an attractive location (and is reflected in a lower vacancy rate than in the Study Area).
- While the study area appears to have a competitive share of residential, the Financial District, which is struggling the most in terms of office rents and vacancy, has very little residential.
- The desire for both new office product and a healthy mix of uses is demonstrated in North Station, which is the strongest office market within the study area and includes a healthy mix of residential and new office product.

Market Analysis | Key Findings: Office Market

Comprised primarily of office buildings, the Financial District lacks the diversity of uses that drives strong office market performance and vibrancy in other submarkets.

- The Study Area as a whole has a diverse mix of uses: 58% office, 38% residential, and 4% hotel. However, the Financial District, which is struggling the most in terms of office rents and vacancy, is disproportionately made up of office buildings.
- The Financial District is the largest office submarket in Boston by a substantial margin.** The Study Area has 445 office buildings compared to 178 in Back Bay and 94 in the Seaport.
- Conversely, the Financial District has the **smallest residential submarket** – 875 units compared to nearly 2,000 in Chinatown and Seaport, and almost 5,000 in Back Bay.

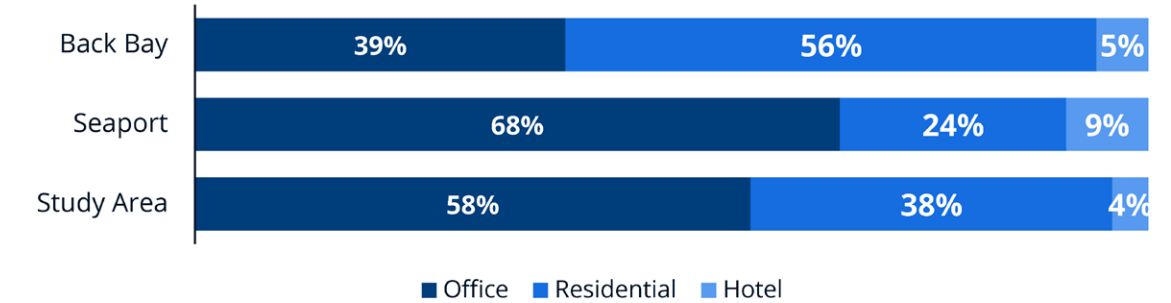


Market Analysis | Key Findings: Office Market

The Study Area does not have the desired mix of uses nor quality of office to compete with neighboring submarkets. Conversion of existing stock could make it as desirable.

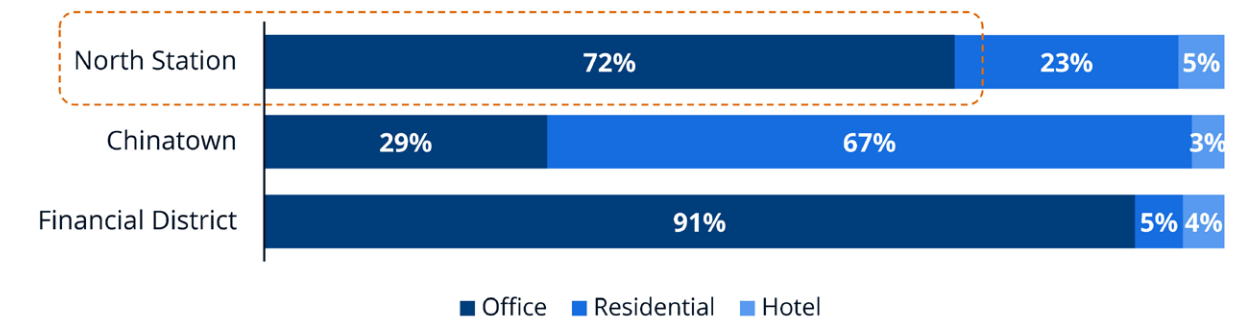
- The Study Area as a whole has a relatively diverse mix of uses, although it has a lower proportion of hotels than the Seaport. Vacancy is lowest and rents are highest in **submarkets that have a strong mix of uses and newer buildings. This includes Seaport and Back Bay, as well as North Station.**
- The desire for both Class A office space and a healthy mix of uses is demonstrated in **North Station**, which is the strongest office market within the Study Area and includes new office product as well as a **(relatively) diverse mix of uses.**

Building Stock by Typology (2022)



Source: CoStar, CBRE

Building Stock by Typology within Study Area (2022)



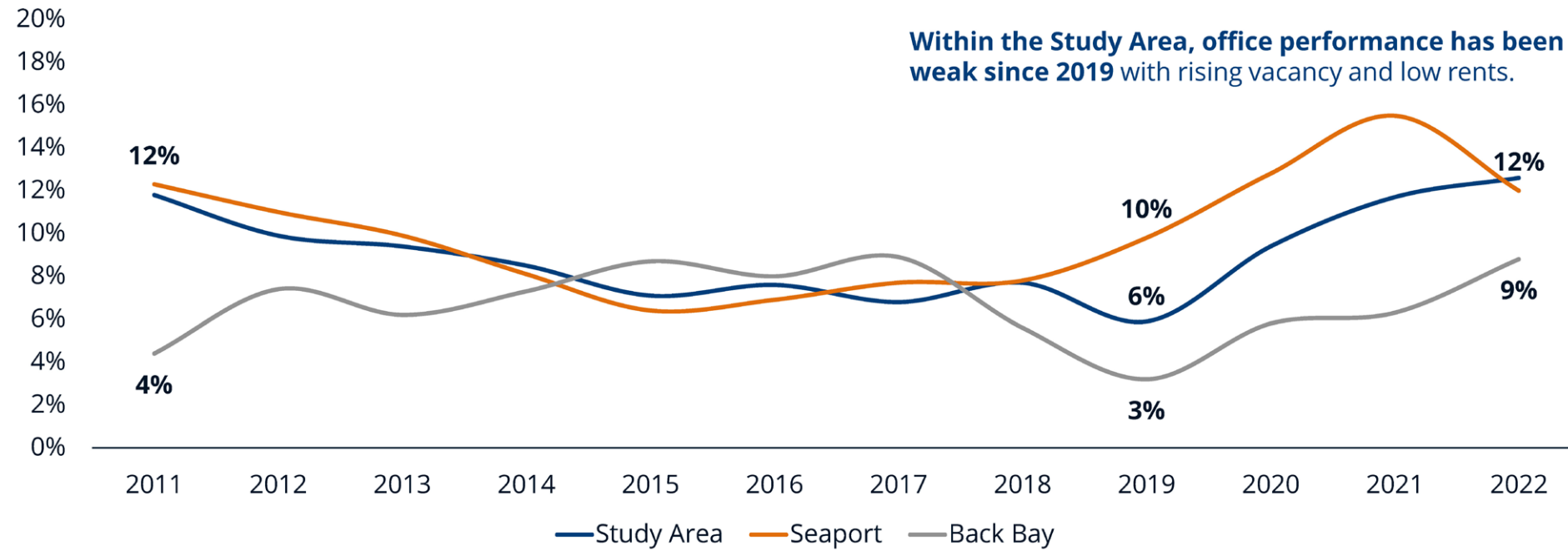
Source: CoStar, Note: Not enough data to estimate lab market size by submarket

