



PLAN: DOWNTOWN



The Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA)

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

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

All or partial use of this report must be cited as “PLAN: Downtown, 2023, Boston Planning & Development Agency.”

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

Acknowledgments

PLAN: Downtown is the result of a collaborative effort between the dedicated members of the Advisory Group, wider community members, City and State departments, and Boston Planning and Development Agency staff. This study would not be possible without their generous contribution of time and insight.

Advisory Group Members

- Barbara Boylan
- Lauren Cambell
- Paul Chan
- George Coorssen
- Alison Frazee
- Arturo Gossage
- Gilbert Ho
- Peggy Ings
- Karen LaFrazia
- Susanne Lavoie
- Joshua Leffler
- Angie Liou
- Lydia Lowe
- Herb Lozano
- Michael J. Nichols
- Beatrice Nessen
- Mary Ann Ponti
- Joyce Sanchez
- Rishi Shukla
- Tony Ursillo

Former Members

- Charles Labins
- Jung Shen Kuo
- Seth Riseman
- Rosemarie Sansone
- Ann Teixeira
- Theresa Tsoi
- Jason Wright

Ex-Officio Members

- State Representative Aaron Michlewitz
- State Senator Lydia Edwards
- City Councilor Ed Flynn
- Captain Kenneth Fong, Boston Police Department
- Roger Mann, Senior Director of Real Estate at the MBTA

Boston Planning and Development Agency Board

- Priscilla Rojas, Chair
- Carol Downs, Treasurer – Ex officio
- Dr. Theodore C. Landsmark, Member
- Brian Miller, Member
- Raheem Shepard, Member

Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA)

- Arthur Jemison, Chief of Planning and BPDA Director
- Aimee Chambers, Director of Planning
- Diana Fernandez, Deputy Chief of Urban Design
- Kathleen Onufer, Interim Deputy Director of Zoning Reform

BPDA Lead Project Team

- Andrew Nahmias, Senior Planner II
- James Fitzgerald, Deputy Director of Transportation
- Alexa Pinard, Urban Designer III
- Travis Anderson, Senior Infrastructure and Energy Planner
- Mark McGonagle, Community Engagement Manager
- Christine Brandao, Community Engagement Manager
- Astrid Walker-Stewart, Planner I
- Angel Guzman, Planner I
- Lamei Zhang, Planner II

BPDA Former Team Members

- Kennan Rhyne, Deputy Director of Comprehensive Planning
- Lauren Shurtleff, Director of Planning
- John Read, Senior Advisor for Transportation Planning
- Corey Zehngebot, Senior Urban Designer

City of Boston

Mayor’s Cabinet Members

- Segun Idowu, Chief of Economic Opportunity & Inclusion
- Kara Elliott-Ortega, Chief of Arts and Culture
- Dion Irish, Chief of Operations
- Jascha Franklin-Hodge, Chief of Streets

Mayor’s Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion

- Andrew Grace, Director of Economic & Strategic Planning

Mayor’s Commission for Persons with Disabilities

- Andrea Patton, Chief of Staff

Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics

- Maddie Webster, Program Manager

Daniel Lander, Senior Advisor to the Mayor

Mayor’s Office of Housing

- Sheila Dillon, Chief of Housing and Director of the Mayor’s Office of Housing
- Karina Oliver-Milchman, Deputy Director of Policy Development and Research

Mayor’s Office of Arts & Culture

- Melissa Meyer, Director of Cultural Planning
- Jared Staley, Cultural Planning Project Manager

Mayor’s Office of Preservation

- Murray Miller, Director of Office of Preservation

Boston Transportation Department

- Vineet Gupta, Director of Planning
- William Moose, Planner
- Matthew Moran, Transit Director
- Matthew Warfield, New Mobility Planner
- Jacob Wessel, Public Realm Director
- Stefanie Seskin, Active Transportation Director

Elected Officials

- State Representative Aaron Michlewitz
- State Senator Lydia Edwards
- Councilor Ed Flynn
- Councilor Michael F. Flaherty
- Councilor Ruthzee Louijeune
- Councilor Julia Mejia
- Councilor Erin Murphy

Consultant Team

- NBBJ: Alex Krieger, Kathryn Firth, Chris Herlich, Rodrigo Guerra, Alan Mountjoy
- HR&A: Kate Wittels, Kyle Vangel
- Arup: Brian Swett, Matthew Ciborowski, Katie Wholey
- Kittelson: Ellen Moshier, Conor Semler
- Engagement Lab: Eric Gordon
- Ground, Inc: Shauna Gilles-Smith
- Boston Conservation Associates: Lisa Howe



Letter from the Chief of Planning



Dear Neighbor,

The Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) is excited to release PLAN: Downtown. This plan is the culmination of five years of planning work with the Downtown community to establish a vision for our city's urban center as a truly inclusive, round-the-clock neighborhood filled with new homes, diverse businesses, green public spaces, esteemed historic buildings, vibrant institutions, and a thriving arts, culture, and entertainment scene.

Our Downtown has always been a bustling hub for business and culture in our City, and for the entire region. Steeped in centuries-old history and iconic landmarks, it's a place where different communities come together — from the lively Chinatown neighborhood to educational institutions, busy stores, and historic sites. The COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting changes to office culture brought new challenges to the area, but foot traffic is returning alongside new shops and small businesses, marking an opportunity to reimagine the role that our downtown will play in Boston's future.

This comprehensive plan lays the groundwork for a more vibrant Downtown where current and new residents, workers, and visitors can come together to live, work, and play in new and exciting ways. We are at a critical moment in our Downtown's long history to help meet the growing housing demands of our city. To achieve this the plan prioritizes increasing housing in our city's core by modernizing outdated zoning, optimizing height and density where

it can be best accommodated, and implementing the recently launched office-to-residential conversion program.

The plan also supports the growth of new and diverse small businesses, broadening cultural and artistic event programming, recruiting new businesses to capitalize on the expanding Climate Tech economy, and preserving our historic landmarks and cultural areas. It outlines key improvements needed to ensure our streets are safer and more accessible for all, and targeted open space and green infrastructure recommendations for areas like Chinatown, where public and green space is needed most. By embracing these new projects and policies, Downtown can begin to support the high-level of new housing opportunities, businesses, and job growth that the City and region need to thrive.

We look forward to implementing this plan together – with community members, developers, institutions, staff, and other stakeholders – in the years ahead to make its vision a reality.

Thank you to everyone who dedicated valuable time and effort to this plan.

Sincerely,

Arthur Jemison, Chief of Planning



CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	3
Letter from the Chief of Planning	4
<hr/>	
1 Introduction	8
Goals	9
Planning Process	10
Character Areas	13
Chinatown	16
Key Planning Trends	18
<hr/>	
2 Recommendations	21
Growth & Preservation	22
Mobility	32
Open Space & Public Realm	40
Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development	52
<hr/>	
3 Implementation	57
Policy Actions	58
Design Guidelines	66
Zoning Updates	125
Downtown Office Conversion	132
<hr/>	
4 Appendix	135
Prior Plan Summaries	136
Downtown Office Conversion Study	140
<hr/>	

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 vision and 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

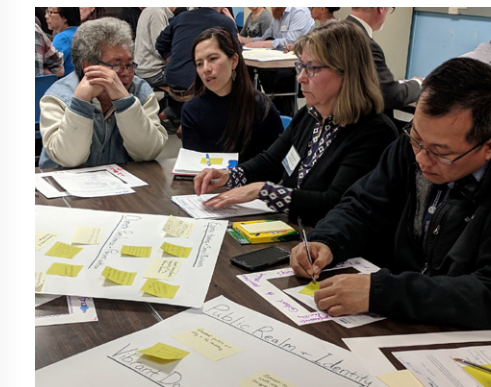
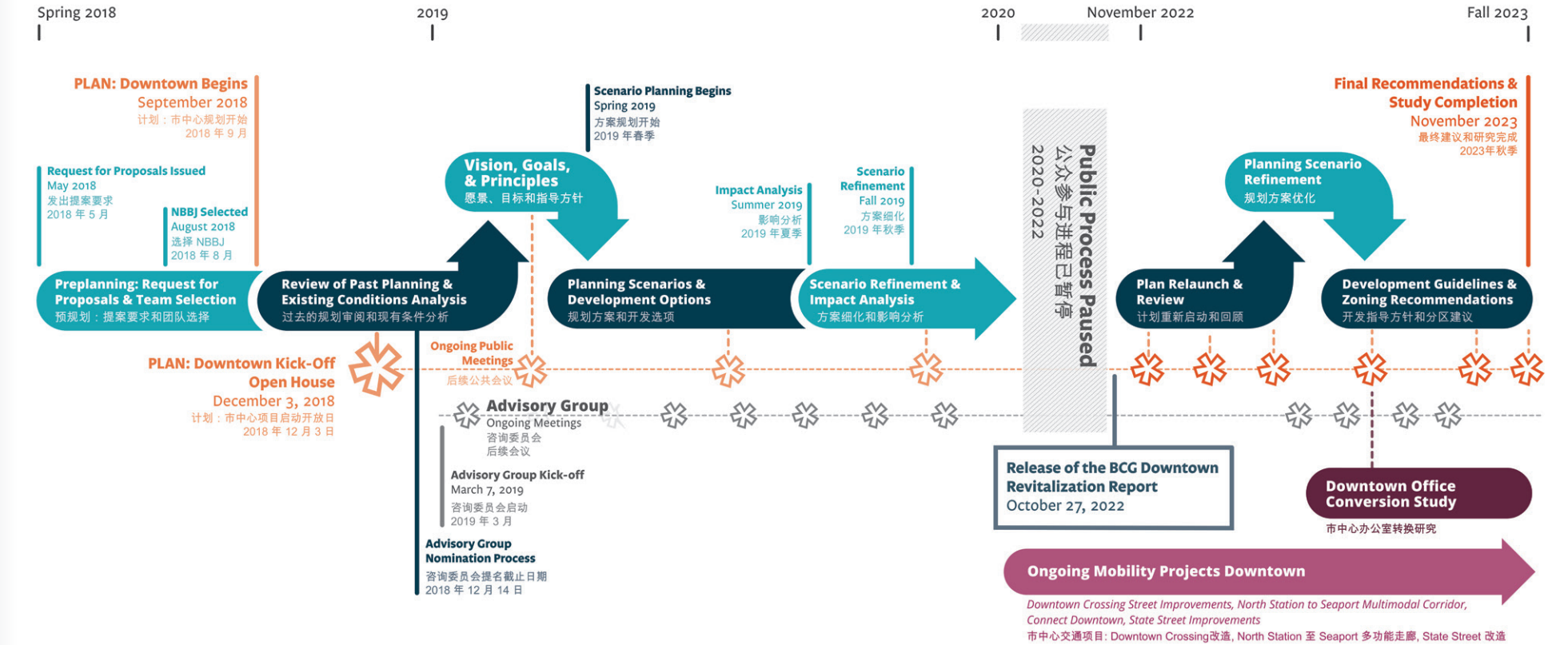
Throughout the planning process an Advisory Group (AG) met regularly to review the work of the project team. The AG was composed of representatives of Downtown, including people from residents' associations, local community groups, institutions, local foundations, preservation advocates, and business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

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.



The study area focuses on areas that have not seen recent planning or updates to outdated zoning. For the purposes of this study, the PLAN refers to this area as "Downtown."

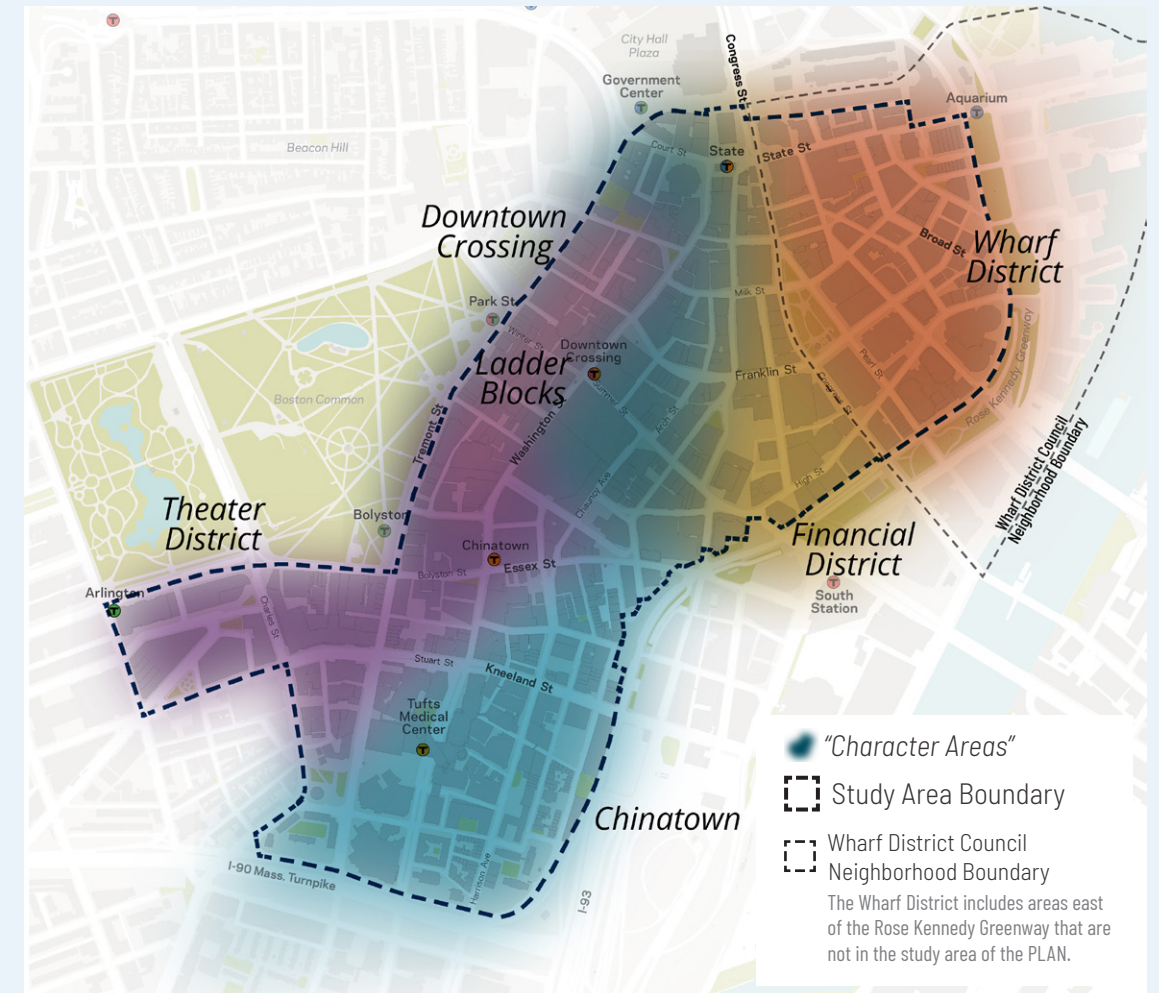
CHARACTER AREAS

Six distinct "character areas" were defined early on in the engagement process to help better identify the distinct strengths, qualities, and needs of each region within the study area. These include: Downtown Crossing, the Ladder Blocks, Chinatown, the Financial District, the Theatre District, and the portions of the Wharf District inside the study area.

Some of these areas have more formal definitions and clearer boundaries than others. The Wharf District for example includes areas west of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, outside the study area, and has a formal boundary established by the Wharf District Council neighborhood organization. Meanwhile the Financial District has no official definition, but is roughly used to describe the tallest and most commercial areas of Downtown, some of which are in the Wharf District and Downtown Crossing areas.

These six character areas each have their own discrete needs, but there is also often overlap between them. As a result, they will benefit from and inform one another's development and growth and these boundaries can serve as a flexible tool and reference to help bolster and promote the diversity of Downtown's different spaces and uses.

The following pages breakdown the key characteristics and priorities in each area.



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.

Each area is distinguished by its:

- land use and activity such as residential, office, cultural, or retail
- built form, scale of buildings and blocks, architectural styles, and materiality
- cultural and historic heritage
- access to public spaces, green spaces, and transportation

Downtown Crossing



Downtown Crossing is a major hub of shopping and transit at the center of Downtown. It’s 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 the historic urban fabric, historic buildings and features, and walkable scale.
- 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.
- Encourage residential uses on upper stories.
- 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 and the building that enrich and enhance their historic character, acknowledging both theaters’ 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 areas 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 and ensure a design quality that makes contribution to its historic context.

Wharf District



A portion of the Wharf District neighborhood falls within the study area boundary, linking the waterfront and greenway to Downtown. Its western blocks are integral to Downtown’s commercial core. Meanwhile, historic streets along the greenway showcase some of Downtown’s oldest structures and a mix of offices and residences. With its residential community and diverse businesses, both large and small, the area has the potential to grow with additional housing opportunities and public realm improvements that enhance its historic streets and create a stronger bridge between Downtown and the waterfront.

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.

While Chinatown has become a major residential and commercial anchor in the Downtown area, it would be remiss to not acknowledge the historical disenfranchisement and inequity faced by the Chinatown neighborhood which have shaped Chinatown to be the resilient and innovative community it is today. In addition to early national policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Chinatown has been challenged by urban renewal, highway construction, and institutional expansion.

In recent years, 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.

Chinatown is maturing into an arts and cultural center through its number of murals, public art installations, and “placekeeping” programs. One such public art installation is the Chinatown Worker Statues, created by local artist and activist, Wen-ti Tsen, that will include four statues installed in Chinatown. “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.

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, its community engagement process, and the 2020 Boston Chinatown Master Plan.
- 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 and green Phillips Square and the public realm, improving the accessibility of sidewalks, increasing pedestrian safety, and providing green infrastructure to addresses 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	Housing demand and development	Struggling office markets and flight to quality	Commuter culture	Declining Affordability	Age Distribution and Large Student Population	Increase in family households	Diversity
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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. In Fall of 2023, BPDA awarded tentative designation for the redevelopment of 290 Tremont Street (Parcel P-12C). This project aims to provide 119 income-restricted units, made up of a mix of rental and homeownership opportunities.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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. In the Summer of 2023, the City announced the “Downtown Office to Residential Conversion Pilot Program” (further detailed in the Appendix).</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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 units in the rest of the study area (838), however, the demand for income restricted housing remains high as Chinatown serves a significant low-income population, and plays an important role as a gateway for new immigrants and working families.</p>	<p>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).</p> <p>In comparison, in Chinatown, the population of adults between the ages of 25 to 65 have increased since 2010. These statistics suggest a greater need for more housing opportunities for both young professionals and working-age adults and families.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
Source: BPDA Research Division	Source: BPDA Research Division	Source: Boston Downtown Office Conversion Study	Source: US Census Bureau, 2017-2021 American Community Survey, LODES data 2019, BPDA Research Division	Source: BPDA Research Division, Boston Income-Restricted Housing Report 2022	Source: BPDA Research Division	Source: BPDA Research Division	Source: BPDA Research Division



RECOMMENDATIONS

Growth & Preservation	22
Development Framework	28
Mobility	32
Proposed Street Typologies	36
Key Public Realm Connectors	38
Key Mobility Projects	39
Open Space & Public Realm	40
Priority Improvements	46
Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development	52

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 recommendations:

- Updated development framework that informs zoning updates
- Downtown design guidelines
- Conversion of underutilized office buildings
- Updated survey of all buildings and historic assets in the study area, based on historic and cultural significance, design features, as well as community use.

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.