Market Analysis | Key Findings: Office Market

Offices are faring better in the Seaport and Back Bay, demonstrating a flight to quality both in terms of building class and neighborhood quality and amenities.

Office Submarket Vacancy (2011 - 2022)

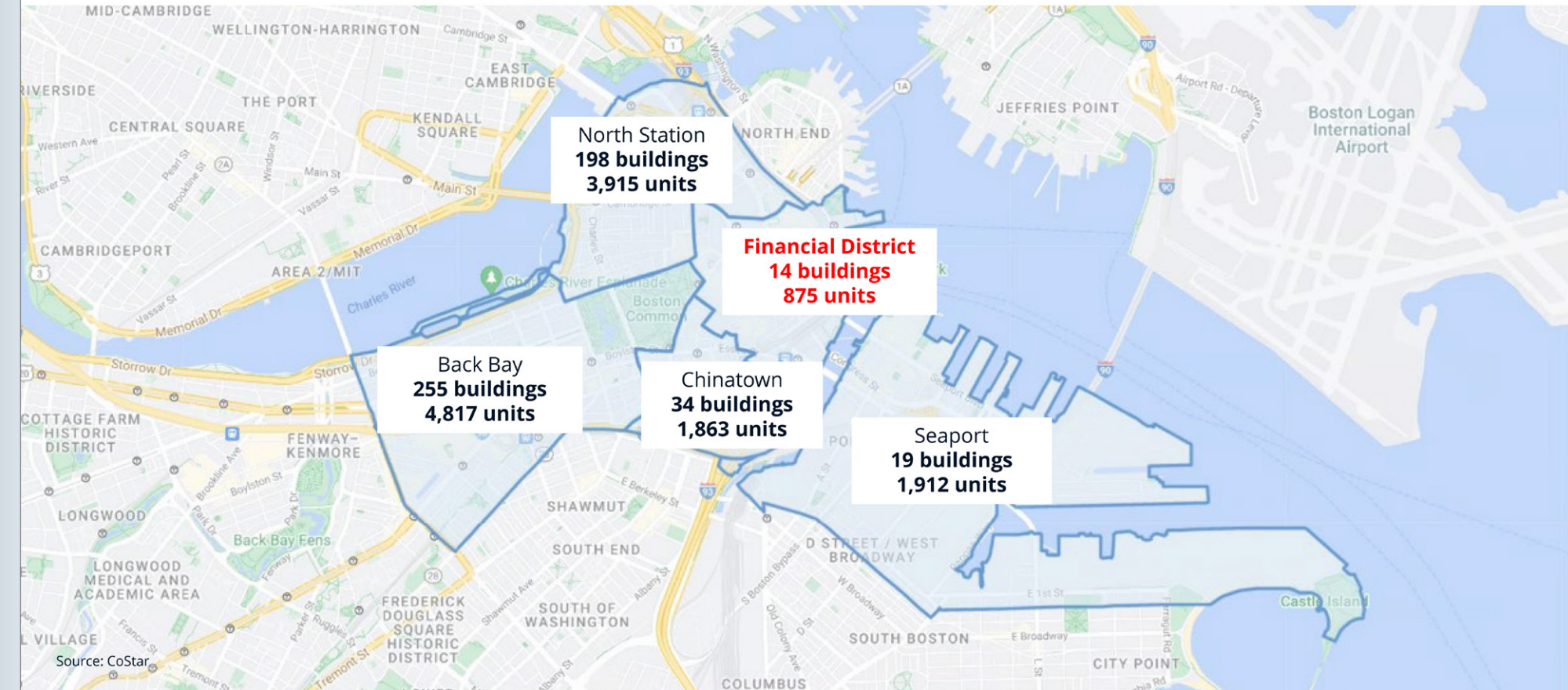
Within the Study Area, office performance has been weak since 2019 with rising vacancy and low rents.



Source: CoStar

Market Analysis | Key Findings: Residential Market

The Financial District currently has a major shortage of residential units compared to surrounding neighborhoods.

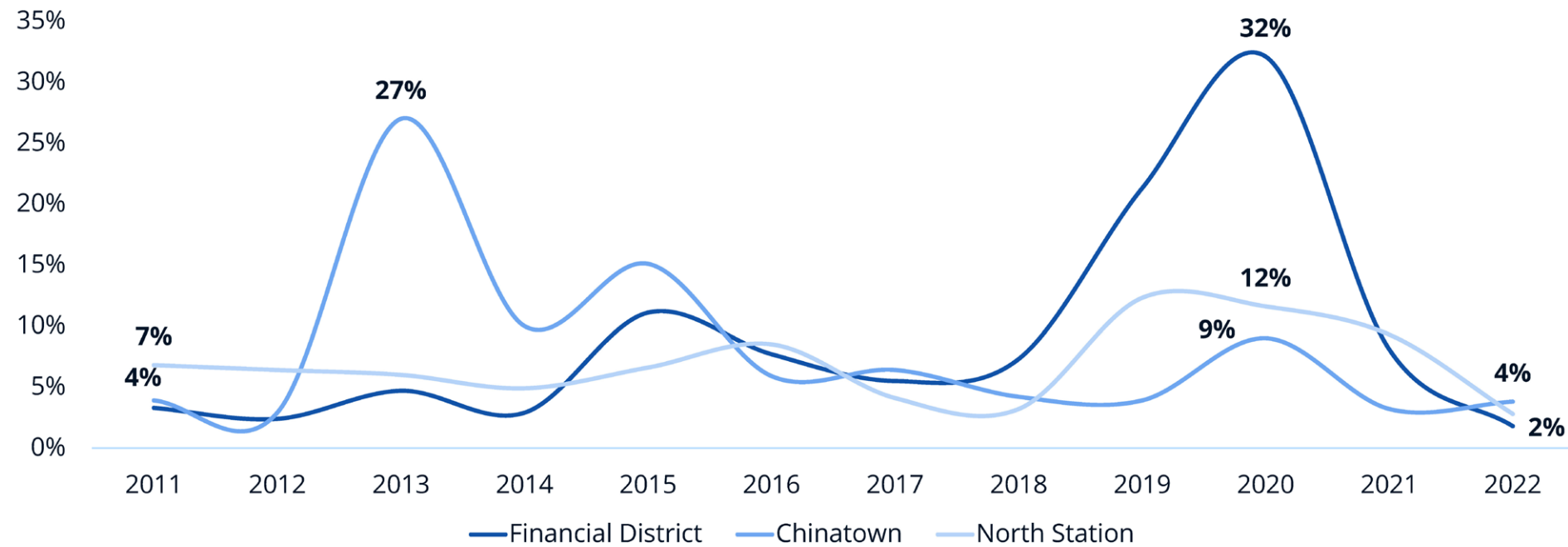


Source: CoStar

Market Analysis | Key Findings: Residential Market

Within the Study Area, the Financial District saw the highest pandemic-induced vacancy rate but has shown the most robust recovery since, indicating strong demand for more housing.

Residential Vacancy within the Study Area (2011 - 2022)

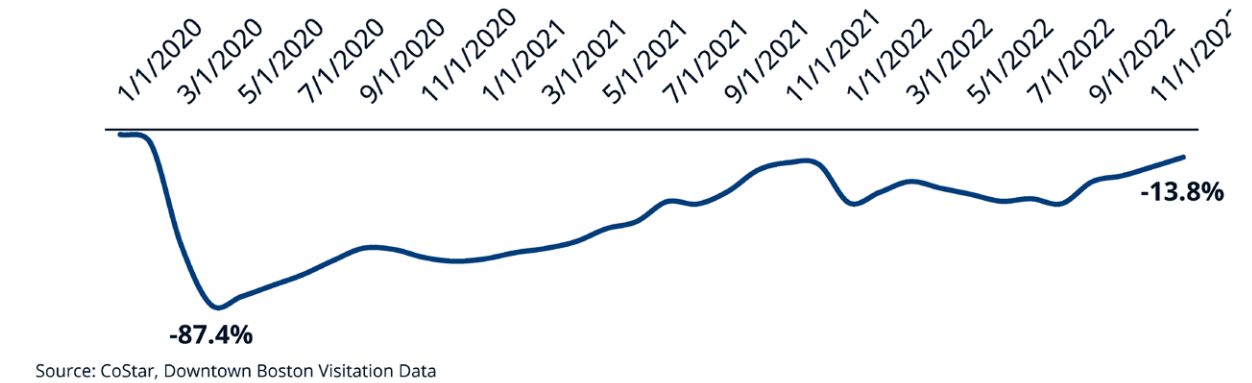


Source: CoStar

Market Analysis | Key Findings: Hotel Market

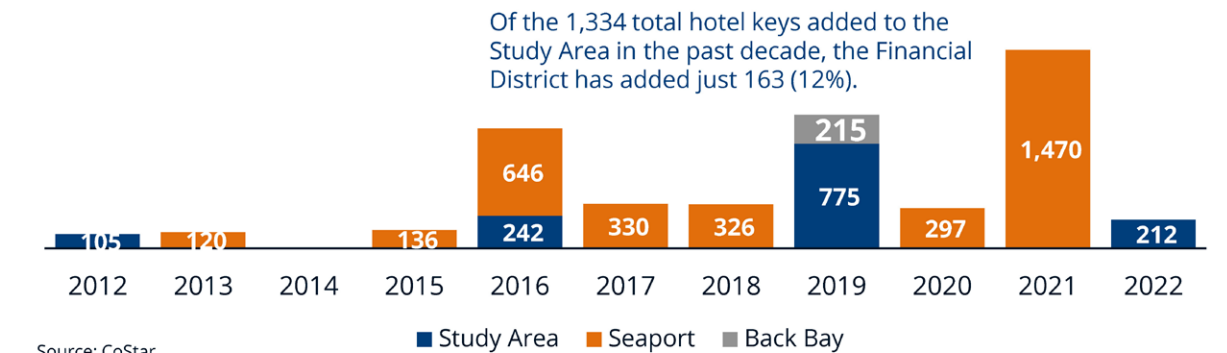
The hotel market is rebounding well, although still below pre-pandemic levels as business travel has yet to recover (as of November 2022).