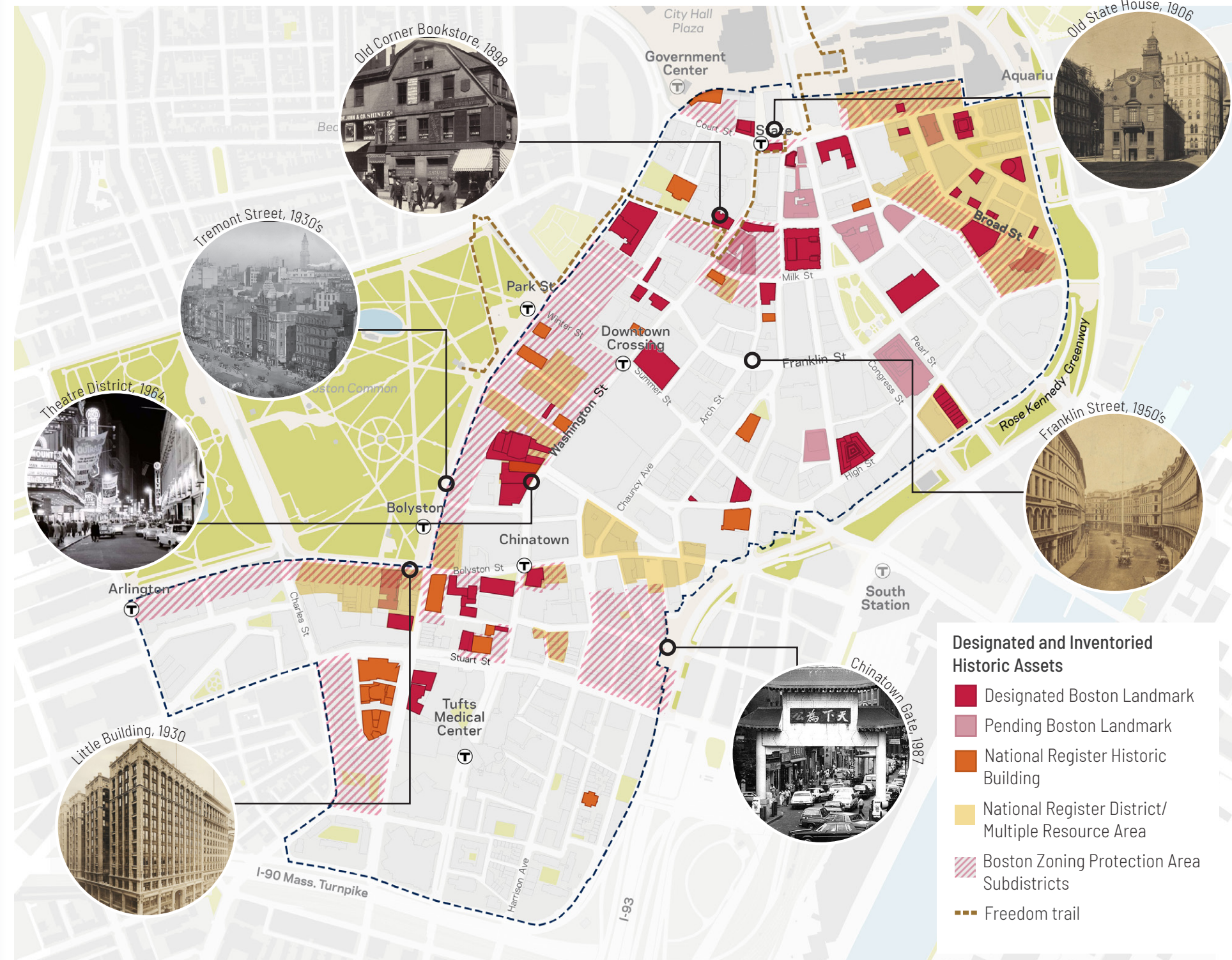
While regulations protect the Boston Common and Public Garden from new building shadows and protect flight paths from Logan Airport, there is limited guidance on how or where to effectively

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



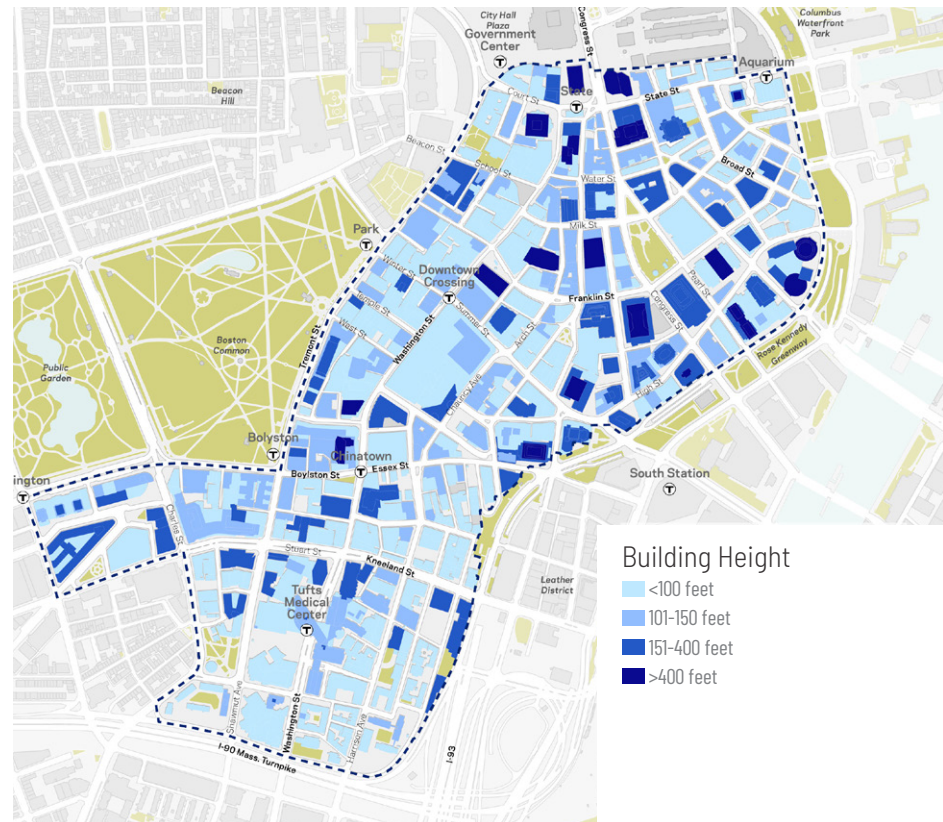
Growth & Preservation Challenges & Opportunities

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 along Boylston St. and Huntington Ave., in giving the city a distinctive skyline. This range of building heights present opportunities for new growth that can align with the existing scale of the City's center.

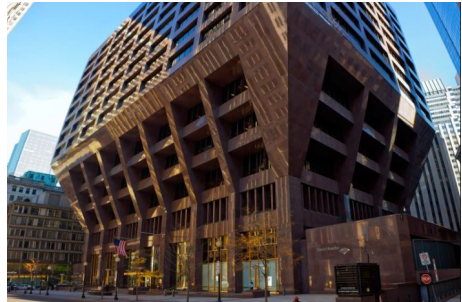


Buildings step down in height from the Financial District's cluster of tall buildings to the Boston Common

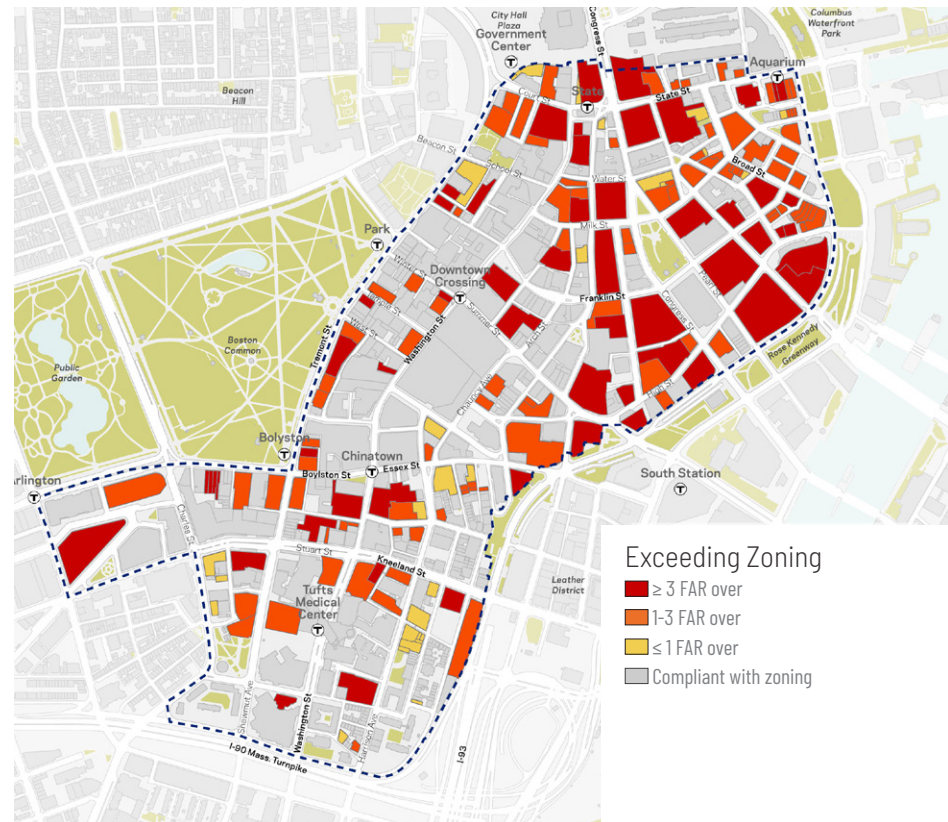


Buildings exceeding out-of-date zoning

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.



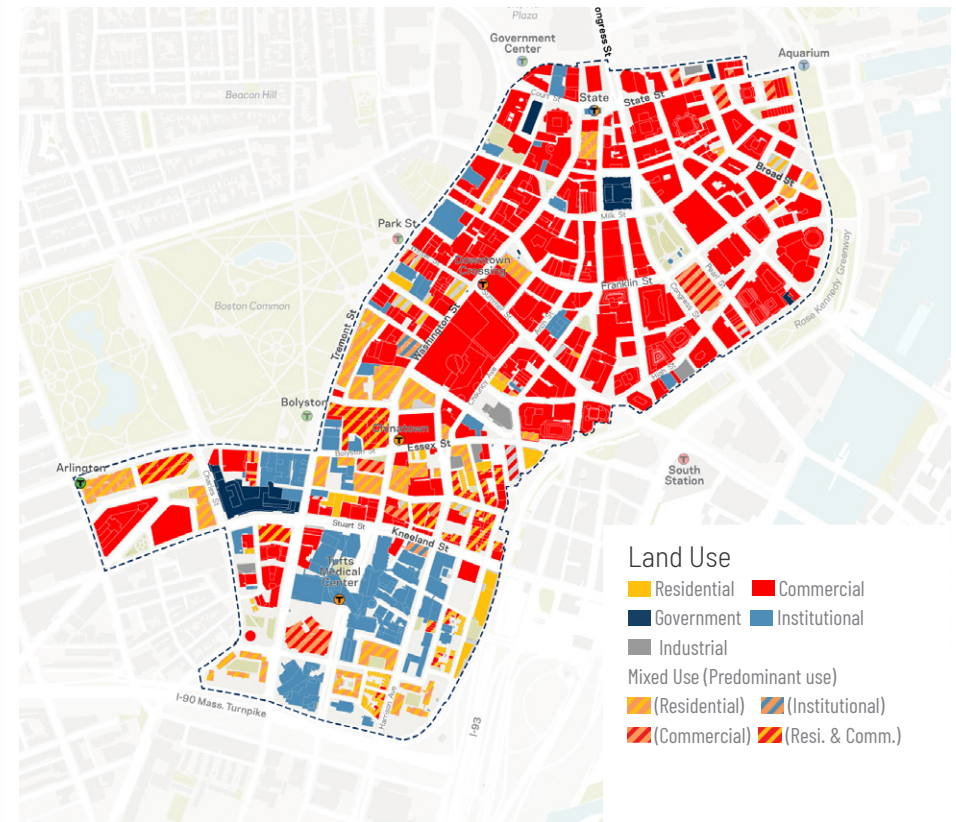
Financial District: 100 Federal Street is far over zoning limits



Land use

Downtown consists primarily of commercial uses, including office and retail space. The highest concentration of mixed-use residential areas are Chinatown, home to a significant population of low-income residents, and the Theatre District. Chinatown's southern area is predominantly residential and institutional while the area north of Kneeland St is a vibrant

mix of shops, offices, and housing. Meanwhile the Theatre district contains a great deal of student housing and prominent institutions such as Tufts, Emerson, and Suffolk. Due to their high mix of uses these areas feature some of the highest level of street activity throughout the day, outside the transportation and shopping hub that is Downtown Crossing.



Chinatown: mixed-use residential and commercial buildings



Financial District: large scale commercial blocks

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 Boston Landmark Commission (BLC) housed in Boston's Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) 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.

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. These areas do not restrict demolition, but they include form and use regulations, and sometimes,

design guidelines meant to protect the scale and character of each area. In Downtown, these small districts have accumulated over time around areas and clusters of buildings often not protected by BLC, state, or national preservation designations but deemed historically and culturally significant. However, the small scale, number, and often ambiguous and unenforceable design guidelines of these sub-districts have added to the complexity of the zoning approval process Downtown and do not consistently or effectively preserve historic and cultural sites and areas. Downtown is in need of a more comprehensive regulatory approach that goes beyond small and limited zoning 'Protection Areas.' This approach should include simplified zoning districts informed by an updated development framework and separate Downtown design guidelines that help ensure new development respects and enhances its context.



The Proctor Building is a BLC designated landmark

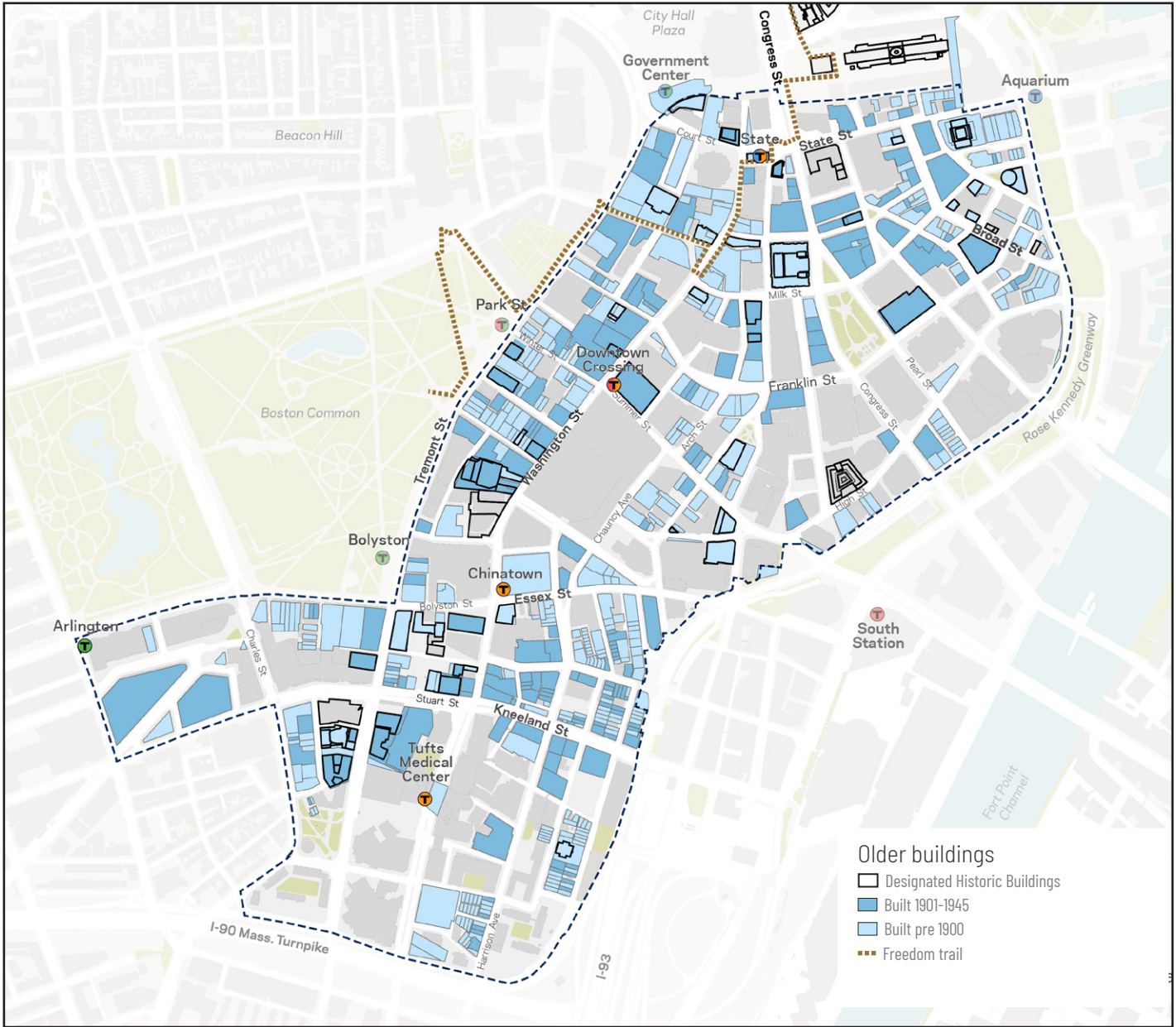
Unprotected older buildings

There are a substantial number of older structures - pre-1900 - across the study area. Areas like the Wharf district and the Ladder Blocks, contain some of Boston's oldest buildings. Many, including several older buildings in Chinatown which have provided naturally occurring affordable housing, do not have historic designation or protection. The significance of these sites often goes unrecognized until they are at risk from new development or nearby projects.

Conducting an updated inventory of historic, cultural, and community significant buildings Downtown will help showcase the sites most in need of preservation and identify the proper tools to preserve them. The updated inventory will also be a powerful tool in creating a more predictable pathway for development to navigate and enhance Downtown's historic fabric.



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



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 components is the need to ensure equity, a healthy mix of uses, a safe, accessible, and greener streetscape, sustainable development, and climate resilience. They must also work towards enhancing and identifying cultural and historic buildings across all areas Downtown.

- Growth Areas: Mixed-Use Focus**
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 and improve 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.



Growth Areas: Mixed-Use Focus

The Downtown growth area has long been and will continue to be a key regional employment center. Boston has also historically had a mixed-use downtown, where retail, office, research lab, educational, entertainment, hospitality, and residential uses all contribute to the area's vitality. At this moment in Downtown Boston's evolution, it is especially important to encourage and incentivize new housing, and to explore every opportunity to incorporate housing within mixed-use developments that include workplaces and hospitality uses.

As Boston remains a hub for research and lab-based employment, these uses have and may continue to locate in the growth areas of Downtown that can accommodate larger buildings. Not every site will be appropriate for this use, which has distinct urban

design impacts from larger floorplate buildings and mechanical systems, as well as a heavy ground-floor loading demand. In order to ensure a site is appropriate for research lab use and will not have adverse impacts on neighboring uses and the pedestrian character of downtown, new research lab uses shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

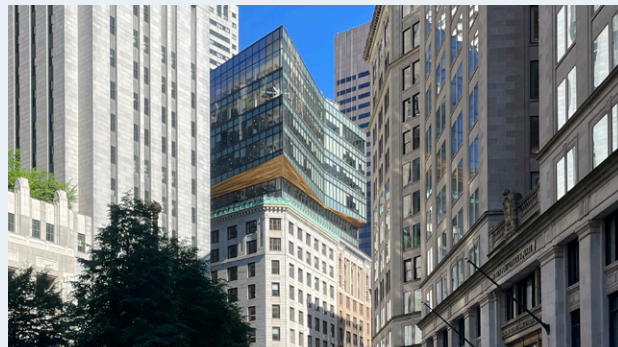
Similarly, the ongoing modernization of light manufacturing and trade through 3D printing and integration with research operations may be particularly suitable in the growth areas of Downtown, particularly for climate technology businesses advancing Boston's future. The impact of these uses is highly dependent on the scale and operation of the use, and while encouraged as part of a thriving employment center downtown, should be evaluated

on a case-by-case basis to ensure compatibility with the overall mixed-use character of the area and avoid negative impacts on neighboring uses and the overall pedestrian character of downtown.

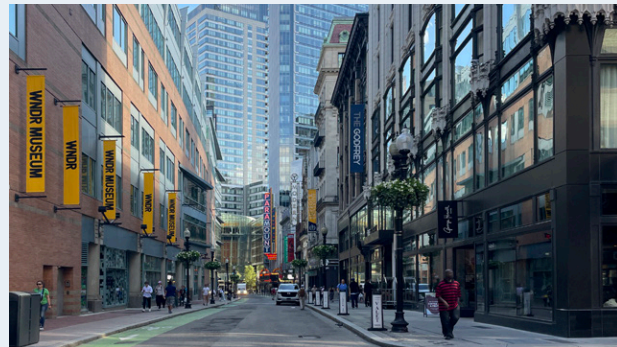
Downtown Boston is one of the most important tourism, heritage, and hospitality destinations in the region. The area is rich with historic buildings that span over three centuries, some dating back to the founding of the nation. While growth in hospitality uses, including larger hotels, is an important part of Downtown's future, large-scale hotels also have specific site impacts from valet and pick-up/drop-off activities. Sizable new hotel uses will similarly be evaluated on a site-by-site basis to ensure they avoid any negative impacts on the pedestrian safety and quality of the public realm of Downtown.



Tall buildings surrounding Post Office Square



View of Congress Square addition



View of the Opera House (1928) and Paramount Theater (1932) looking down Washington St

Washington St Corridor

Stretching from Boylston St to State St, Washington St is one of the key spines of Downtown. Across this area, historic preservation and adaptive reuse are key priorities. Particularly where it borders lower-scale areas on its west side, new growth should prioritize the retention and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

As a gateway to major transit hubs—including the Chinatown, Downtown Crossing, and State St MBTA stations—the Washington St corridor is also a critical location for supporting growth. On the east side and select portions of Washington St, where buildings are generally taller with a wider mix of uses, a broader range of mixed-use development alongside needed housing growth should be accommodated, especially on underutilized sites like parking garages. On the west side, where the historic context is more sensitive, new development should generally be smaller in scale, with opportunities for additional height only where it supports housing growth and the preservation and reuse of historic buildings and Landmarks. Projects should consult with the Office of Historic Preservation to determine the significance of historic buildings and determine methods of adaptive reuse.

Enhance Areas

Historic areas like the Ladder Blocks, the India and Broad St area of the Wharf District, the edges of Boston Common, and parts of Chinatown are distinguished by their cohesive fabric of historic buildings and facades, fine-grained parcels, and smaller buildings dating to prior eras of Downtown. Lower heights and smaller building footprints are appropriate in these areas to help maintain scale and encourage the retention of existing buildings. Development in these areas should prioritize appropriate adaptive reuse and additions to existing buildings. Given the number of historically and culturally significant, but not officially Landmarked, buildings, sites, and facades in these areas, it is especially important that projects consult with the Boston Office of Historic Preservation to advance historic preservation and ensure that new



View from the Shopper's Plaza amphitheater of historic Washington St facades

development is compatible with existing buildings in terms of scale.

Creative economy uses, including small office and cultural uses, are appropriate in these areas to help advance historic preservation, adaptive reuse, and the continued vitality of Boston's economy.



Cluster of historic buildings along Temple Place that frame a glimpse of Boston Common



Liberty Square

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
- Improved curb management and enforcement of deliveries, services, and curbside uses especially in pedestrian zones

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.

In Chinatown, walking is a more common mode of commute than it is in other parts of Downtown, with roughly half of all workers walking as their primary mode of transportation. Sidewalks are populated by residents and tourists of all ages, creating a well-utilized corridor, but also contributing to the need for greater safety and maintenance of aging and damaged sidewalks.

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

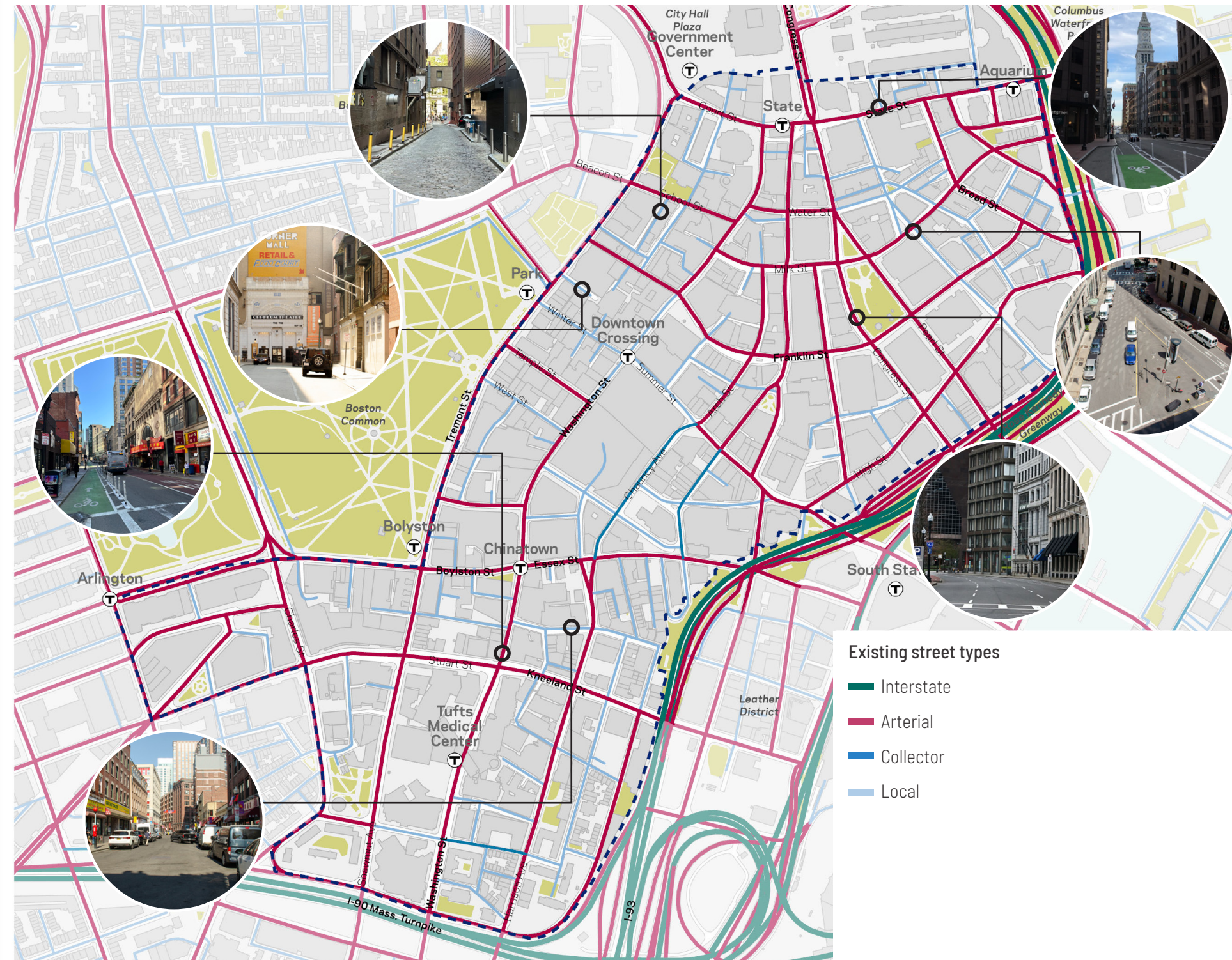
all types of vehicles navigate a network of predominantly one-way, disconnected streets. The stark contrast between weekday and weekend conditions further complicates the situation, with less foot and vehicular traffic but infrequent bus service on weekends.

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 and enforcement 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.



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



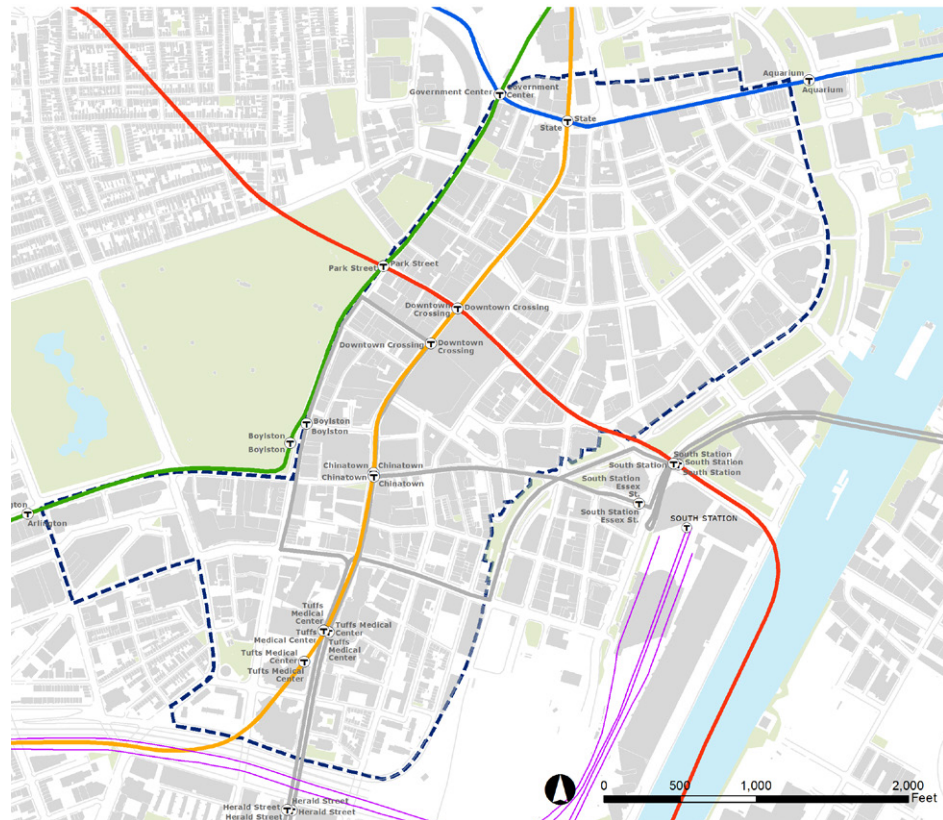
Mobility Challenges & Opportunities

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

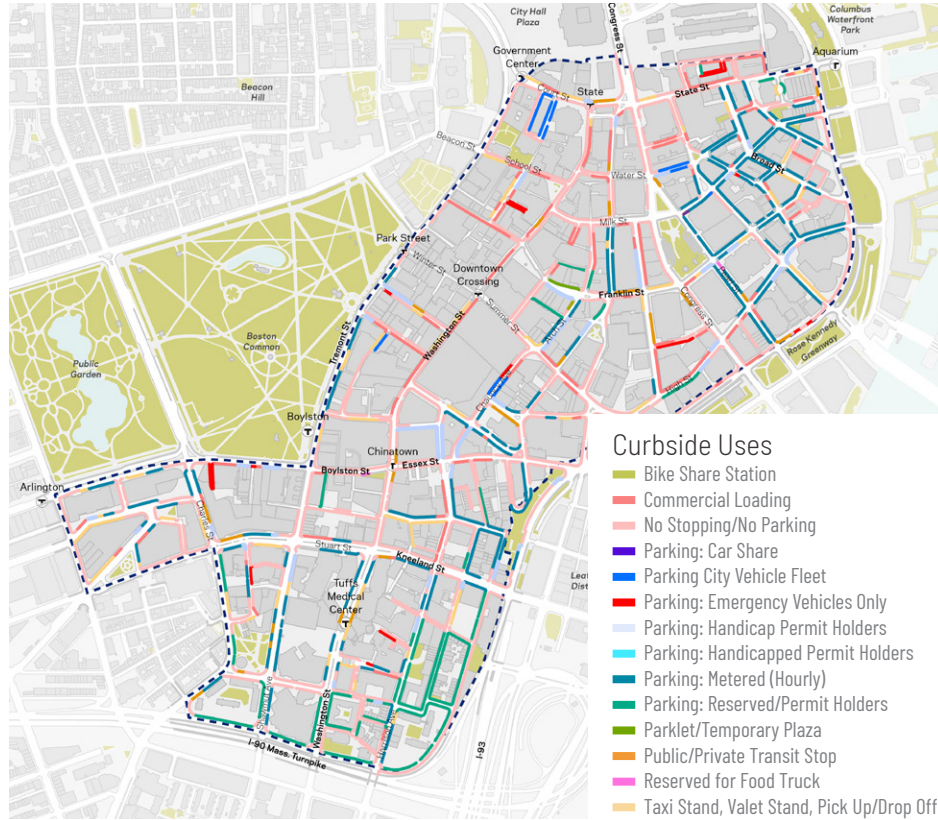


Curbside uses

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 and enforcement of curbside space is crucial to maximize its value and minimize conflicts.

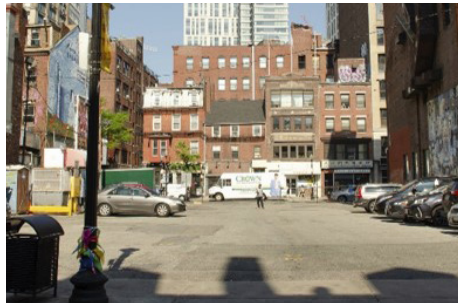


An example of the competing curb side interests along Washington Street

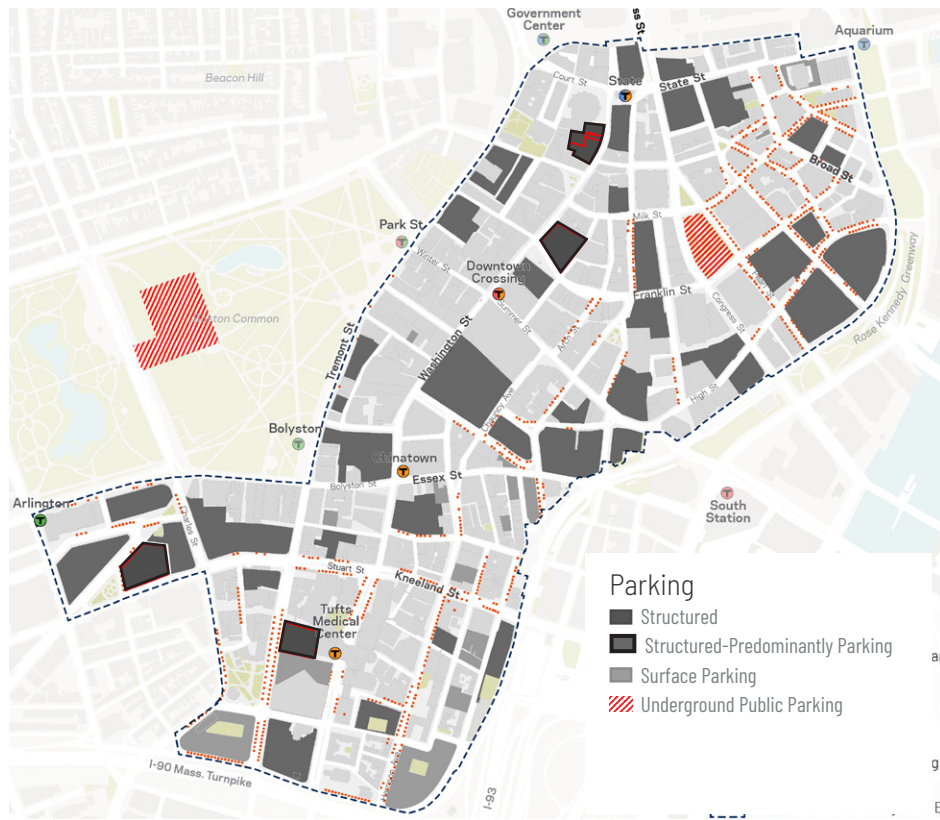


Parking

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, much of which is due to the presence of institutions, 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

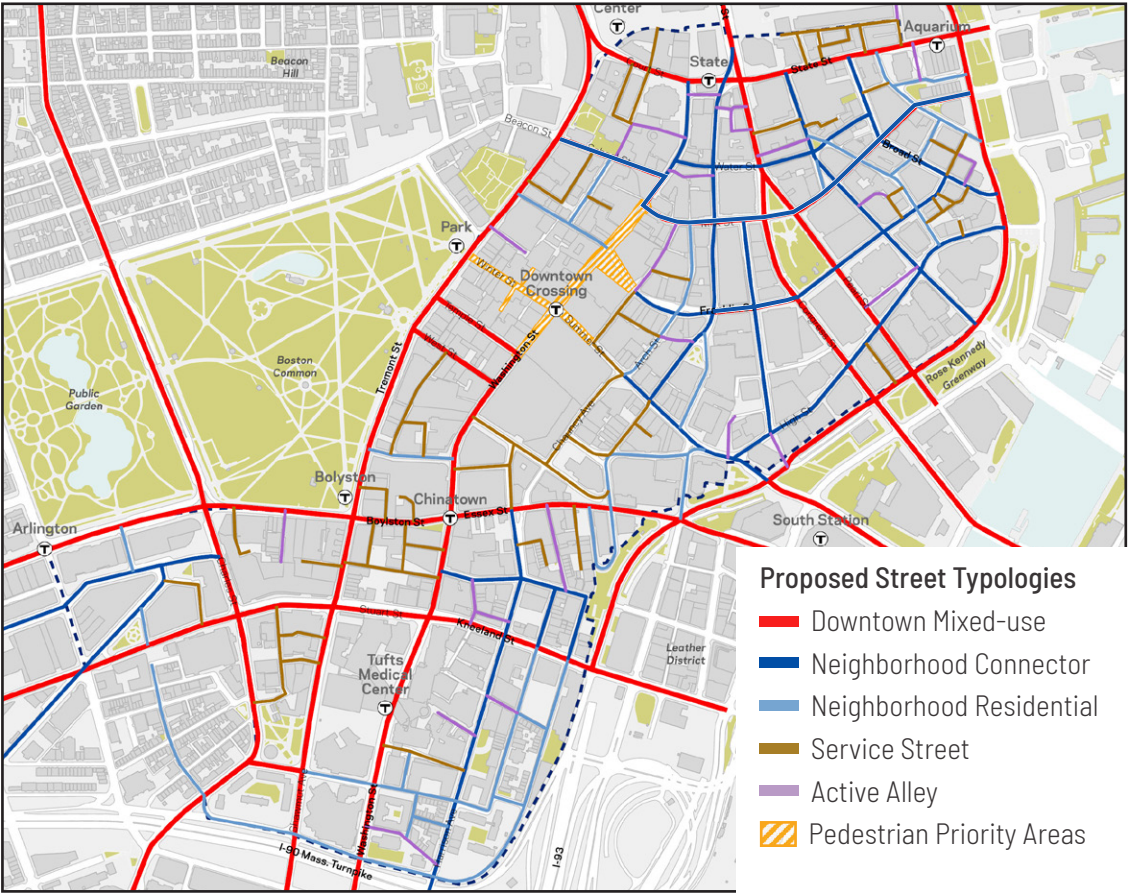
Pedestrian Priority Areas have a single grade or surface that is shared by people using all modes of travel at slow speeds. They are able to support a variety of land uses, making them a unique expression of the public realm: [Washington \(portion\)](#), [Winter, Summer \(portion\)](#), [Franklin \(portion\)](#),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

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](#).

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](#).

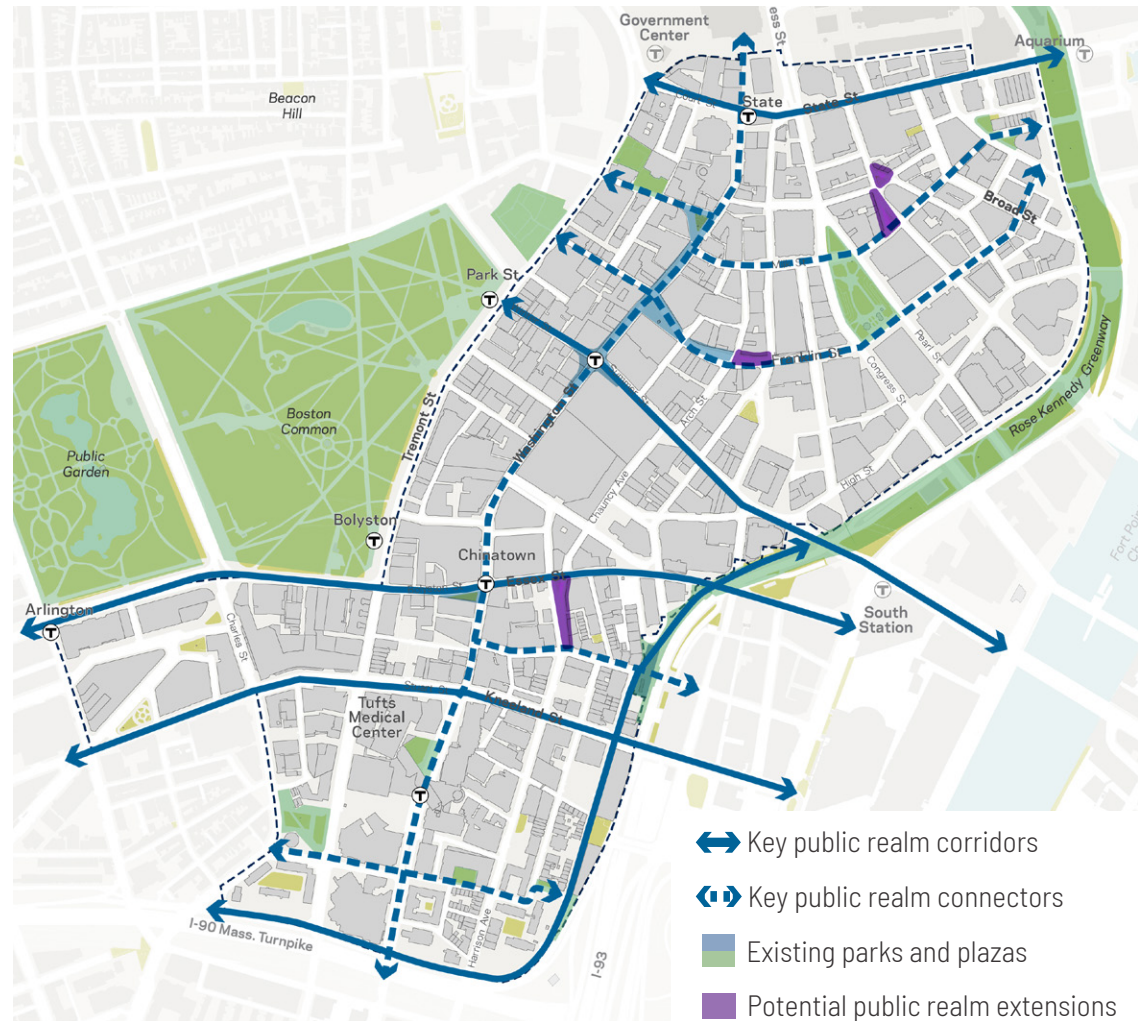
Neighborhood Residential Streets contribute to a high quality of life for residents of the study area. They are used primarily for local trips and are characterized by lower flows and limited retail/activity: E.g.: [Province](#), [Bromfield](#), [West Avery](#), [Edinboro](#), [Kingston](#), [Bedford](#),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

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](#).



Active Alleys are unwelcoming to vehicles, accessible to pedestrians, hyperlocal connections, some retail: [Pi Alley](#), [City Hall Ave](#), [Winter Pl](#), [Boylston Pl](#).

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.

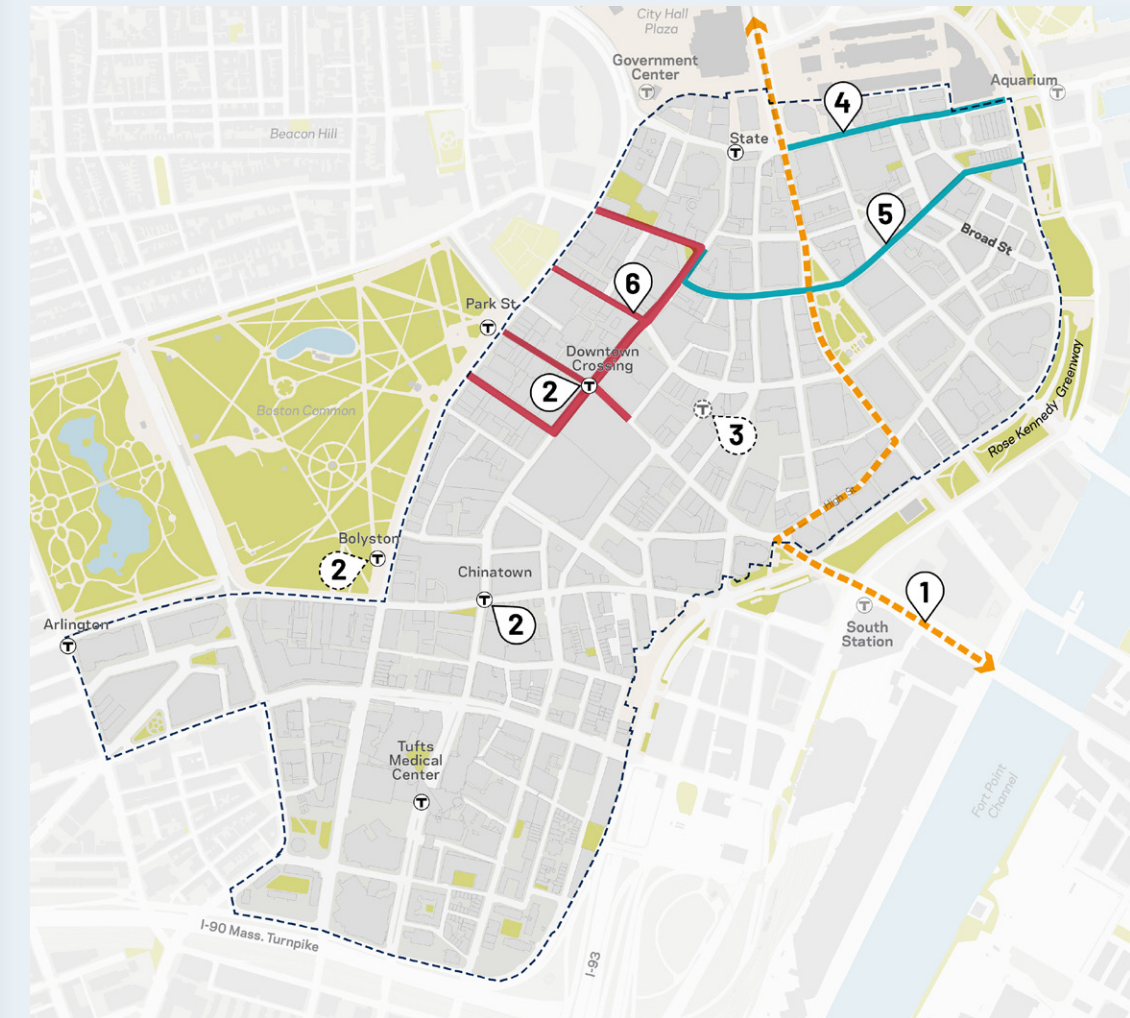
Key Public Realm Connectors

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.