Percent change in Visitation



Source: CoStar, Downtown Boston Visitation Data

Hotel Deliveries (2012 - 2022)



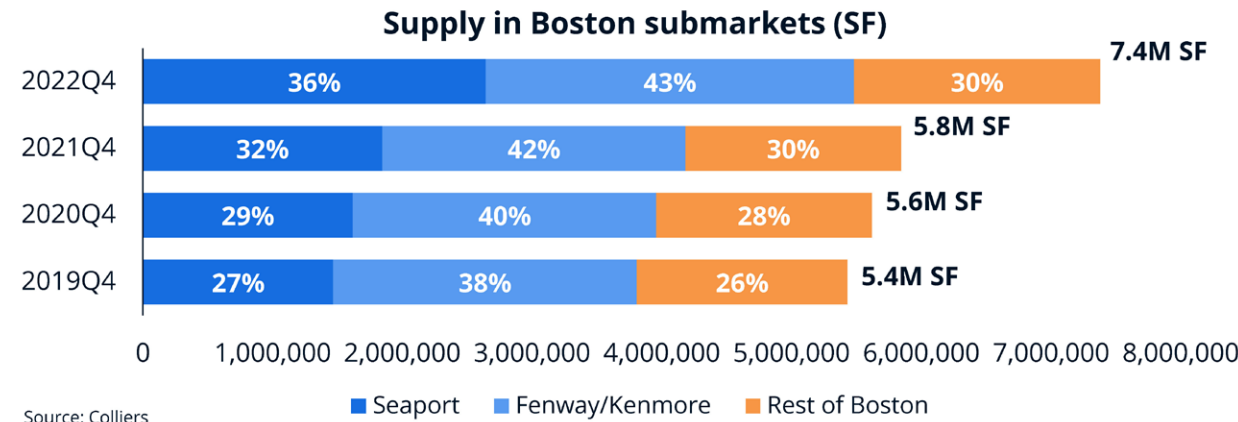
Source: CoStar

- Monthly visitation to Boston was down over 87% at the start of the pandemic. Visitation has recovered rapidly but is still down by nearly 14%.
- The Financial District in particular has an appropriate mix of tourist attractions, historic assets, and access to transit to support more hotel deliveries.
- The Study Area lags Back Bay and Seaport in the number of hotel keys and has lagged the Seaport in new hotel development over the seven years.

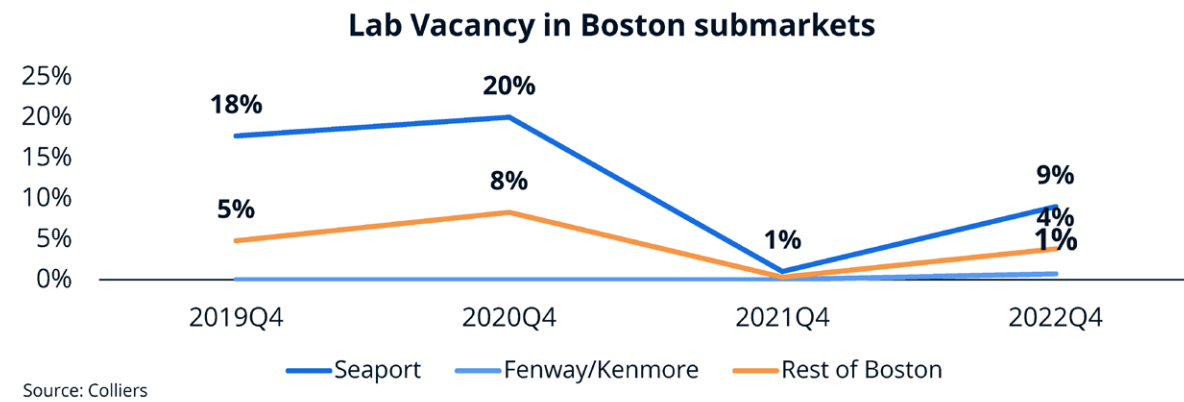
Market Analysis | Key Findings: Lab Market

A large amount of new supply and softening demand, combined with macroeconomic headwinds have led to a slowdown in the lab market since Q4 2022, across all submarkets.

- Within Boston, the **Seaport and Fenway/Kenmore house the bulk of lab space**, and consistently added new supply from 2019 through 2022. **From 2021-22, the Seaport submarket led the supply increase in Boston**, accounting for more than half of the market's supply (800K SF and 1.5M SF respectively).



- After an uptick in leasing and development activity, **the lab market started slowing down in 2022Q3**, with increasing vacancy rates and lower-than-expected absorption of new deliveries. Boston (with concentration of lab space in Seaport and Fenway) lags the Cambridge and suburban submarkets. **In the near-term, lab space/life sciences is unlikely to be viable in the Study Area.**