Key recommendations:

- Public realm improvements to existing spaces
- New permanent and temporary public spaces
- Make existing temporary spaces permanent
- Create new policies around areaways and advocate for the repair of damaged and inaccessible sidewalks and pedestrian pathways, especially for areas that experience high foot traffic, like Chinatown

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. The existing temporary public plaza at Phillips Square in Chinatown already provides much-needed seating and gathering space in the neighborhood that could be further improved as a permanent space for residents and visitors.

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



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. Maintaining frequent and public entrances will add to the safety and activation of the public realm.



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. Creating more active ground floors and opportunities for public art in these areas will add to the overall vibrancy of Downtown.



Chauncy St blank wall

Publicly accessible interior spaces

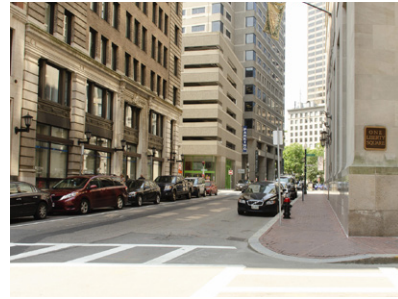
There are few publicly accessible interior spaces in the study area. Lobbies are increasingly being made publicly accessible, particularly in the Financial District. With better signage and additional locations these interior routes/spaces could help with the overall connectivity of Downtown's public realm network.



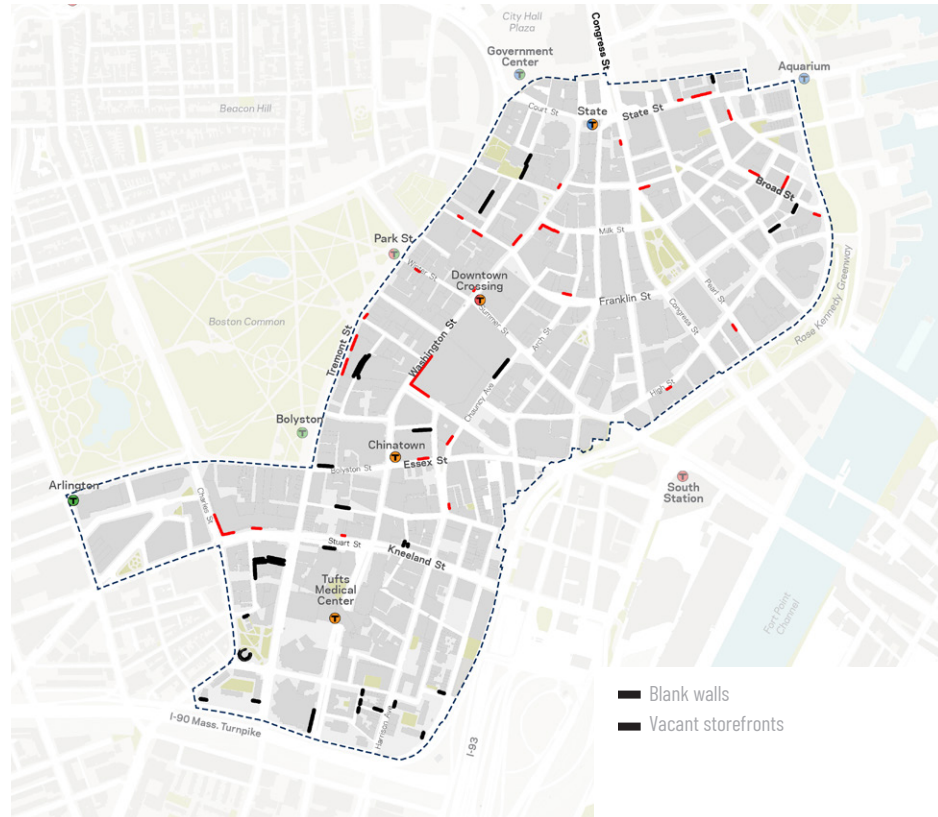
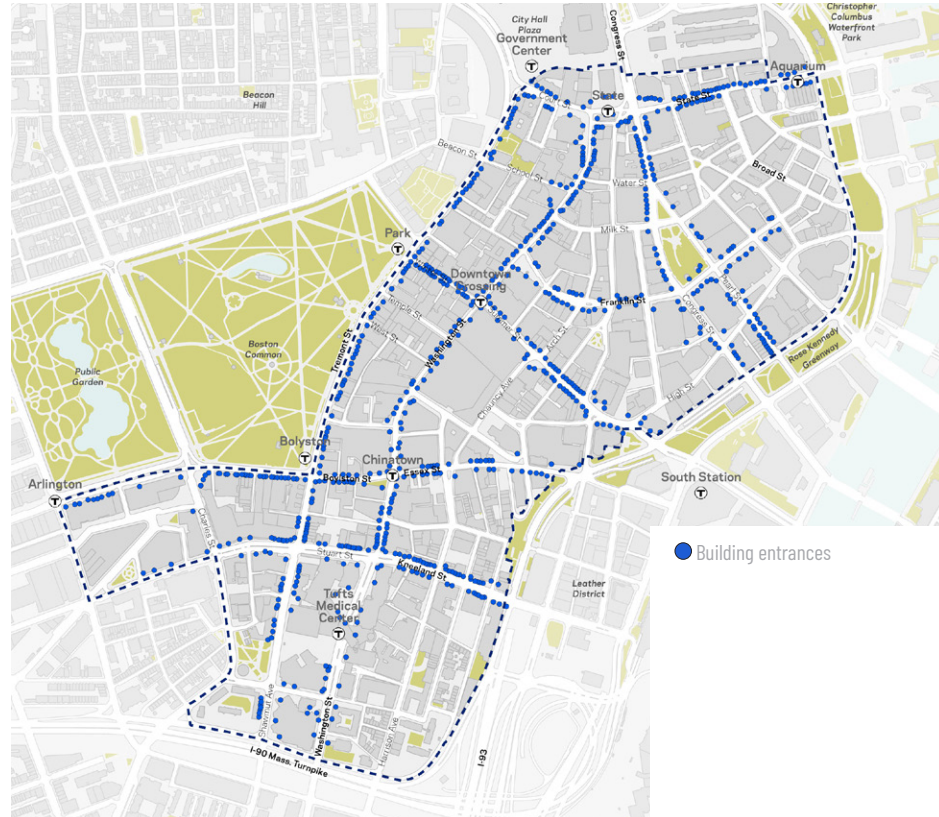
One International Place in the Financial District provides a publicly accessible interior space and passages

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 and heightened wind effects. It becomes essential for new development, especially tall buildings, to adhere to State shadow law and carefully test the impact of shadows and wind on the public realm and other buildings throughout the year, mitigating those impacts through massing changes and architectural elements.



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



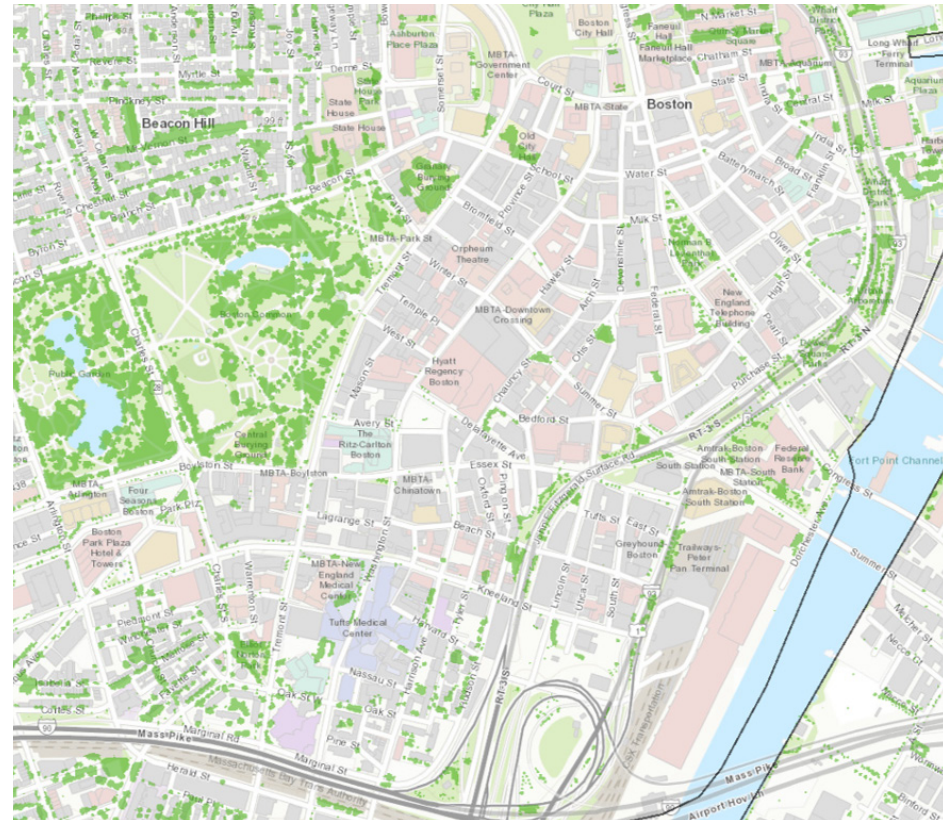
Open Space & Public Realm Challenges & Opportunities

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, highlighting the need for accessibility and public realm improvements.



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



Areaways

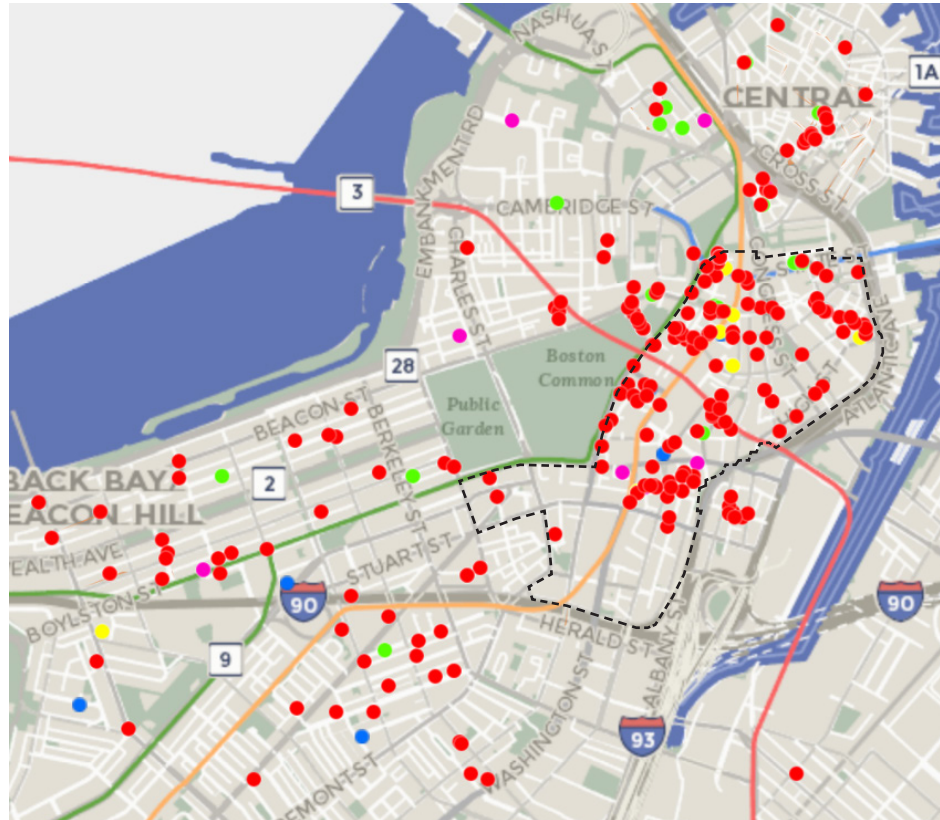
Areaways (also referred to as “hollow sidewalks” or “sidewalk vaults”) exist throughout the city, but are concentrated in Downtown and Chinatown, where their impact on the built environment is most pronounced. Areaways are stretches of sidewalk that contain privately-owned vaults and extensions of the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

- Improved access and accessibility
- Greenery wherever possible
- Improved seating and sheltered areas
- Playable landscapes
- Reduced impervious surfaces
- Integrated public art
- Space for families and different age groups
- 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 and public realm improvements :

- 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



Priority public realm improvement sites:

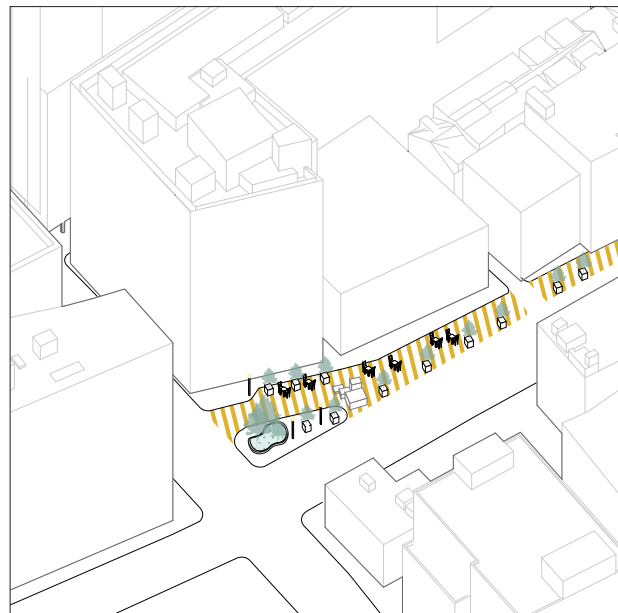
- Phillips Square
- Marginal Road/Hudson Street
- Oxford Street Playground
- Tufts Medical Center
- Eliot Norton Park
- Kilby/Milk Streets
- Liberty Square
- Franklin Street
- Reader’s Park
- Jenney Plaza
- Milton Place
- Downtown Crossing Pedestrian Zone (Improvement study ongoing)

Open Space & Public Realm Priority Improvements

①

Phillips Square

Chinatown



- A. Work with the community to make Phillips Square a permanent public space with a possible expansion south along Harrison Ave.
- B. Include opportunities for art and cultural installations reflective of Chinatown.
- C. Provide a comfortable public space with seating and tree planters.

②

Marginal Road/Hudson Street

Chinatown

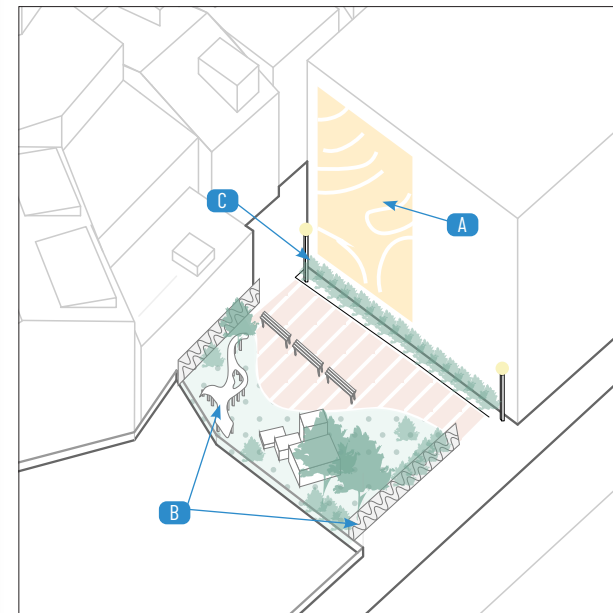


- A. Extend the Greenway along Marginal and Hudson Streets incrementally, beginning with a road diet and with a goal of full pedestrianization between Tai Tung St. and Tremont St.
- B. Coordinate with studies examining creating a park on Parcel 21, above the highway and rail lines between Shawmut Ave.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

③

Oxford Street Playground

Chinatown



- A. Retain mural reflective of Chinatown.
- B. Provide additional seating and multi-generational recreation 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.

④

Tufts Medical Center

Chinatown

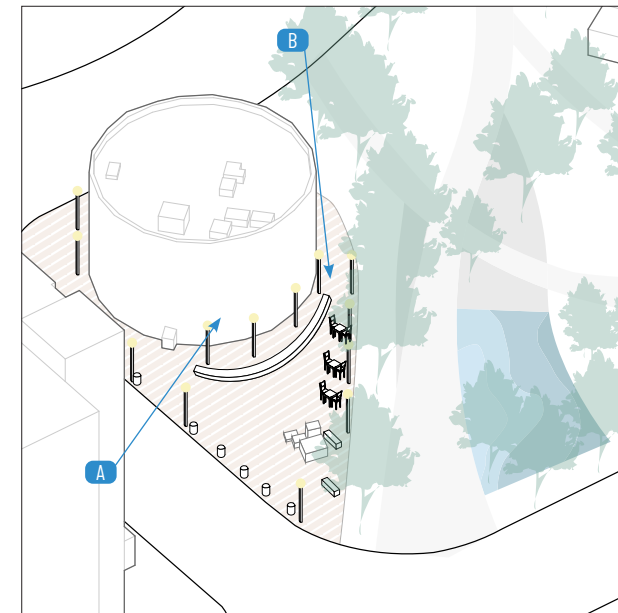


- A. Provide a clear, well-lit and welcoming connection to Tremont St.
- B. Integrate multi-generational recreation and play structures and fixed seating; improve lighting to ensure a sense of safety and highlight route to Tremont St.

⑤

Eliot Norton Park

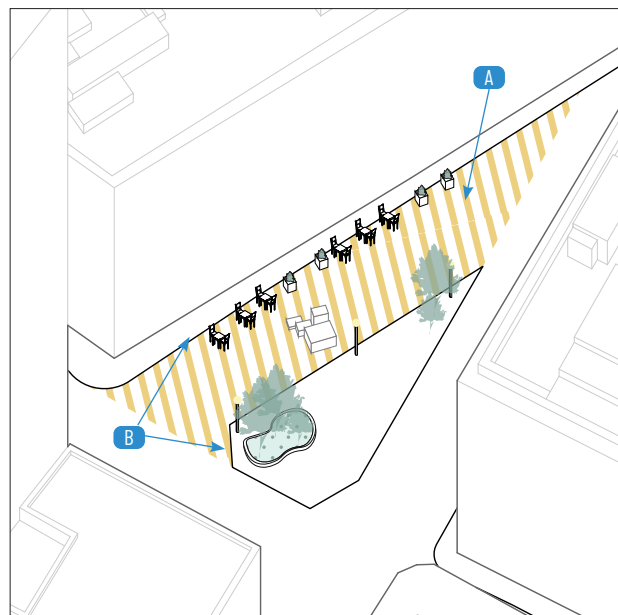
Chinatown



- 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.

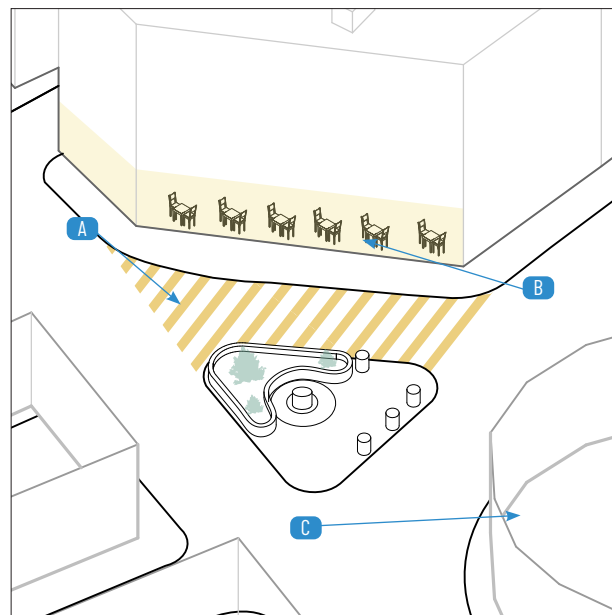
Open Space & Public Realm Priority Improvements

⑥ Kilby/Milk Streets Financial District



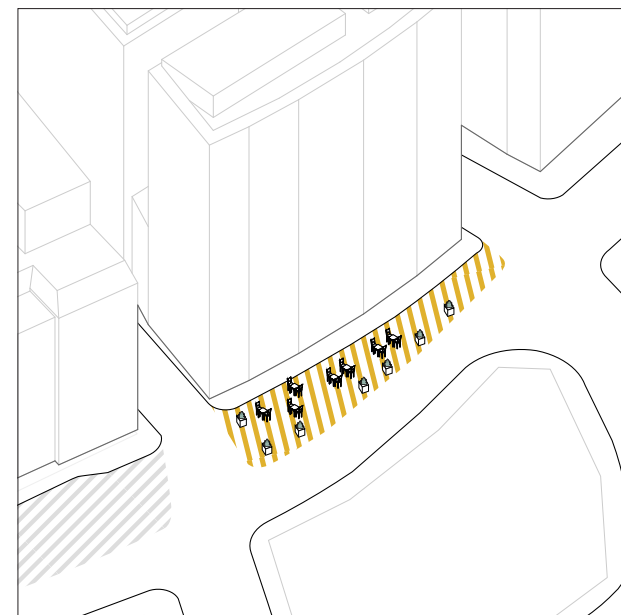
- A. At Kilby St. and Milk St., merge the existing traffic island with the sidewalk to the west.
- B. Provide a comfortable public space with seating and tree planters.

⑦ Liberty Square Financial District



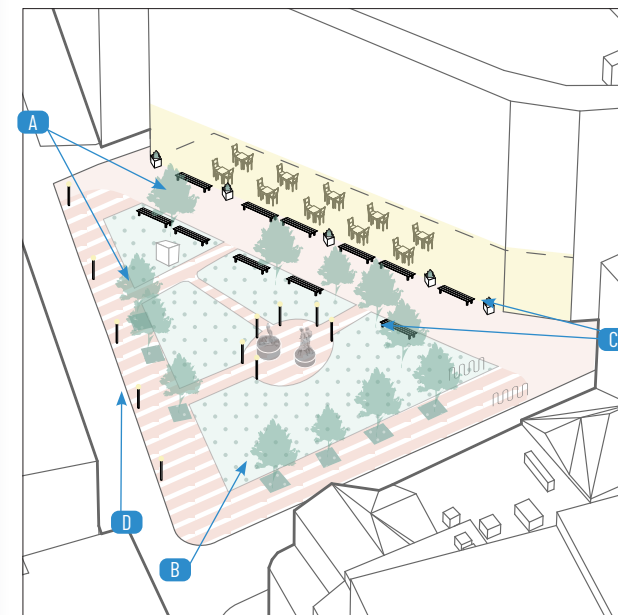
- A. At Water St. and Hawes St., (Liberty Square) merge the traffic island with the sidewalk to the north.
- B. The new public space should allow spill out for the neighboring ground floor commercial uses such as outdoor dining.
- C. Ensure the new public space allows for the appreciation of One Liberty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

⑧ Franklin Street Financial District



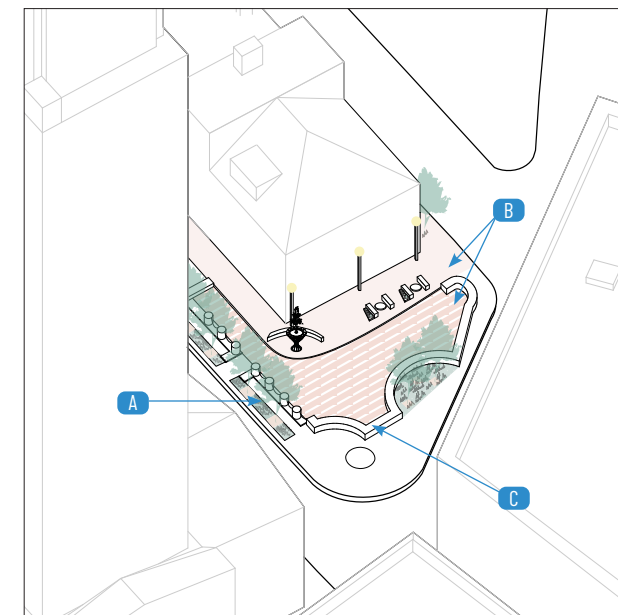
- Extending the existing Tontine Plaza west to the block between Arch St. and Devonshire St. and include outdoor seating, public art, and plantings.

⑨ Reader's Park Downtown



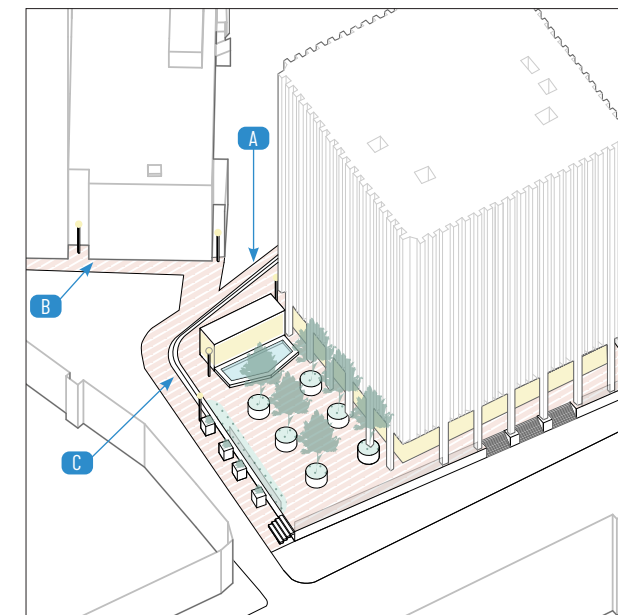
- A. Add more shade trees, potentially demarcating the perimeter of the abutting streets.
- B. Provide usable green space through mix species planting.
- C. Provide more and well-located seating and ensure universal accessibility.
- D. Consider raising Washington St to the level of plaza/sidewalk to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

⑩ 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.

⑪ 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.

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 to ensure buildings reduce carbon emissions
- 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.

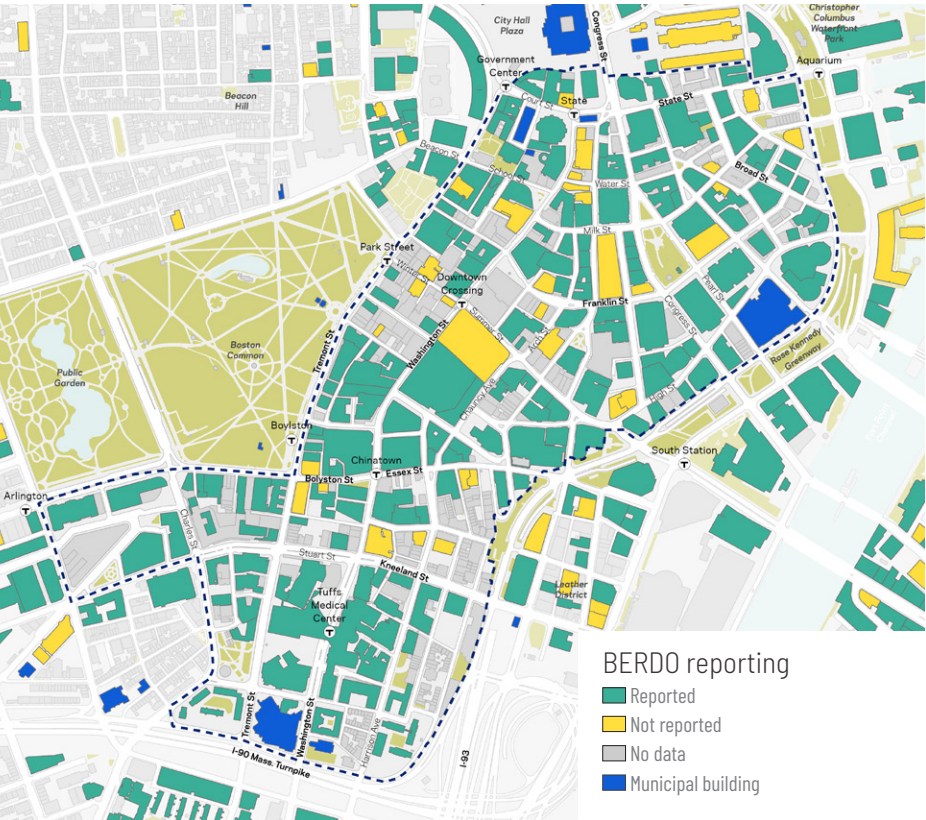
The City is actively working on citywide zoning and policy updates, new standards, and best practices including Zero Net Carbon guidelines to ensure that all future development address sustainable development and considers the project’s environmental impacts and reduces carbon emissions. Climate Ready 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. 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)

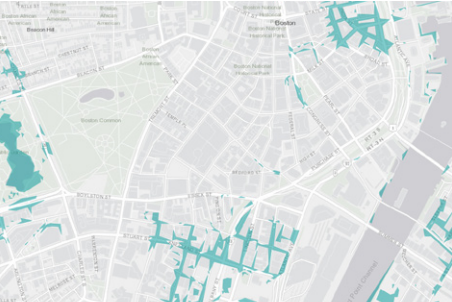
The Building Energy Reporting and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO) is a citywide regulation in Boston that requires certain buildings to report their energy usage and carbon emissions, aiming to promote energy efficiency and sustainability across the city. Downtown buildings, though occupying only 0.78%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

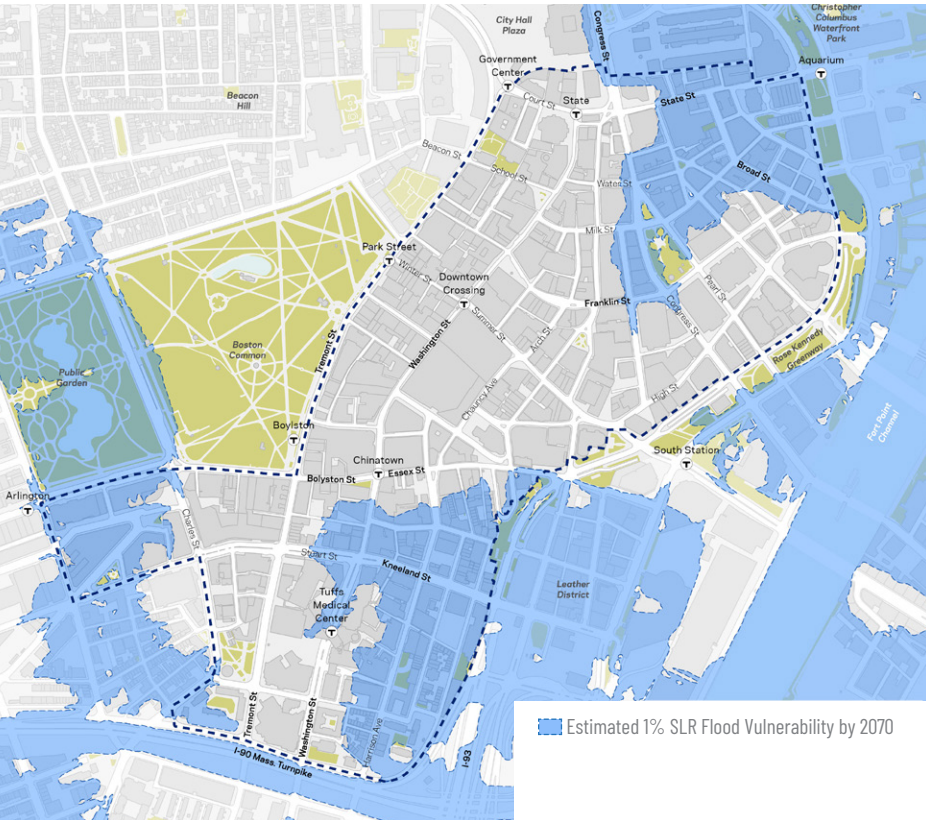


2070 Flood vulnerability

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 Flood 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 is more likely to suffer from the impacts of extreme heat island and heat duration events than other neighborhoods in Boston. This is particularly true in Chinatown where a 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.

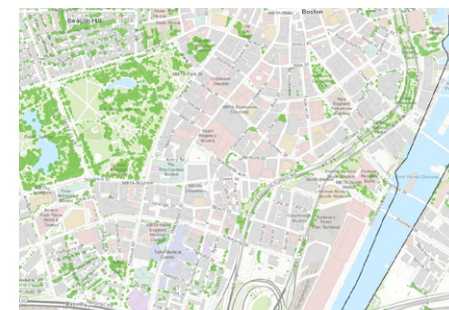
Incorporating green infrastructure into capital improvements, new construction and retrofits is essential to not only mitigate urban heat island but also impacts of increased precipitation, which could be as high as 10-20% by 2050.



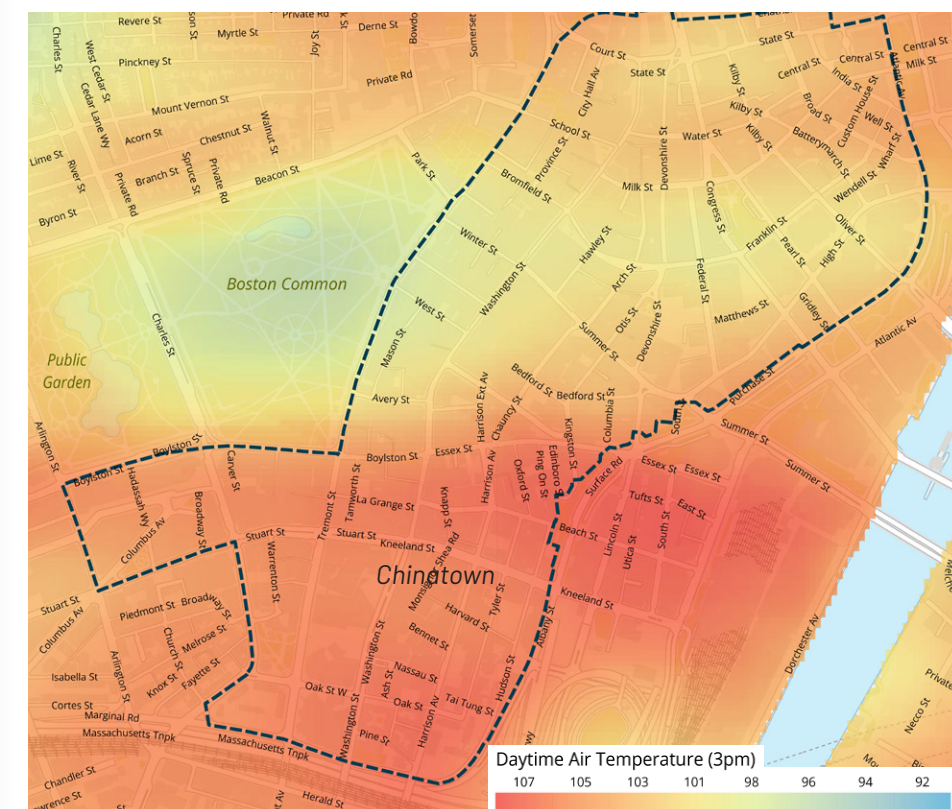
Efficient building systems lead to less utility costs and emissions

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. This effect is particularly severe in Chinatown. Increasing green space and plantings is essential to mitigating urban heat island.



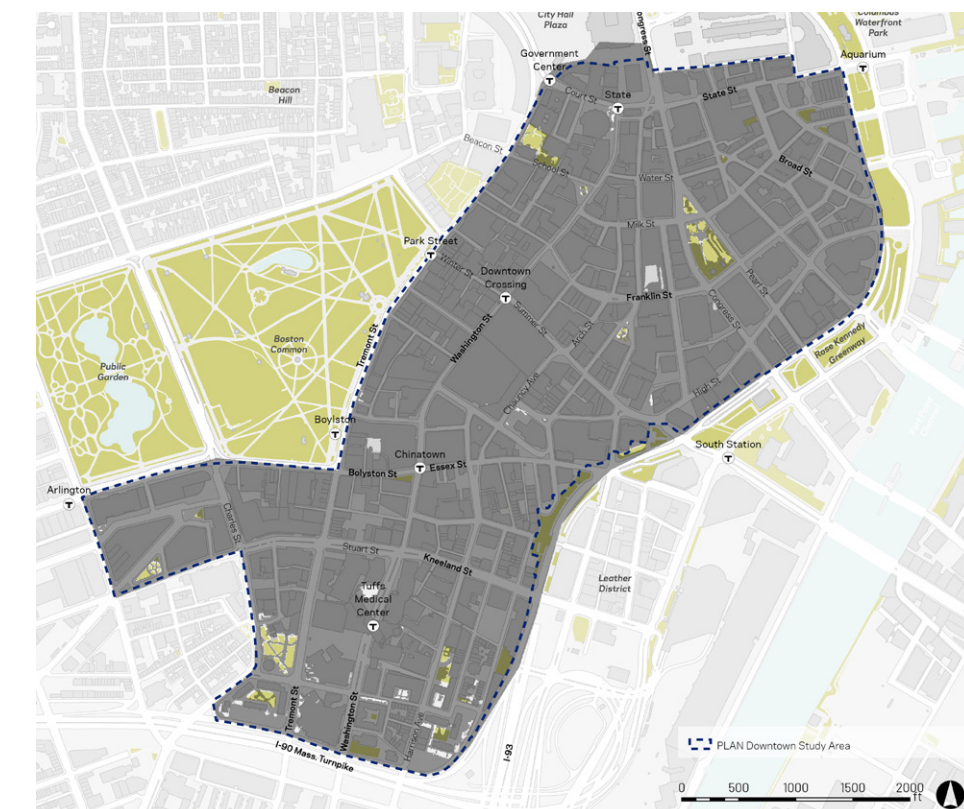
More tree shade would reduce the land surface temperature



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. Incorporating green infrastructure whenever

possible as a part of new development and public realm improvement projects will help offset the impacts of precipitation.





IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Policy Actions	58
Design Guidelines	66
Zoning Recommendations	125
Office Conversion Program	132

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 correspond to the analysis and recommendations in each of the four Recommendations chapters in this PLAN. They are grouped by chapter theme and PLAN goal:



GROWTH & PRESERVATION

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.



MOBILITY

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



OPEN SPACE & PUBLIC REALM

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



CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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

Policy Actions



GROWTH & PRESERVATION

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. [BPDA, OE01](#)
- Create low- or rent-free spaces in vacant upperfloor office spaces, both temporarily and permanently, for startups, nonprofits, and small businesses. [BPDA, OE01](#)
- Expedite/streamline inspection services for first-time brick-and-mortar retail businesses. [BPDA, ISD, OE01](#)
- Facilitate the location of short-term and temporary uses in vacant ground floor retail spaces by streamlining the permitting process for short-term occupation. [BPDA, ISD, OE01](#)
- 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. [BPDA, ISD, OE01](#)
- Proactively engage communities throughout Downtown, informing them of economic development opportunities Downtown, via OE01 and local non-profit organizations. [BPDA, OE01](#)
- Inventory vacant ground floor spaces at semi-annual intervals to track trends and help connect potential tenants with landlords. [OE01](#)
- Incentivize new uses for underutilized parking garages that create opportunities for public amenities and spaces. [BPDA](#)
- Encourage a diversity of uses in the Financial District by incentivizing small business. [BPDA](#)
- 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). [BPDA, MOAC](#)
- Incentivize placement of community infrastructure such as schools, libraries, and recreation centers alongside or as part of proposed development. [BPDA](#)

- Ongoing/in-planning
- Immediate actions
- Near to mid-term actions
- Long term actions

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy Actions



GROWTH & PRESERVATION

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. [BPDA](#)
- Offer tax and fee incentives to start construction of residential projects that meet PLAN: Downtown and the City’s goals. [BPDA](#)
- Continue devoting underutilized public land to the production of new affordable housing following the guidance of the Citywide Land Audit, 2022. [BPDA](#)
- Continue to explore increasing the number and range of housing options in Chinatown with a priority on low- and middle-income family housing in accordance with the Chinatown Neighborhood Master Plan 2020. [BPDA, 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. [BPDA, 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. [BPDA, 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. [BPDA, MOH](#)
- Explore a vacancy tax on those who buy housing without occupying or leasing the unit. [BPDA, MOH](#)

- Ongoing/in-planning
- Immediate actions
- Near to mid-term actions
- Long term actions

Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy Actions



GROWTH & PRESERVATION

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. [BPDA, MOAC, OHP](#)
- Conduct an updated inventory of all buildings and historic assets in the study area, based on historic and cultural significance and design features. [BPDA, OHP](#)
- 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. [BPDA](#)
- Strengthen the Theater District as a cultural hub by continuing to incentivize development of affordable performance, production, and exhibition spaces. [BPDA](#)
- Utilize the PLAN: Downtown design guidelines to inform how new development can respect and enhance the surrounding public realm and buildings. [BPDA, OHP](#)
- Continue to promote and support public artwork and sculpture projects like Wen-Ti Tsen’s “Chinatown Worker Statues” in Chinatown and throughout Downtown in streets, public spaces, and active alleys, and on walls and blank facades. Encourage private partnerships with local artists and community groups. [BPDA, MOAC](#)
- Incorporate art by local artists and makers in wayfinding and streetscape furniture design. [BPDA, MOAC, PWD](#)

- Ongoing/in-planning
- Immediate actions
- Near to mid-term actions
- Long term actions

Agencies responsible are highlighted



MOBILITY

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 [BTD, PWD](#)

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

Bike Network [BTD](#)

- Support the implementation of permanent pedestrian and bike network improvements on State Street.
- 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 Street corridor as identified in the "Safe Streets" program.

Bus Network [BTD, MBTA](#)

- 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 . Key MBTA Transit Priority Vision projects within the study area include: High-quality bus priority facilities through North-Station-Seaport project to help the new T7 route be reliable and competitive, furthering a solution to combine two patterns of the Silver Line (SL4, SL5) near Downtown Crossing with a common routing, stops, and terminal, and upgrading the Washington Street corridor of the Silver Line to more effective transit priority.
- 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.
- 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.