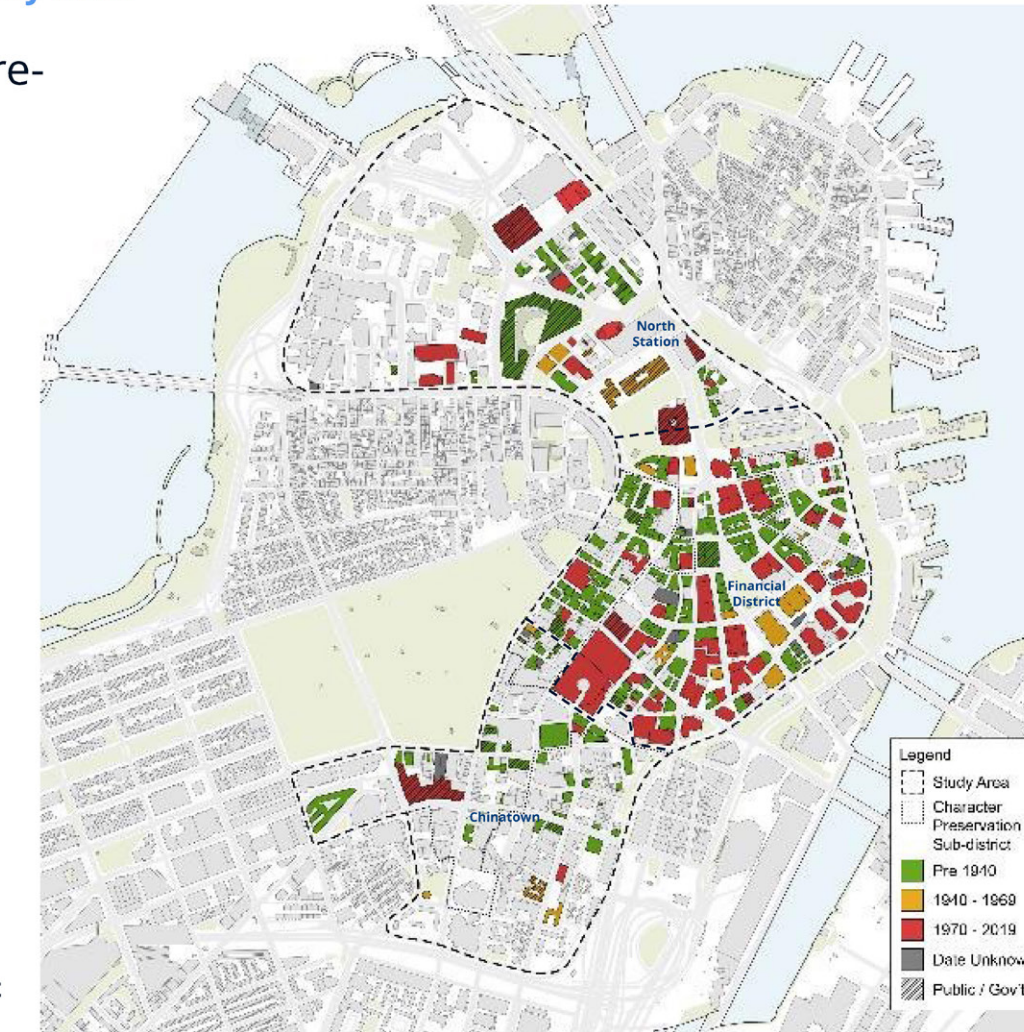


Building Inventory Analysis | Office Floorplates in Study Area

The majority of office buildings were built pre-1940 or post-1970, with the latter primarily comprised of large floorplates (>15,000 SF).

To assess conversion feasibility, the Office Conversion Study created an **inventory of office buildings in the Study Area** using the City of Boston's assessment data in conjunction with a 3D model of the city. The building inventory was sorted by age and floorplate size.

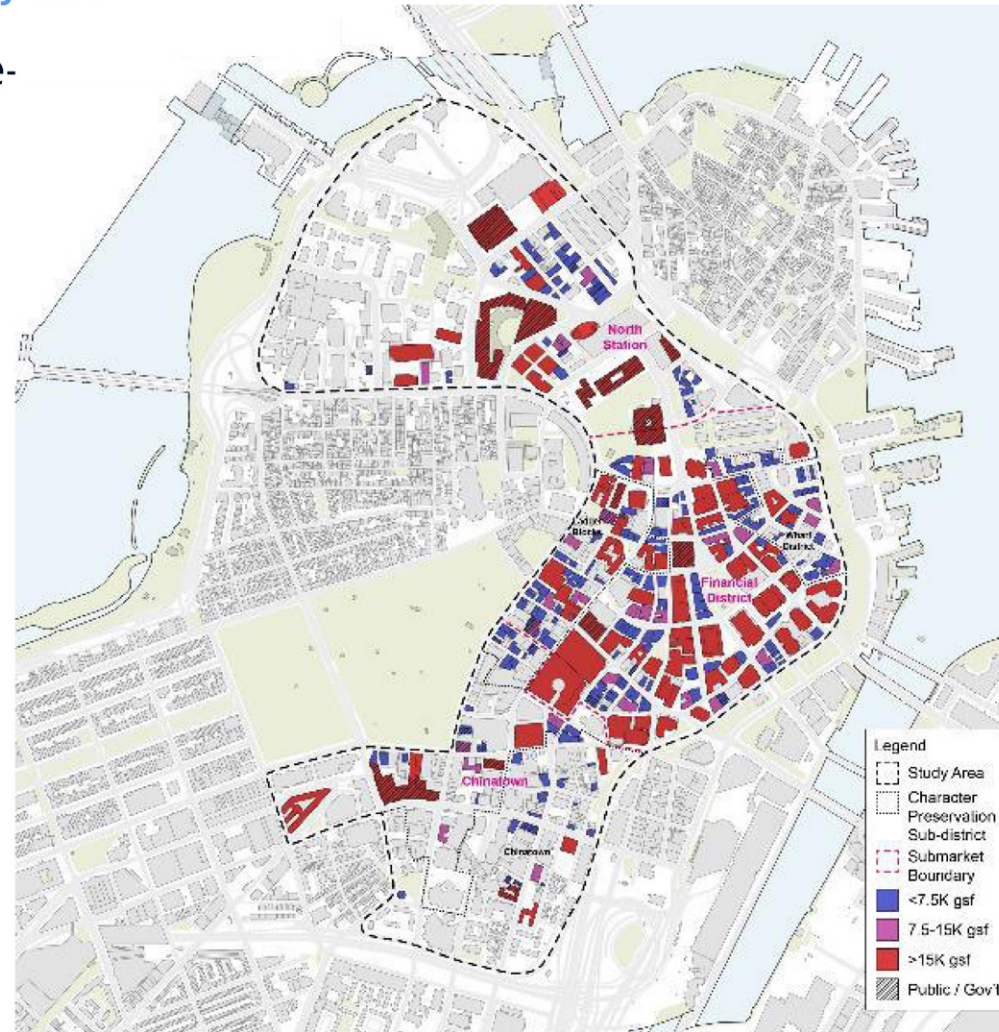
Year Built	Count
Pre-1940	245 count
1940-1969	26 count
1970-2019	84 count
Unknown	25 count
Total	380 count