Rail Network [BTD, MBTA](#)

- Support Rail Vision - the MBTA's long-term vision for improved rail service in Greater Boston and beyond.
- Support South Station Expansion to enable the growth and improve the reliability and resiliency of the regional rail network.
- 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.
- 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.

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) and improve the enforcement of deliveries, services, and curbside uses, especially for the Pedestrian Zone. [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](#)
- Support MBTA efforts to modernize mass transit infrastructure and improve its resilience to challenges like stormwater infiltration and excess heat. [BTD, MBTA](#)

● Ongoing/in-planning
● Immediate actions
● Near to mid-term actions
● Long term actions
Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy Actions



OPEN SPACE & PUBLIC REALM

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 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 Street/Summer Street](#). [BPDA](#), [PWD](#)
- Create new privately owned public spaces privately owned public spaces (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 Street](#), [Bedford and Kingston Streets - traffic island transformation](#), [Kilby and Milk Streets - 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 Street 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](#)

● Ongoing/in planning
● Immediate actions
● Near to mid-term actions
● Long term actions
Agencies responsible are highlighted

Policy Actions



CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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](#)

● Ongoing
● Immediate actions
● Mid-term actions
● Long-term actions
Agencies responsible are highlighted

DESIGN GUIDELINES

These design guidelines provide direction as to 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 divided into 5 sections to focus on the following key areas:

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

How to use:

The guidelines are intended for City staff as well as developers, architects, and community members to help shape and evaluate projects in the area. They will be used and enforced when projects undergo the BPDA and BLC design review process, as outlined in this chapter. During this process projects must demonstrate with a context analysis and supportive materials how the project fulfills the five key sections covered in these design guidelines.

SECTIONS 1-4: General design guidelines that apply across all of Downtown.

SECTION 5: Additional location specific design principles and historic context to guide projects in each Downtown character area.

Prioritizing Adaptive Reuse and Conducting Context Analysis:

While many of these guidelines provide direction for new construction, projects Downtown should foremost prioritize the adaptive reuse of existing buildings to maintain not only the area's historic fabric and character but also lower embodied carbon and significantly further sustainable development. Demonstrating a clear understanding of a project's context is critical. Projects should:

- a. Analyze the surrounding built context and public realm, consulting with the Office of Historic Preservation to identify key historic and cultural assets that the project will impact and enhance.
- b. Examine and refer to existing historic surveys and resources for the site and surrounding buildings, including:
 - Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) data and resources
 - Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) data
 - National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) resources
- c. Create relevant elevations, site and context plans, massing studies, and street views that illustrate the project's relationship to the surrounding context.



Design Review Process

These design guidelines should be utilized for all types of projects but will be the basis of design review for projects undergoing design review through the Planning Department.

Projects will undergo different types and degrees of review by the Planning Department as well as other City agencies to examine their site plan, massing, and design depending on project scale, location, or project type, such as a change of use, new construction, or addition. Project conditions that often trigger different types of design-related review Downtown include but are not limited to:



- a. If a project requires zoning relief, the project must file an appeal with the [Zoning Board of Appeal \(ZBA\)](#).
- During the appeals process, Planning Department staff create non-binding recommendations on ZBA applications that consider zoning and planning context (such as PLAN: Downtown). These recommendations are then provided to the ZBA for their consideration.
 - The ZBA may require Planning Department design review as a condition of zoning relief.



- b. The scale or type of project Downtown (as determined by the Boston Zoning Code) often triggers [Planning Department design review as a component of Article 80 review](#):
- The design components of the review process enforce the Downtown Design Guidelines.
 - Depending on the size of the project (refer to the Boston Zoning Code) other components of the review process include, but are not limited to: the evaluation of transportation impacts, accessibility, resilience and green building, infrastructure systems, and development impacts.



- c. Changes to a Boston-landmarked building requires the prior review and approval of the [Boston Landmarks Commission \(BLC\)](#):
- BLC staff should be consulted early in the design process to assist in the development of projects that will be approvable by the BLC by assessing the potential impact on historic structures, refining and improving proposed changes, and ensuring that changes align with landmarks' standards.
 - The BLC ultimately approves projects through a public hearing process.
 - BLC resources provide the latest information on pending and designated Boston landmarks.



- d. The demolition of buildings that meet the criteria outlined in Article 85 requires an [Article 85 Demolition Delay](#) application that is reviewed by BLC staff:
- Boston Zoning Code Article 85 establishes a waiting period to consider alternatives to the demolition of a building of historical, architectural, cultural or urban design value to the City, including how that may impact project design.
 - Depending on the significance of the building, demolition delay provides an opportunity for the public to comment on the demolition of a particular building.
 - Minimizes the number and extent of building demolition where no immediate re-use of the site is planned.
 - Refer to Boston Zoning Code Article 85 for requirements and review process.



- e. Projects in the [Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District \(CFROD\)](#) Downtown require resilience review through the Article 80 review process.
- CFROD ensures project compliance with the City's climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines, ensuring projects are designed to be resilient to the risks of future floods under sea level rise
 - Refer to Boston Zoning Code Article 25A for requirements and review process.



- f. Projects in the [Groundwater Conservation Overlay District \(GCOD\)](#) Downtown must obtain a Conditional Use Permit through the Boston Zoning Board of Appeals depending on the scale and nature of the project as outlined in Article 32 of the Boston Zoning Code.
- GCOD helps protect wood pile foundations of buildings from being damaged by lowered groundwater levels.
 - Projects must include a groundwater recharge system and obtain a Certification of No Harm.
 - Refer to the Boston Zoning Code Article 32 for requirements and review process.

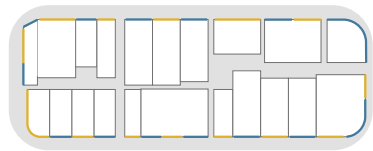
Design Guidelines

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. **Frontage width:** 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 ✓

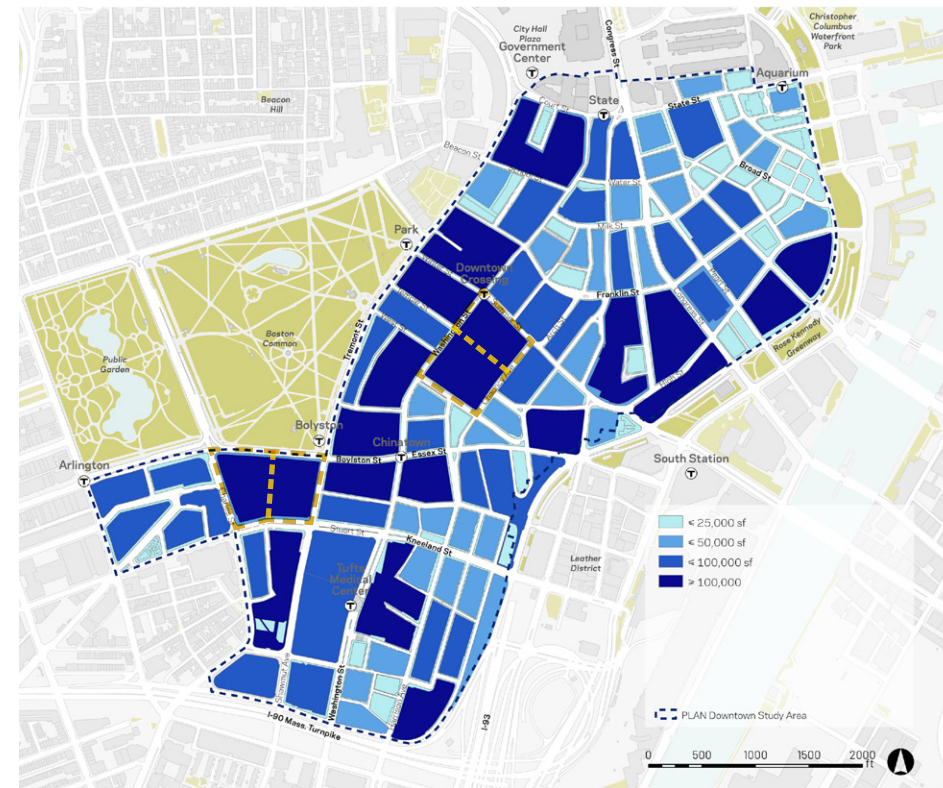


Large city block without interior public passages X

- b. **Maintain existing passages and alleys** or provide an interior public passage along the same or similar alignment.
- c. **Alignment:** 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. **Mid-block open space:** Site and building design should establish, respect, and enhance mid-block open space.
- e. **Mid-block connections:** 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.

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

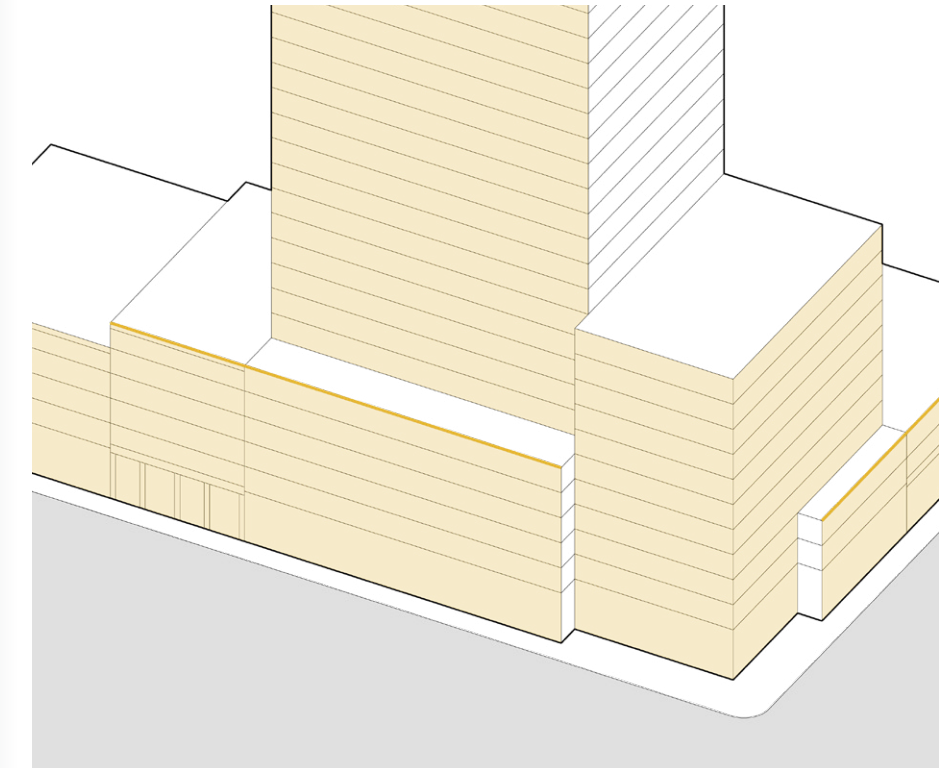


Range of block sizes in the study area

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. **Stepbacks:** Utilize stepbacks to reference and respond to the height, massing, and important architectural lines of abutting buildings. Particular attention should be paid to abutting historic buildings in the Ladder Blocks, Wharf District, and Chinatown.



- b. **Distance between non-party wall buildings:** In non-party wall conditions, utilize setbacks to ensure adequate space for light and air, especially between buildings with window walls.
- c. **Building alignment:** Align new development with the predominant setback along the street to maintain continuous street edges and active streetscapes. Upper-story facades should not protrude beyond street alignment. Exceptions may include courtyards or forecourts that do not significantly disrupt a continuous street edge and help meaningfully expand the public realm.



The Kensington (above) has a stepback along a portion of its facade that aligns with the neighboring historic building. The corner breaks with the street alignment to expand the public realm and provide outdoor seating.

The Modern Theatre (left) steps back to highlight the historic theater facade.

Design Guidelines

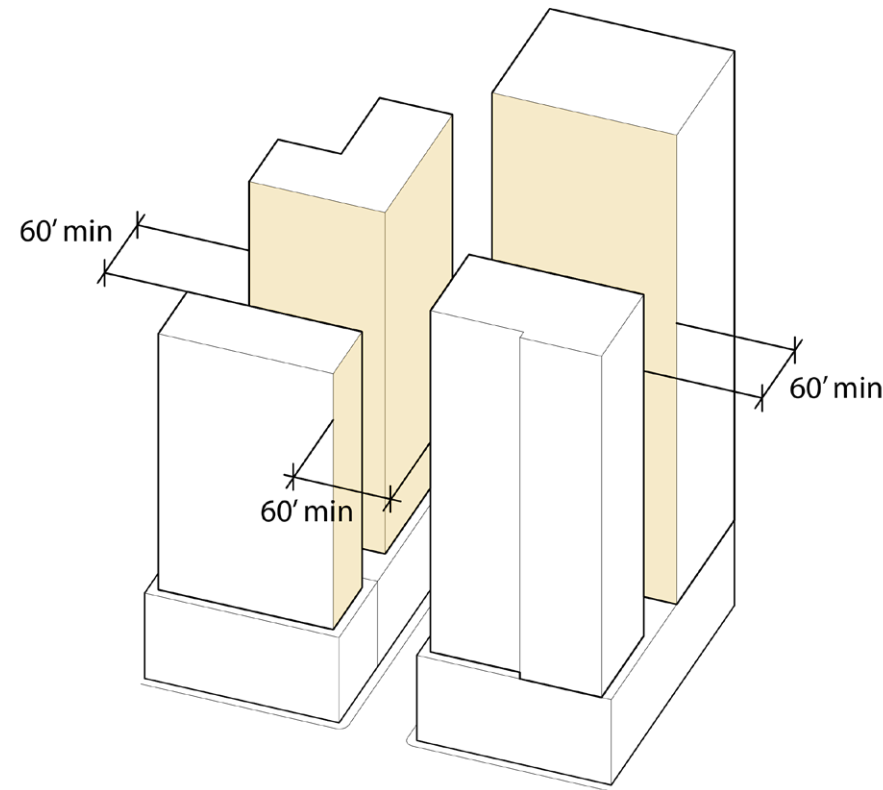
1. Scale, Massing, & Articulation

1.3 Tall buildings

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

- a. **Impact and wind analysis:** Test impacts on the local environment at the design stage, ensuring tall buildings minimize impacts such as high wind speeds at the street level.
- b. **Stepbacks:** Introduce stepbacks from parks, open spaces, neighboring properties, and key streets to maximize access to light and air between adjacent buildings and reduce visual and physical impacts on the public realm and neighboring historic buildings.
- c. **View corridors:** Shape tall buildings with particular attention to views from elsewhere in the City and the street level, framing open spaces, key view corridors, and historic buildings and spaces.
- d. **Material and facade articulation:** Utilize materials that have impact from a distance while also providing, scale, pattern, and jointing up close, particularly on the ground floor and base of the building.
- e. **Mechanical penthouses** should be treated as integral elements to the overall design, concealed as much as possible within the typical facade treatment.

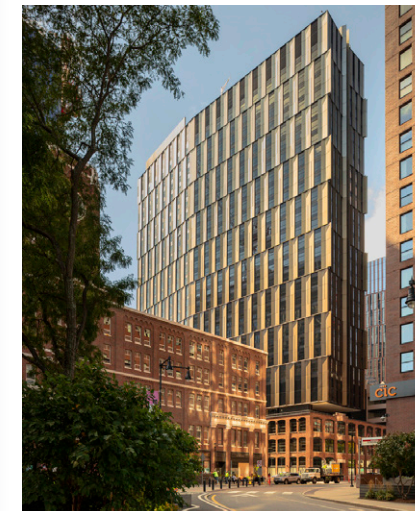
- f. **Tall building separation distance:** Tall buildings on the same block, on separate lots, and across right-of-ways, parks, and open spaces should be separated by a minimum of 60', measured from the exterior wall of the building face, excluding balconies.



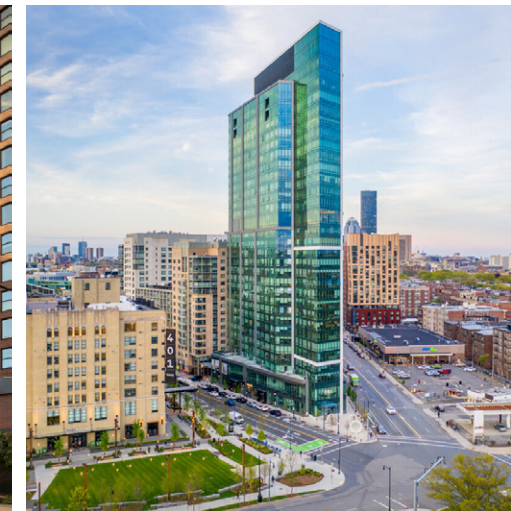
660 Washington stepbacks at a height aligned with neighboring historic buildings. A higher stepback at the corner helps break up the massing and emphasize the tower corner. (Boston)



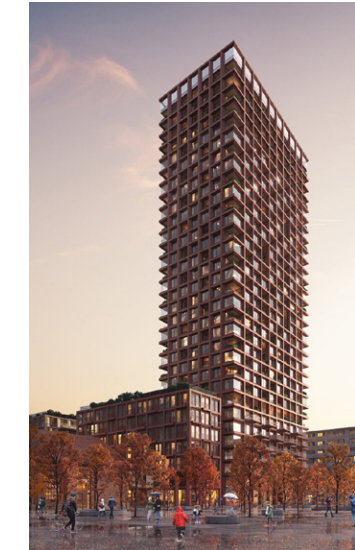
A small stepback along the front face of the **Millenium Tower** aligns with historic buildings along Franklin St. (Handel, Boston)



Site 4 graduate housing reuses a brick warehouse building and orients the primary massing away from the street edge. (NADAA, Cambridge)



The **188 Brookline Ave** residential building's front corner setback makes a small public plaza. Small podium-level stepbacks along each side of the tower help mitigate negative height impacts on the street. (CBT, Boston).



Rocket & Tigerli mass timber tower design uses terracotta brick to complement the surrounding area (Schmidt Hammer Lassen, Switzerland)



One Crown Place Towers' facade is distinct from neighboring buildings, but tiered stepbacks help transition tall portions of the tower to the lower historic context. (KPF, Canada).



Quay Quarter Tower reuses an existing 1976 tower reaching the end of its usable lifespan to create a more sustainable tiered massing. (3XN, Australia)



88 Walker preserves and distinguishes itself from a historic firehouse on the ground level. (fitzpatrick+partners, Australia)

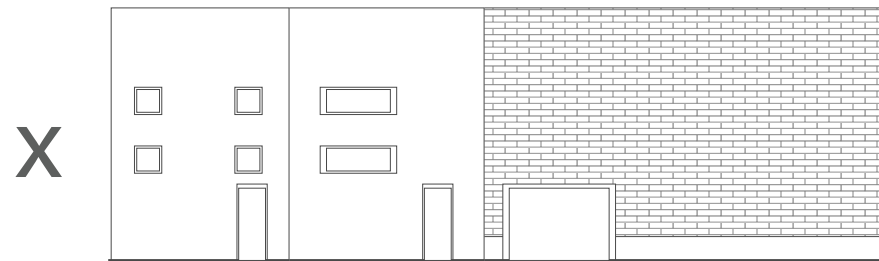
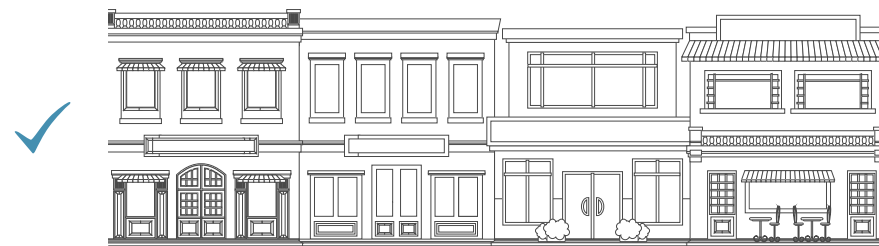
Design Guidelines

1. Scale, Massing, & Articulation

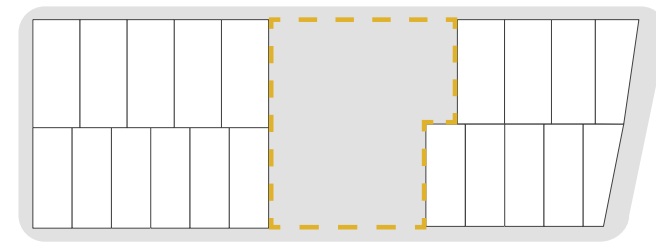
1.4 Architectural Articulation

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

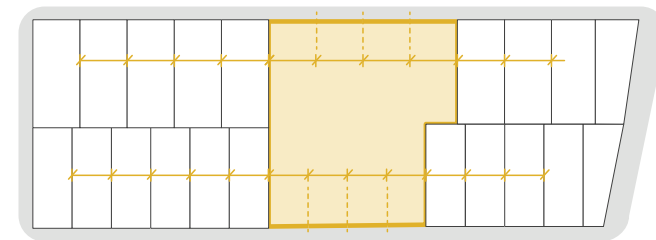
- a. Avoid large expanses of undifferentiated blank surfaces. Thoughtful compositional strategies that incorporate human-scaled detailing, components, and features to break-down the scale of building elements at the ground and lower floors are encouraged.
- b. In general no façade should present a blank wall for more than 30 ft. Simple changes of color or material in the same plane are rarely sufficient.



- c. 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.
- d. 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.

- e. Ensure glass and other building materials do not cause adverse reflections on adjacent buildings and the public realm.
- f. Respond to the ornamental context of adjacent buildings, but avoid direct mimicry and imitation of historic features.
- g. 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

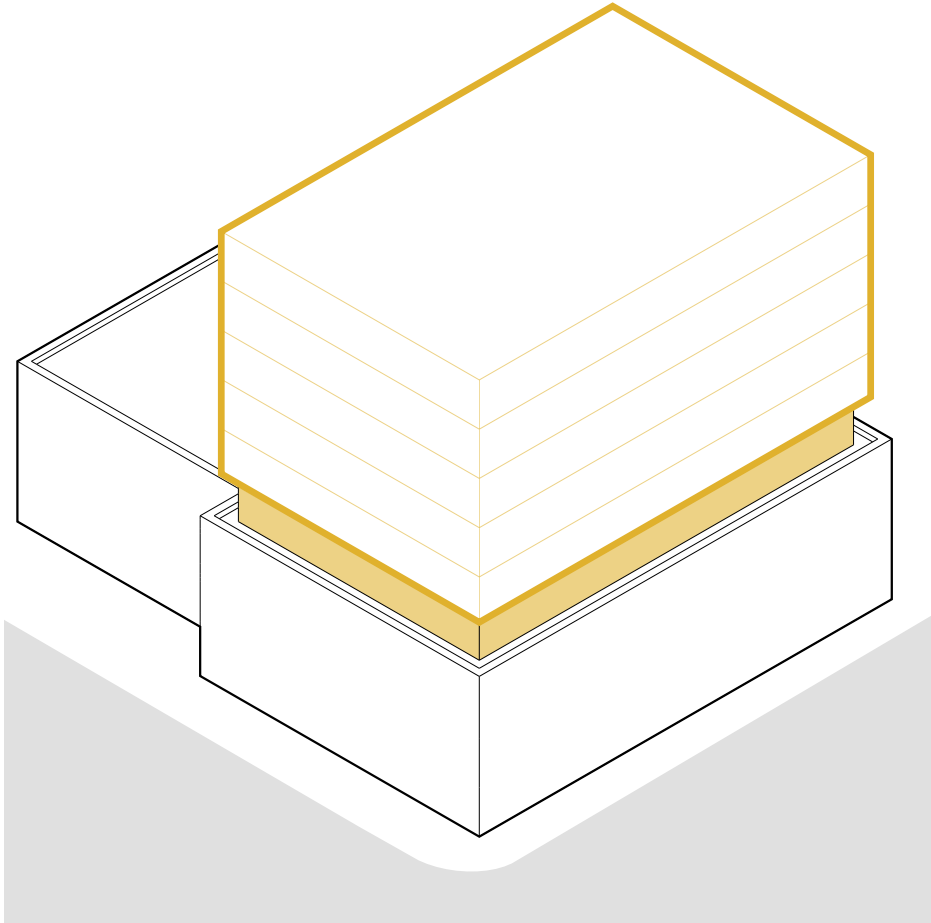


1. Scale, Massing, & Articulation

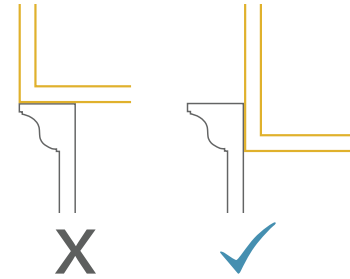
1.5 Vertical Building Additions

Distinguish vertical building additions from the existing building.

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



- 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

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



New York, USA



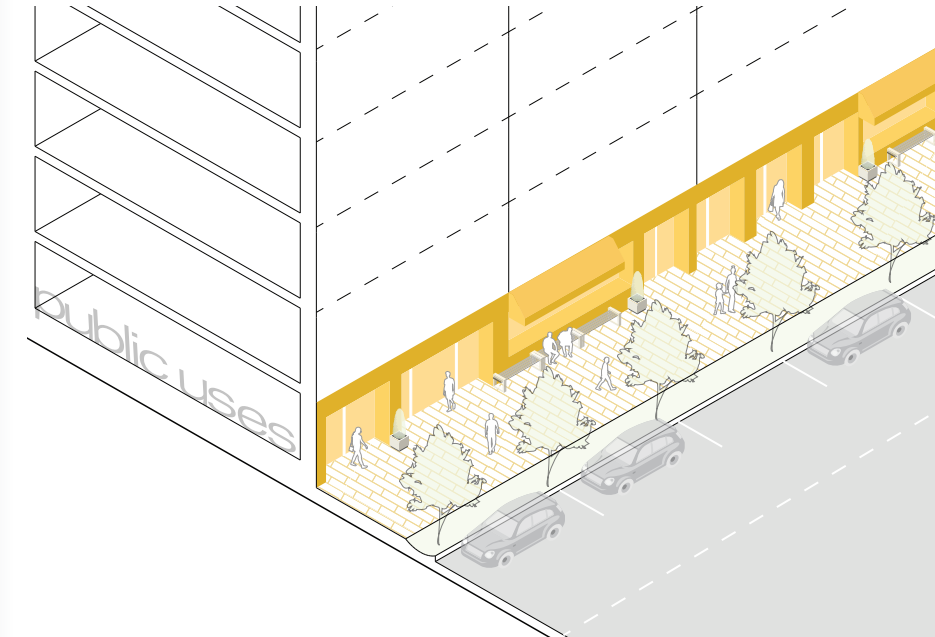
Oviedo, Spain

2. Active Ground Floors & Loading

2.1 Active Uses

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

- Designing space scaled for small, locally-owned, and diverse-owned businesses is encouraged.
- Publicly accessible and not just tenant-only active ground floor uses should be available on every parcel that is not service-oriented, and placed as frequently as possible to support a diversity of experiences.



- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- a. 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.
- b. Incorporate lighting, landscaping, and public realm enhancements at building entrances wherever possible.
- c. Utilize signage to call out entrances and follow the Downtown Crossing Signage Guidelines.
- d. 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.

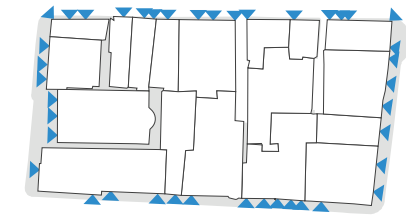
Theater District: Tremont Street and Washington Street.

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.

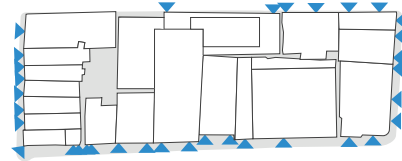
Financial District: Congress Street, Pearl Street and the 'Busy Local Streets' identified in the street typologies.

Wharf District: State Street and Broad Street.

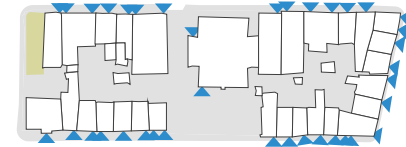
- e. Distance between entrances should fit a common neighborhood pattern and avoid long frontages without active entries.



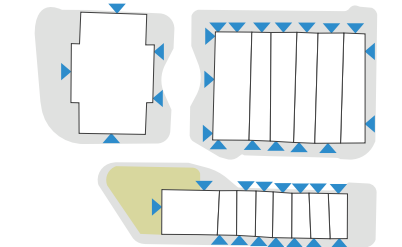
Downtown



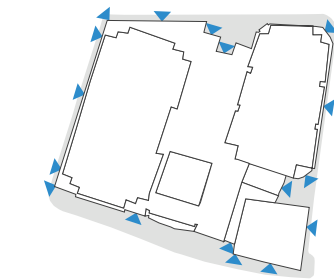
Theater District



Chinatown



Wharf District

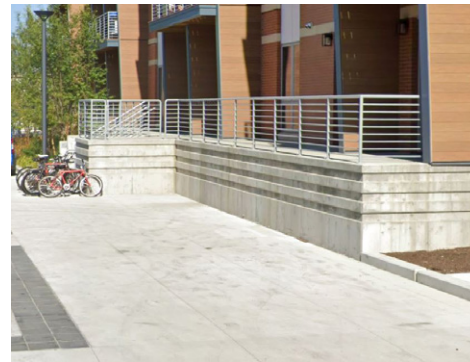


Financial District

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.

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.

- a. Wherever feasible, locate parking access, loading and servicing areas on side streets or, preferably, alleyways, away from primary streets.
- b. Location of loading, servicing, and delivery should follow any relevant City guidelines.
- c. 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.
- d. 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.
- e. Loading/servicing/delivery/parking entrances should be consolidated as much as possible, ideally resulting in no more than one curb cut per block face.
- f. Access drives to loading areas should be built at the same elevation of the sidewalk to maintain a continuous grade across them for pedestrians.
- g. 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. Avoid placing mechanical exhaust vents alongside public spaces.
- c. Encourage a variety of shading and rain protection structures in places with high solar exposure, especially where tree planting is less viable.
- d. Utilize flexible furniture and seating paired with building awnings and plantings to encourage use.
- e. 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.
- f. Find opportunities to provide additional, or increase existing, planting that will address the desire for a ‘greener’ Downtown.
- g. 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.
- h. Provide spaces that support different types of activation including community events, play areas, and exercise equipment for a variety of ages and groups.
- i. Wherever possible, address areaways that inhibit street trees, accessibility, and sidewalk improvements.

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, such as Wen-ti Tsen’s *Chinatown Workers Statue*.



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

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.



Boston Symphony Music Hall



Boston Theatre District

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 ground cover 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.

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



View to Post Office Square from Franklin Street.



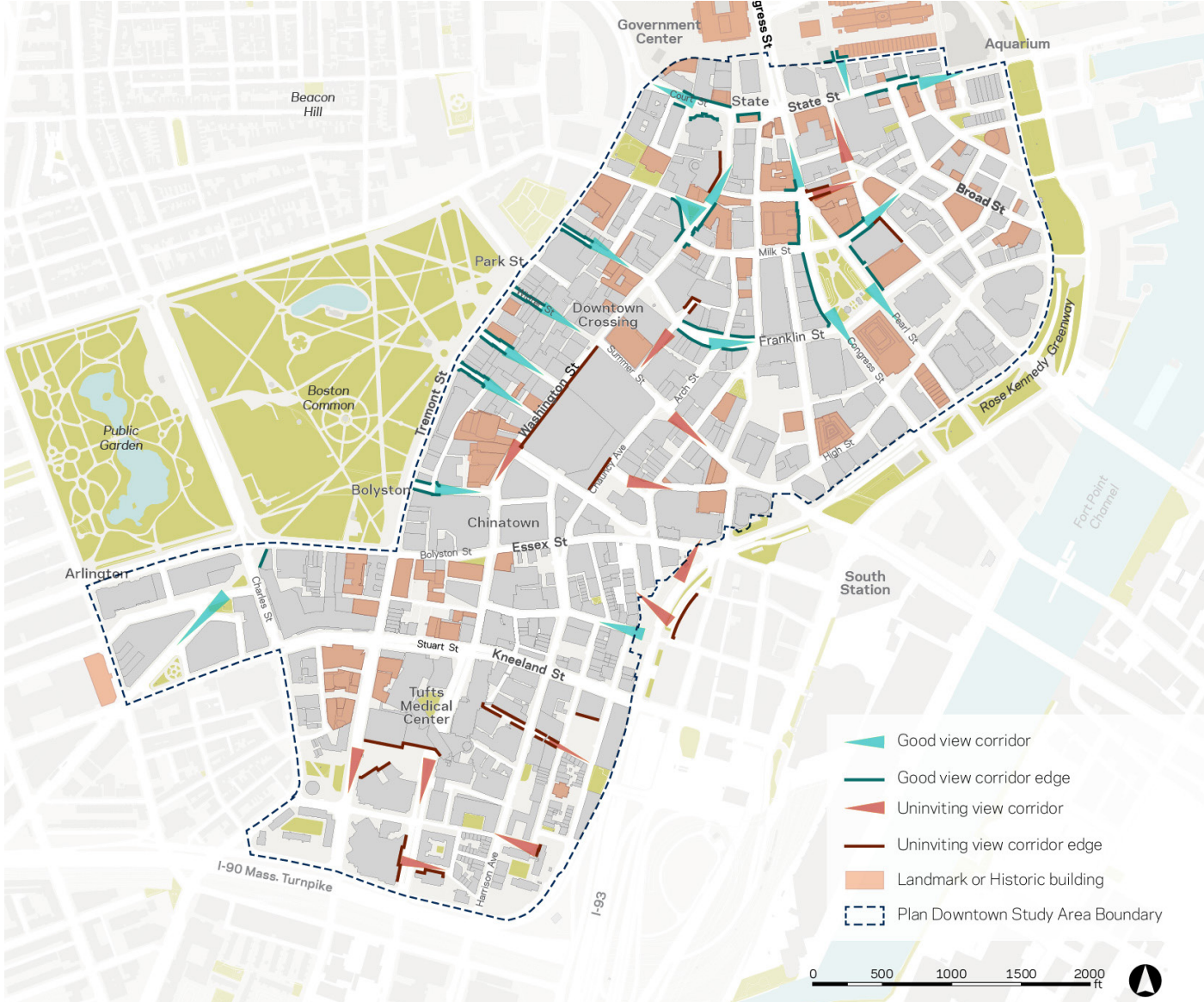
Buildings of different periods and scales define Reader's Square edge .



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).

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.

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. All pavers must comply with the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- d. 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

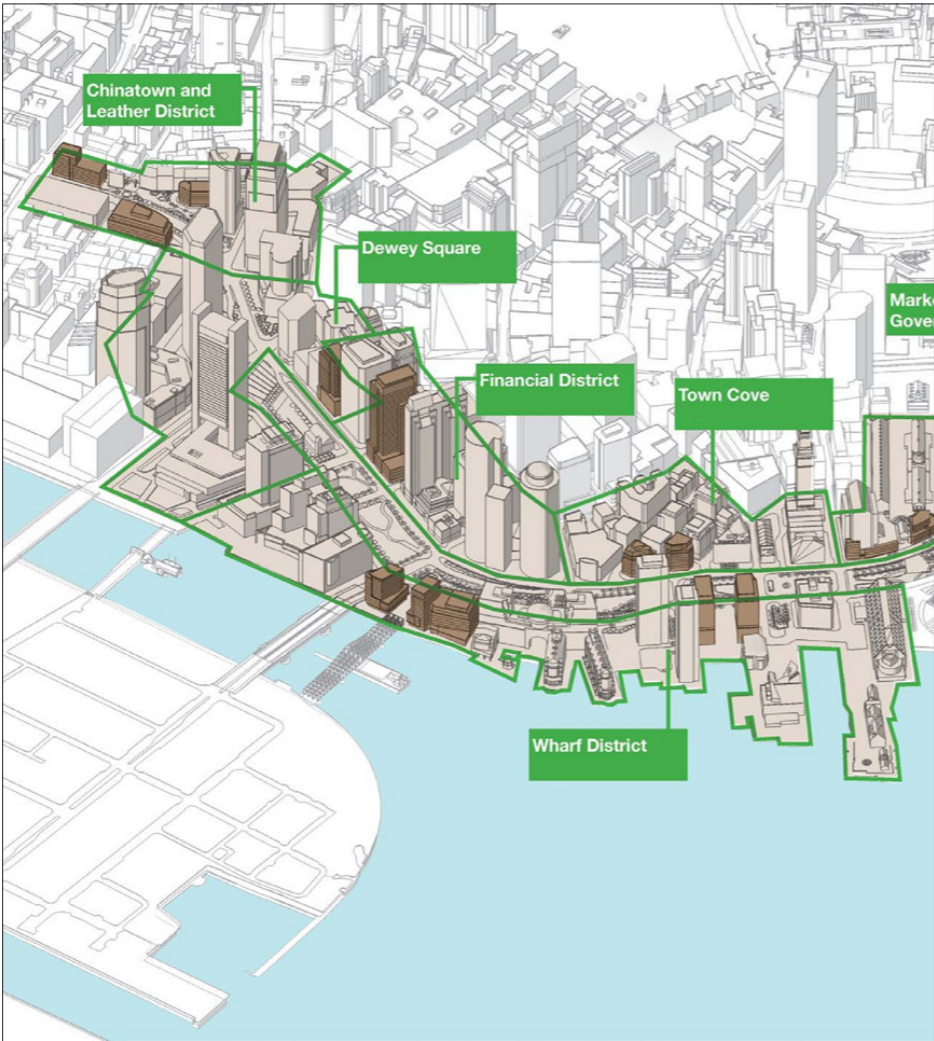
Street furniture should enhance access to Downtown and support pedestrian comfort and year-round activation.

- a. 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.
- b. Furniture should not obstruct, obscure, or disrupt the pedestrian zone and should aim to reduce visual and physical clutter.
- c. Trash and recycling receptacles should be located in amenity zones near street crossings and intersections or in other high traffic areas.
- d. 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.
- e. Locate bike racks and seating near building entrances, open spaces, and intersections, but avoid impeding primary paths of travel for pedestrians.

3.7 Enhance the Greenway

Enhance, activate, and expand the public realm adjacent and connecting to the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway. Adhere to the Greenway District Planning Study Use and Development Guidelines that have additional site by site considerations such as:

- a. Primary building entries and ground floor active uses and programming should face the Greenway parks and connections to the Greenway to the extent feasible.
- b. Design open spaces, sidewalks, and street improvements to improve pedestrian flow and increase pedestrian safety, with particular attention to enhancing connections to and through the Greenway.
- c. Assess shadow and wind impacts on the Greenway.



Greenway District Planning Study Use and Development Guidelines (2010)

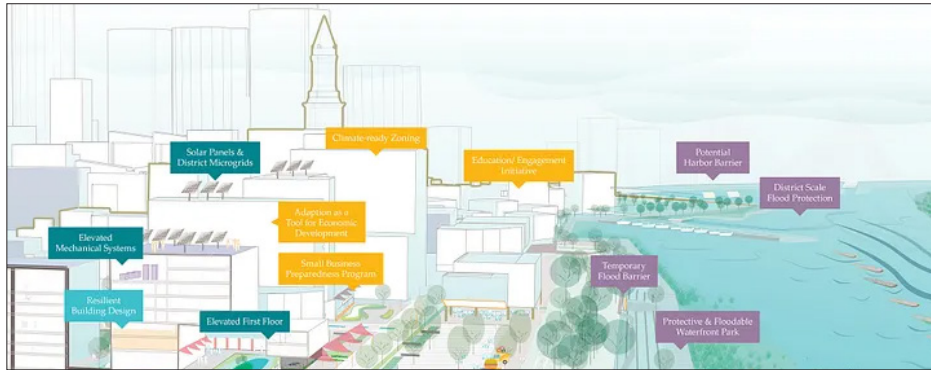
Design Guidelines

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

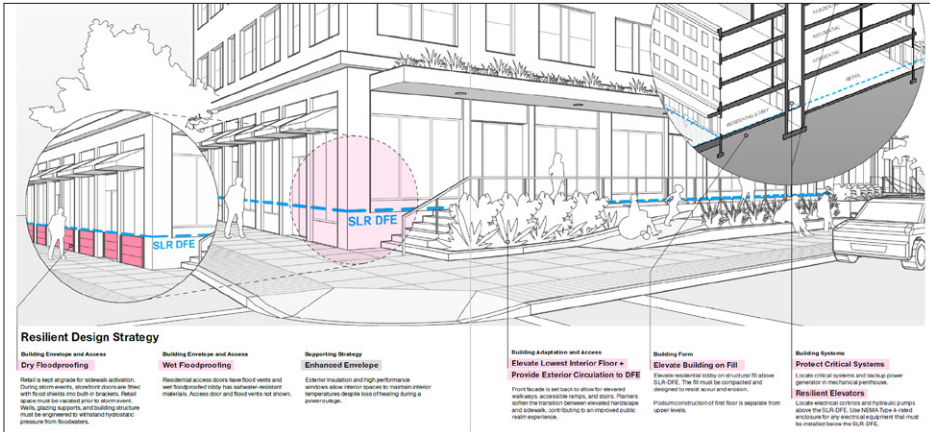


Climate Ready Boston

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 where appropriate. “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



Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Introduction

This chapter provides historic context and additional location-specific design principles for each character area. These more place specific guidelines overlap significantly with the general design guidelines that apply across Downtown, and they should be used together in shaping and evaluating projects.

The historic districts, buildings, and public spaces of Downtown can be understood as an accumulation of layers over time. Nearly every style of American architecture and every decade since the 1700s is represented in its architecture. Taken as whole, Downtown Boston is a district rich in history. At the same time, each neighborhood displays characteristics that make it distinct. These traits might include block structure, street types, parcel size, building heights, architectural styles, historical eras, or building materials.

While this undoubtedly makes it a treasure, it does not make it a museum; it is a city that is very much alive, each generation adding its layers to the tapestry.

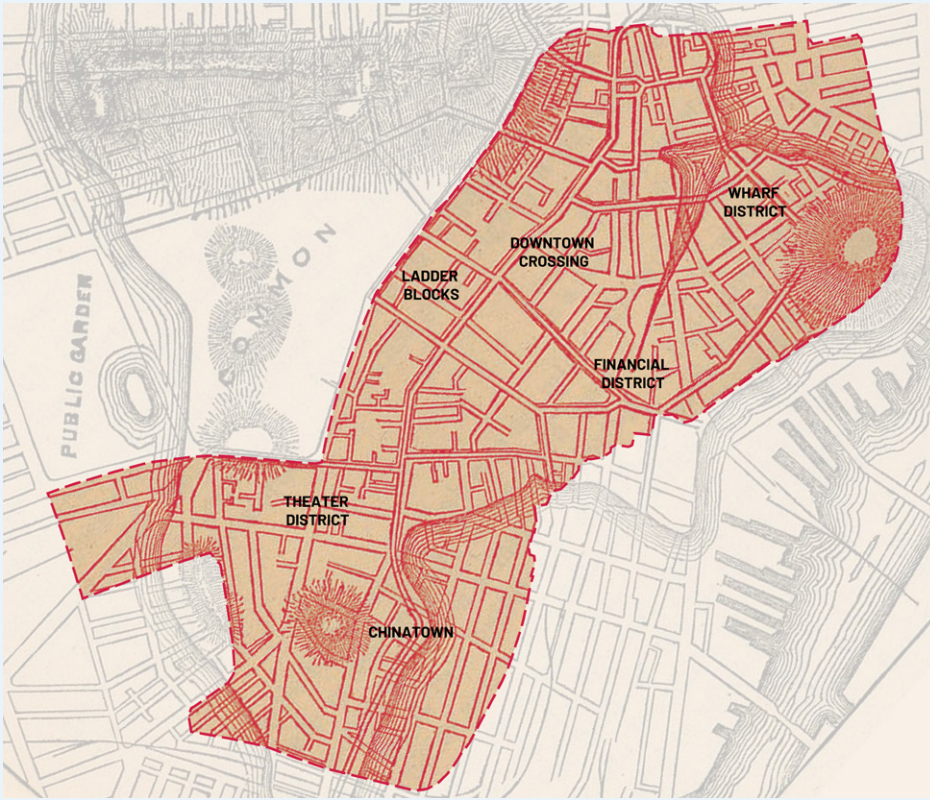
An understanding of this historic context should not be viewed as a ceiling that prevents creative growth but rather as a springboard to thoughtful development, respectful of its context while firmly of its place and time. The desire to protect historic buildings, landmarks, and cultural areas should be regarded not as an impediment but as an intelligent opportunity that can be leveraged to mold a better future.