Building Inventory Analysis | Office Floorplates in Study Area

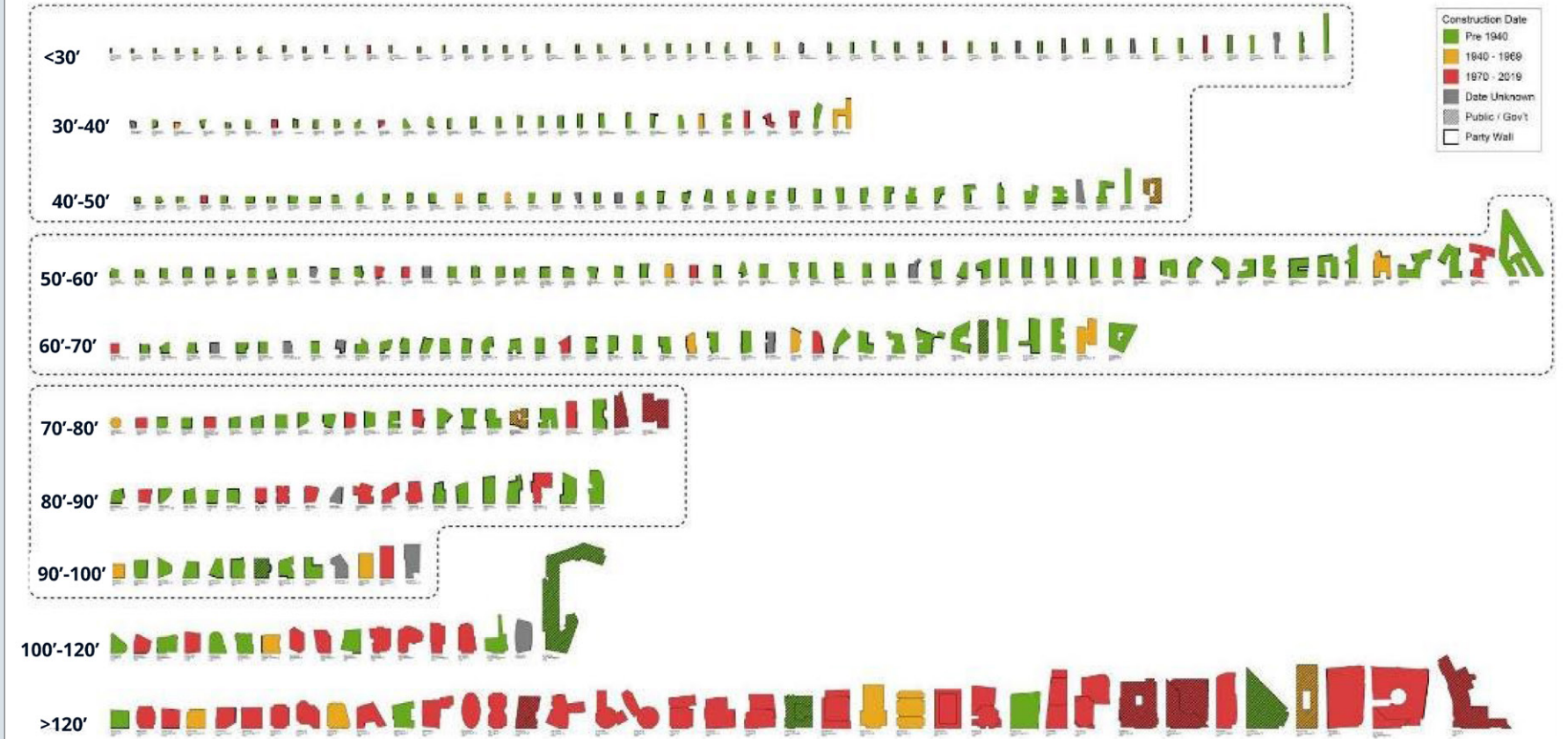
The majority of office buildings were built pre-1940 or post-1970, with the latter primarily comprised of large floorplates (>15,000 SF).

Count of buildings by floorplate size		
■	<7,500 GSF	243 count
■	7,500 – 15,000 GSF	28 count
■	>15,000 GSF	92 count
	Unknown	17 count
	Total	380 count



Building Inventory Analysis | Office Floorplates Sorted by Building Age and Width

We categorized the 380 office buildings in the study area – and identified six typologies potentially viable for conversion – based on floorplate width and use.



Building Inventory Analysis | **Building Typologies**

Floor plates up to 100 ft wide are suitable for residential and hotel conversions, whereas lab conversions require larger floorplates, more than 100 ft wide.

	Conversion Use	Floorplate width
Type 1	Residential	30-50 ft
Type 2	Residential	50-70 ft
Type 3	Residential	70-100 ft
Type 4	Hotel	50-70 ft
Type 5	Hotel	70-100 ft
Type 6	Lab	100+ ft

- **30-50 ft wide** buildings lend themselves to a **single-loaded bar** typology, requires at least 1-2 window walls, and is suitable for **residential conversions only**
- **50-70 ft wide** buildings lend themselves to a **double-loaded bar** typology, require at least two window walls (ideally on opposite long facades), and are suitable for **residential and hotel conversions**
- **70-100 ft wide** buildings lend themselves to a **point-loaded tower** typology, require windows on all facades, and are suitable for **residential and hotel conversions**
- **Buildings >100 ft wide are suitable for lab conversions** because of the large floorplate requirements.

Financial Analysis Overview | **Key Inputs**

The decision to convert an office building to another use is highly dependent on five key inputs.



Market conditions

- Current and projected performance of both the office market and the alternative use (lab, resi, hotel)



Physical attributes and location

- Floorplate size
- Window walls
- Operable windows



Construction cost to convert the building

- Hard and soft costs
- Time to vacate
- Construction and lease-up period
- Interest rates



Building performance and characteristics

- Occupancy levels
- Rents
- Efficiency factor

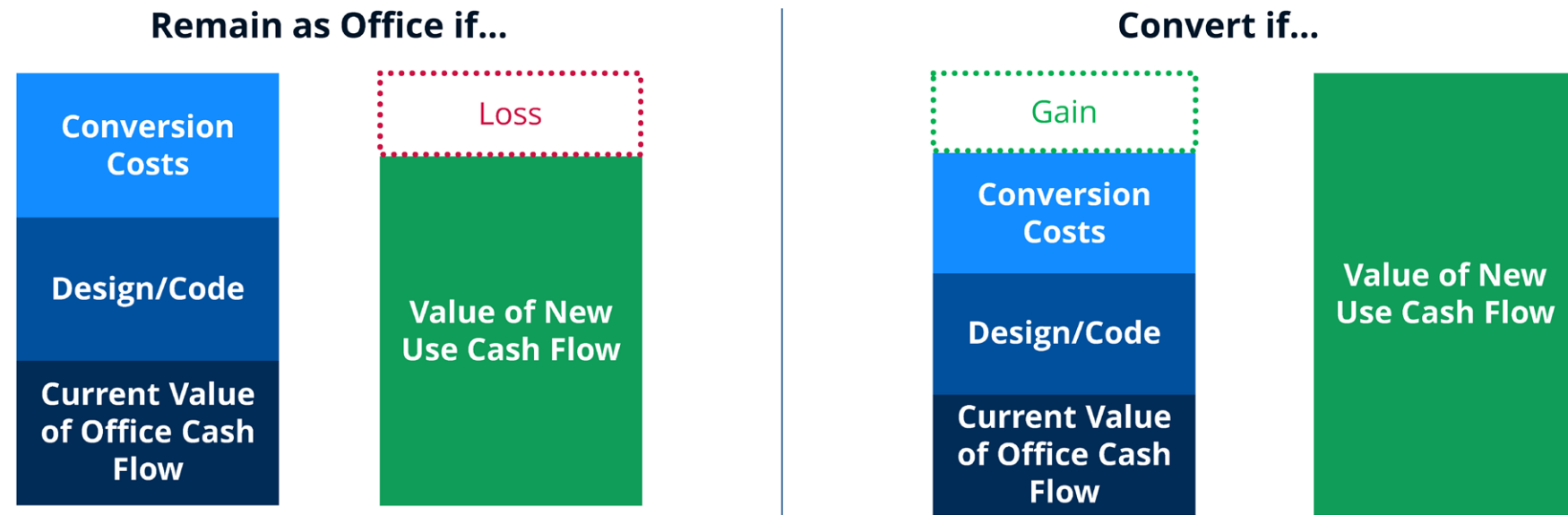


Regulatory requirements

- Electrification standards
- Affordability requirements
- Green building standards

Financial Analysis Overview | Approach

Our analysis assumes that **office buildings face two paths forward**: remain as office space or convert to another use. Conversions only happen when **the cost of conversion plus the existing office value is less than the future value of a residential building**.



Individual owner decision making will be driven by this and countless other building specific factors.

For each typology, the financial model included a scenario in which the building remains as office and a scenario in which the building converts to a new use. The model then compared the Net Present Value (NPV) of the cashflows over the 20 years, to determine if the residual value of the office cash flows is less than or greater than the residual value of the converted building.

Financial Analysis | Financial Feasibility By Office Building Performance (Financial District)*

Smaller buildings (Type 1) are mostly infeasible as they cannot generate enough revenue to justify conversion costs.

At ~30% vacancy, Types 2 and 3 buildings become feasible to convert.

	Baseline (Market Vacancy)**	20% Office Vacancy	40% Office Vacancy	60% Office Vacancy
Type 1	(\$79)	(\$70)	(\$26)	\$17
Type 2	(\$21)	(\$10)	\$41	\$99
Type 3	(\$8)	\$4	\$60	\$124

**Using Financial District data; market vacancy (office) is 15.8%.

Note: All scenarios in this table are modeled on **Financial District** data. Preliminary findings subject to change.

Green boxes indicate a higher residual NOI/GSF for the residential conversion case vs. the baseline. Red boxes indicate a lower residual NOI/GSF than the baseline.

In general, larger buildings (Types 2 and 3) are more feasible to convert to residential use than smaller ones. Although smaller office buildings (Type 1, 30-50 ft wide) are feasible from a typological perspective, it is not financially feasible to convert them to residential use as they cannot generate enough revenue to justify conversion costs – until they hit office vacancy of 60% or higher.

Financial Analysis | **Key Takeaways**

Conversions are dependent on office market and conversion market performance, and construction costs. In general, office-to-residential conversions are most likely to work in Boston.

Residential

In general, larger buildings (Type 2 and 3) are more feasible to convert to residential use than smaller ones (Type 1). Conversions tend not to be feasible in the North Station submarket where residential rents are lower.

Hotel

Hotels have higher conversion costs and lower floorplate efficiency compared to residential. Additionally, hotel occupancy is down ~10% across submarkets due to decreased business travel. As a result, most hotel conversions are infeasible.

Lab

Conversion costs for lab are nearly twice as high as other uses as a result of technical and expensive fit-outs, making nearly all conversions infeasible. Against a macroenvironment of weakening demand, the lower rental revenue cannot support the high construction costs.

Regulations

Regulations including green building standards, affordability requirements, and linkage fees make projects less feasible. However, this can potentially be offset with incentives.



Policy Analysis | **Key Takeaways**

There are a **variety of tools** to enable more office conversions each of which **can each be used in different ways depending on the goals of the City.**

Tax Tools

- **Eliminating/Reducing property taxes** for a period following the conversion **can allow more buildings to feasibly convert.**
- Tax abatements have frequently been used to enable conversion feasibility, often in exchange for the inclusion of affordable housing units, by reducing the tax bill of the converted building.
- **The 421-g program in New York City** offered a 100% abatement on the increase in property tax for 8 years, followed by a four-year phase-out. The program resulted in the conversion of 13M SF of office space in Lower Manhattan between 1995 and 2006 (13% of Lower Manhattan's office market).

Financing Tools

- Historic tax credits and TIF financing could **potentially have the greatest impact on the financial feasibility** of conversion, especially as construction costs increase and developers seek gap financing.
- **Through the LaSalle Street Reimagined Initiative, the City of Chicago** issued an RFP for the conversion of underutilized commercial spaces in the LaSalle Street corridor. The City will provide funding through TIF and the \$300K Small Business Improvement Fund. The selected projects are expected to create >1,000 units with 300 of them being affordable units.

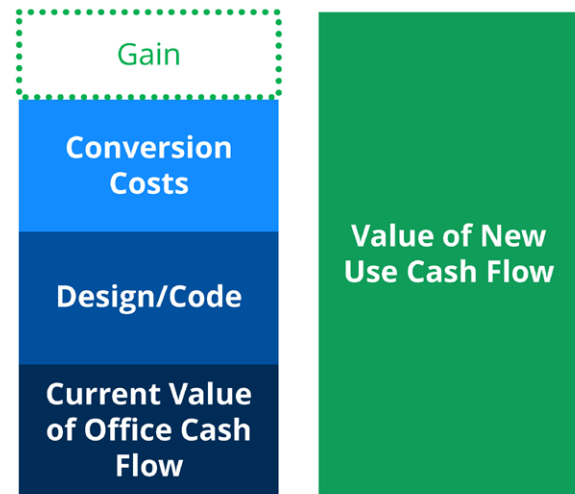
Process Tools

- Process tools **can encourage developers** to pursue conversions by **lowering the perceived level of difficulty.**
- These tools have **less of an impact on financial feasibility** compared to tax abatements or direct financing but can lower barriers for developers.
- **The City of Los Angeles' Adaptive Reuse Ordinance** provides an expedited approval process and ensures that historic buildings are not subject to the same zoning and code requirements as new construction. The program resulted in the addition of 7,300 housing units to downtown LA between 1998 and 2008 (after adding only 4,000 units in the 30 years prior).

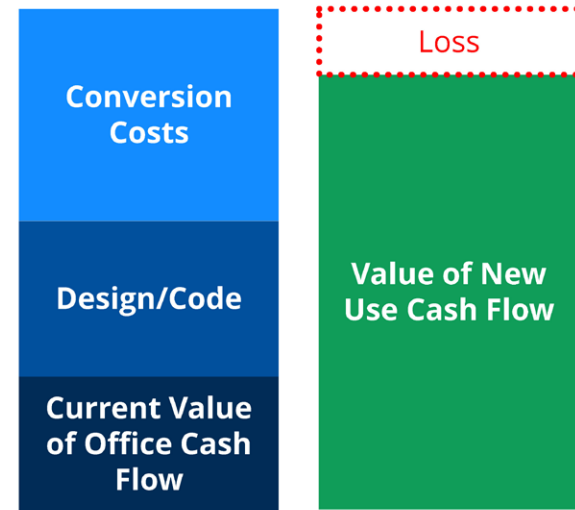
Policy Analysis | **Modeling Overview**

HR&A used the following approach to model incentives required to spur conversions with affordable units and/or green building standards.

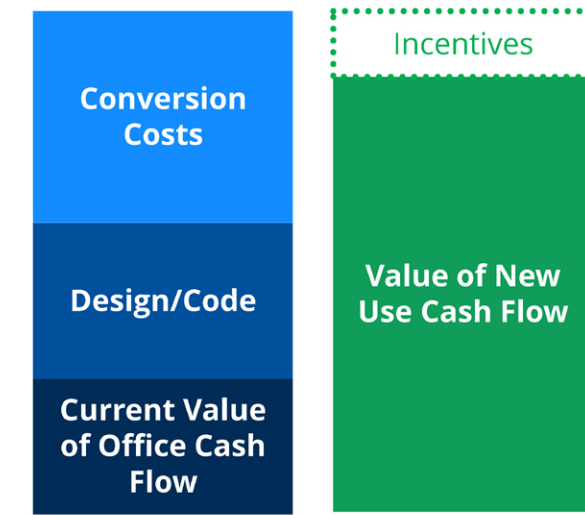
1. Started with buildings that would convert without incentives in the baseline scenario



2. Affordability requirements and green building standards reduce cash flow and increase conversion costs



3. Added abatement or gap financing incentives to eliminate the gap



The first two policy levers – tax abatements and gap financing – were incorporated into the financial model to calculate: (i) the amount of subsidy required to incentivize conversions with affordable units and green building standards, and (ii) the fiscal impact to the city in the form of foregone tax revenue from a tax abatement or direct financing required in the form of tax increment financing or grant funding.

Policy Analysis | **Recommendations**

The City of Boston should consider a **combination of policy tools to encourage conversions of different building types.**

Rising office and retail vacancy rates in Downtown Boston, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, present a unique opportunity for the City to identify actions and policies to drive more foot traffic, create a diverse mix of uses, and create a more vibrant urban core.

Based on the findings of the Office Conversion Study, although conversions to hotel and lab space are not feasible, residential conversions are feasible under certain conditions and with incentives. While the decision to convert is dependent on several building-specific factors (in addition to market and other factors) and will therefore need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis, the analysis leads to broad recommendations based on the following key conditions:

Physical Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type 2 and 3 buildings, i.e., floorplates that are 50-70 or 70-100 ft wide and >15,000 GSF
Building performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >30% office vacancy rate <\$45 PSF office rents 72.5% efficiency factor
Regulatory Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP), i.e., 17% of units at 70% AMI and 3% at Fair Market Rent (FMR) Building electrification

Not: The analysis does not account for building code changes or implementation considerations (such as life and safety) that might need to be modified; will affect costs, etc.



Policy Analysis | **Recommendations**

Below are recommendations that the City of Boston should consider to **spur office-to-residential conversions in the Financial District.**

Type of Incentive	Tax abatement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, a conversion with IDP and electrification requirements would require a 75% abatement for up to 29 years (depending on the building typology and other factors)
Supportive incentive(s)	In addition to a tax abatement, the City should consider supporting incentives to reduce upfront construction costs and improve other hurdles. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recently announced Massachusetts Green Bank could be a potential source of funding. Additionally, the City should consider expedited approvals and other development process improvements to encourage more owners to convert
Target Geography	Financial District, since it has the highest concentration of office buildings and the least diverse mix of uses
Implementation	Considerations for BPDA as it develops the policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory vs optional regulatory requirements As-of-right district-wide approach, or request for proposals (RFP) for a specific sub-district Program caps or goals, such as number of projects or units Other funding sources? Is there a cap on funding