What is “historic”?

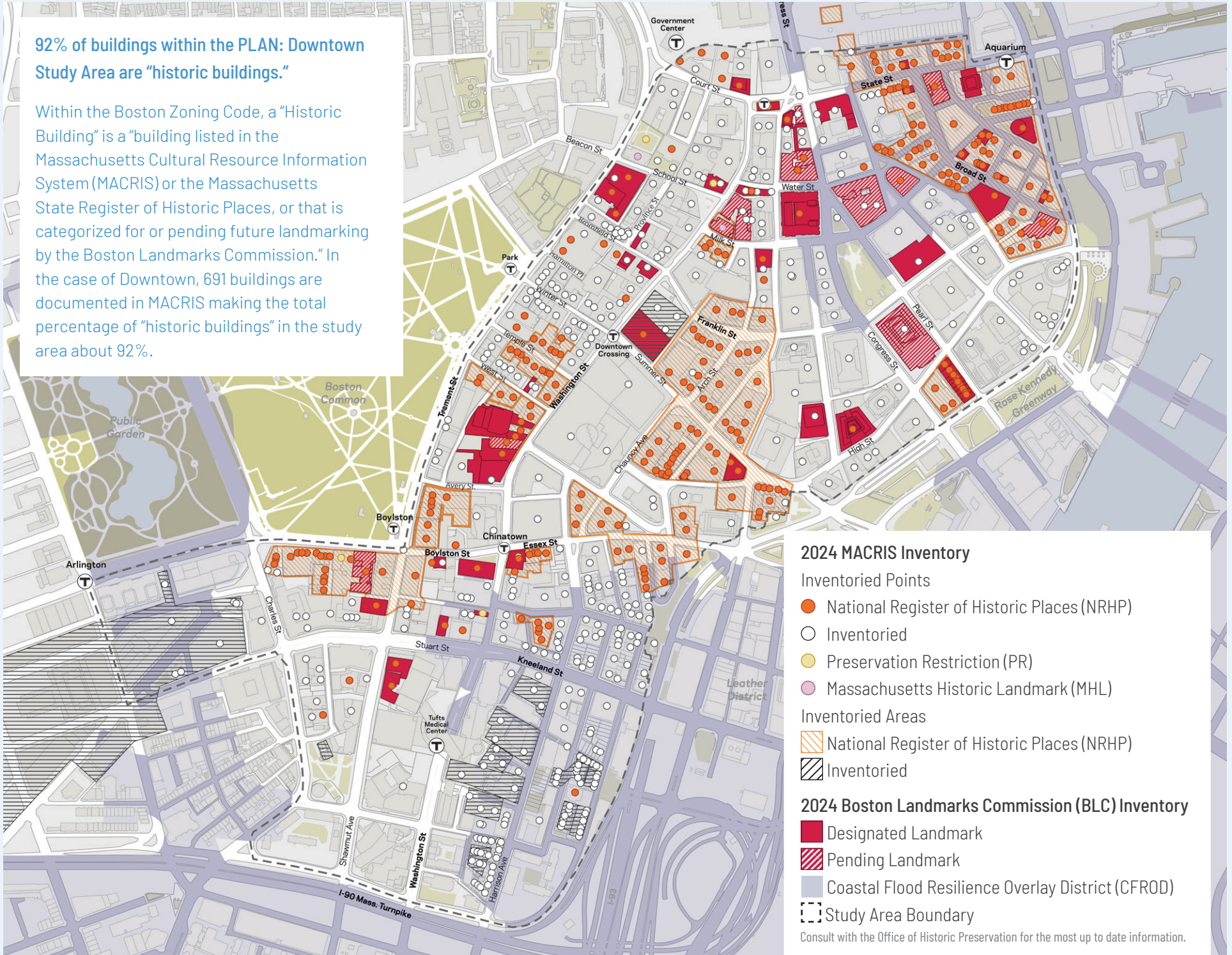
Within the study area, “historic” often refers to formally designated structures and areas, as well as often overlooked older buildings and sites that have architectural, cultural, and historical significance to an era or event. Areas like the Wharf District and the Ladder Blocks have some of Boston’s oldest buildings. Alongside these

sites there are also notable collections of modern and post-modern era structures, which, now seventy and thirty years old, respectively, should also be considered historic. In addition to buildings, historic site features such as granite slab sidewalks should be considered in evaluating historic context.

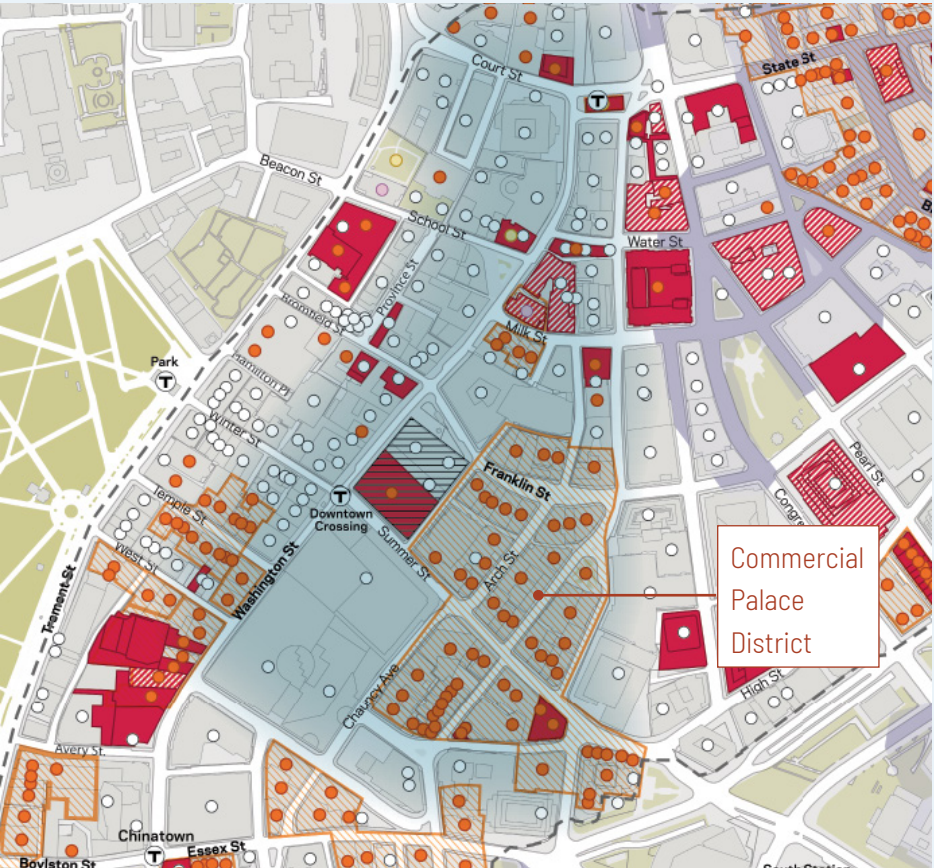
For the most part, the district’s historic buildings have been documented; however, work to expand and update surveys are necessary. When evaluating a site’s historic significance and conducting site analysis, refer to MACRIS survey information as well as BLC and NRHP resources.



Overlay of PLAN: Downtown study area and Character Areas on historic map of 17th century topography and 19th century streets



Downtown Crossing



- 2024 MACRIS Inventory

 - NRHP
 - Inventoried
 - PR
 - MHL
- 2024 BLC Inventory

 - Designated Landmark
 - Pending Landmark
 - CFROD
 - Study Area

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Projects should enhance Downtown Crossing’s distinctive identity as a vibrant hub where diverse architectural styles, heights, and scales converge, reflecting the area’s dynamic mix of people and historic character.

Historically a residential neighborhood that became a hub of retail activity mixed with institutional uses in the mid nineteenth century, Downtown Crossing stretches east of the Boston Common, with the historic Washington Street spine running through the area from north to south.

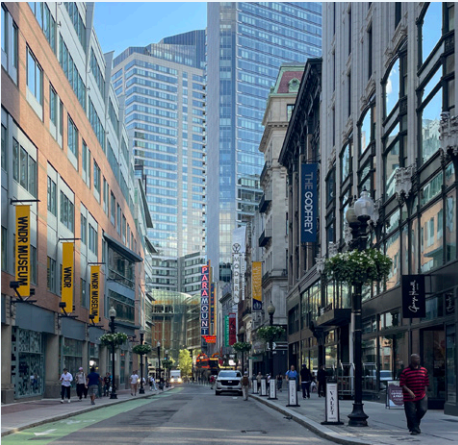


Washington Street, the area’s spine, plays an important role as a retail and view corridor framing Reader’s Plaza, the Old South Meeting House and layers of old and new buildings Downtown.

Maintain and enhance Downtown Crossing’s street pattern and network of smaller alleys that create dynamic views of historic sites and building facades.

The area’s unique street layout enhances the visibility of building facades. Its historic street pattern developed along the original topography and shoreline of the Shawmut Peninsula. Downtown Crossing and its natural continuation in the Financial District form a fan-shaped street layout, resulting in several trapezoidal and almost triangular blocks of varying sizes that make building facades more prominently displayed and visible compared to a straight block configuration or standard street grid.

In addition to the major streets, Downtown Crossing features several historic alleys (e.g., Pi Alley, Winthrop Lane, Spring Lane, etc.), which help break up large city blocks and create through block connections. Projects should respect existing alleys and look for opportunities for more mid-block connections.



Washington Street framing historic theaters. Shifts in the street pattern highlight signage and building elements in the distance.



Winthrop Lane, a typical alley in Downtown Crossing

Introduce additional density alongside lower historic buildings using massing changes and setbacks to transition between lower and higher buildings in the area.

Throughout Downtown, the blend of historical and contemporary architecture and range of building heights and scales give Downtown its dynamic and visually engaging character for projects to navigate. This is especially true in Downtown Crossing that boasts, as a central hub of transit and commerce for Downtown and the City, recent examples and future opportunities for increased density and the enhancement and reuse of older structures. One clear example is the juxtaposition of the modern glass facade and tall massing of the Millennium Tower alongside the restored historic facade of the adjacent Filene’s Building. Massing changes and setbacks should be used to both highlight existing historic elements of surrounding buildings and transition between new and existing building heights as demonstrated by the 2015 addition to the historic National Shawmut Bank Building (1906, pending Boston Landmark) at 33 Congress St.



The Congress Square project by Arrowstreet in 2015 adaptively reused existing historic buildings, restored existing facades, and added a modern addition above the existing historic structures.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Downtown Crossing

Complement Downtown Crossing's mix of architectural styles and landmarked buildings.

Individual landmarks are scattered throughout the Downtown Crossing area. About half of the historic buildings in Downtown Crossing were constructed during the period from 1850-1900. A notable building from that period is the Old City Hall, constructed in 1862 to designs by Bryant & Gilman in the Second Empire style. The north end of the area features several significant buildings built before the 1800s in Georgian style, including the three National Historic Landmarks: Old State House (1712), the Old South Meeting House (1729), and King's Chapel (1750), along with the Old Corner Bookstore (1728, also known as Thomas Creese House), a pending Boston Landmark and Downtown Boston's oldest commercial building. These 18th and 19th-century landmarks are interspersed with a significant inventory of 20th-century buildings, highlighting the potential in Downtown Crossing for projects that both complement and contrast with its historic fabric.



The Old State House (1712)



The Old South Meeting House (1729)



The Old Corner Bookstore (1728), Boston's oldest commercial building



King's Chapel (1750)

Find opportunities for adaptive reuse and avoid demolition, especially in cohesive areas of smaller historic building fabric like the NRHP Commercial Palace Historic District and Textile District.

Within Downtown Crossing's historic street pattern lie pockets of smaller historic fabric that should be maintained. One such pocket is a cluster of buildings with smaller footprints located between the large-scale buildings along the east side of Washington Street and the Financial District. Particularly noteworthy is the Commercial Palace District, bounded east by Devonshire Street and west by Chauncey and Hawley Streets. As the largest surviving portion of Boston's late 19th-century commercial district, this cluster of smaller and lower buildings represents a key area to preserve through adaptive reuse projects, offering a chance to revitalize the area while avoiding demolition. This area holds a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) status for the National Register of Historic Places, signifying its qualification as a National Historic District.



Portion of Franklin Street within the Commercial Palace District

Frame and enhance key view corridors and urban spaces that showcase Downtown Crossing's mix of new and old.

Downtown Crossing's dynamic mix of 18th to 20th-century buildings helps frame some of the most active urban spaces Downtown. Washington Street, the area's spine, is punctuated by a series of open spaces. These occur largely because of breaks in the street grid or moments when buildings are set back from the property line, allowing for a small to medium-scaled opportunity for respite along the street wall.

Most significant of these is Reader's Park, a small but active space that is bounded by the concrete colonnade and glass facade of 309 Washington Street, a 1972 addition by Kallmann and McKinnell to the Five Cents Savings Bank Building, and the brick facades of the Old South Meeting House and the Thomas Creese House. Taller, more contemporary buildings surrounding the square provide a modern backdrop to the historic sites circling the park and demonstrate the layers of built history Downtown.



Reader's Park, bounded by 309 Washington Street (left, 1972) and row of historic buildings on the right.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Downtown Crossing

Other noteworthy spaces in the area include Shoppers Plaza and Tontine Crescent. Shopper's Plaza contains a recently designed triangular viewing platform along Washington Street that is flanked by two contemporary buildings and the historic Burnham Building (Daniel Burnham, 1912, originally known as Filene's), a designated Boston Landmark. Tontine Crescent, Charles Bullfinch's 1793 response to the curvilinear buildings of Bath, demolished by the city in 1858 and replaced by five-story stone commercial structures destroyed by fire in 1872, is now a four-hundred-foot curved building wall that forms the elegant backdrop to a contemporary public space.

These spaces embody Downtown Crossing's vibrant mix of historic and new buildings, framing views to significant landmarks while creating vital and vibrant social gathering areas in the middle of Downtown.



Historic street wall along Washington Street; view from the Shopper's Plaza amphitheater
Right: Contemporary public space at Tontine Crescent, with curved street wall

Downtown Crossing Design Priorities

- a. Maintain and enhance Downtown Crossing's street pattern and network of smaller alleys that create dynamic views of historic sites and building facades.
- b. Introduce additional density alongside lower historic buildings using massing changes and setbacks to transition between lower and higher buildings in the area.
- c. Complement Downtown Crossing's mix of architectural styles and landmarked buildings.
- d. Frame and enhance key view corridors and urban spaces. Expand the public realm and locate active uses and setbacks along these areas as much as possible. Key view corridors and urban spaces include:
 - The iconic pedestrian-zone view along Washington St to Old South Meeting House
 - The active shopping, commuting, and event hub that is Washington and Summer St intersection
 - Reader's Park, lined with historic assets
 - The urban gateway and gathering space of Shopper's Plaza
 - The historic Tontine Plaza facades and modern plaza space.
- e. Find opportunities for adaptive reuse and avoid demolition, especially in cohesive areas of smaller historic building fabric like the NRHP Commercial Palace Historic District and Textile District.



List of Boston Landmarks Designated

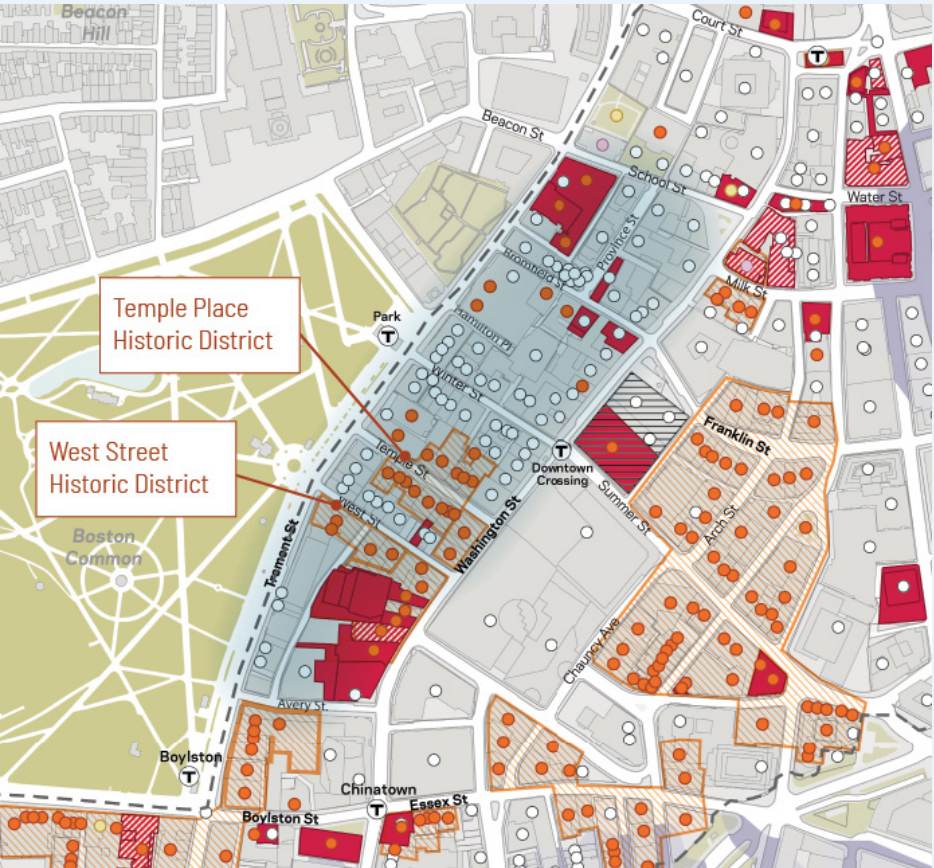
- Ames Building
- Church Green Building
- Filene's Complex (or Burnham Building)
- International Trust Company Building
- Old South Building
- Old State House
- Proctor Building
- Winthrop-Carter Building
- Old Corner Bookstore (or Thomas Creese House)
- Jeweler's Building

Pending

- Old South Meeting House

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Ladder Blocks



- 2024 MACRIS Inventory**
- NRHP
 - Inventoried
 - PR
 - MHL
- 2024 BLC Inventory**
- NRHP
 - Inventoried
 - Designated
 - Pending
 - Landmark
- CFROD Study Area**
- Study Area

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Projects should enhance and respect the Ladder Block’s cohesive pattern and scale of smaller parcels, storefronts, and historic facades.

The Ladder Blocks area comprises the series of blocks between the eastern edge of the Boston Common and Washington Street. A series of parallel through-streets connect Tremont and Washington Streets, forming a ladder pattern, while shorter tertiary lanes and alleys break up the scale of blocks.



1934 view up Bromfield St from Washington St



1934 view up Bromfield St from Washington St today

Maintain the small-grained scale of building frontages, parcels, public alleys, and streets.

The small fine grain of historic parcels and building footprints gives the Ladder Blocks area its small and cohesive character. Most buildings in the Ladder Blocks have a footprint of less than 20,000 square feet.

Create ground floors that respond to the scale and pattern of existing historic ground floor frontages.

Small building footprints in the area result in a mix of narrow and varied ground floor spaces that add a human scale and visual interest to the eye level experience that should be maintained in new projects.



Cluster of historic buildings along Temple Place that frame a glimpse of Boston Common

Find opportunities for the restoration of historic facades and the adaptive reuse of buildings to avoid demolition in the area.

As in other clusters of smaller historic building fabric Downtown, the small building footprints in the Ladder Blocks lend themselves to adaptive reuse, especially to residential or hotel uses. A notable example is the Godfrey Hotel which restored two historic buildings, the Blake Building and the Amory Building into a 243 room hotel along Washington St.



Godfrey Hotel conversion of vacant office buildings to hotel and ground floor retail.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Ladder Blocks

Complement historic architectural styles and facade articulation while finding alternatives to directly mimicking historic ornamentation.

Within its small area the Ladder Blocks features a concentrated mix of 19th century, Second Empire-style and Classical Revival-style buildings constructed mostly during the first half of the 20th century. New projects should refer to and complement the cohesive character of neighboring these while providing contrast and avoiding direct mimicry.

Key site and clusters of notable historic buildings include:

- Intersection of Bromfield St and Province St: Includes designated Boston Landmarks like the Hutchinson Building (Ralph Harrington Doane, 1924), an early 20th century, Classical Revival-style commercial building, and 20-30 Bromfield Street (1870), a rare surviving example of a mid-19th century commercial row building in the Egyptian Revival style; and,
- Along Temple Place and West streets: the Peabody Bookstore (1820-1830, designated Boston landmark), a Federal-style rowhouse, which served as a residence and bookshop for 19th century publisher Elizabeth Peabody, and the Provident Institution for Savings at 37 Temple Street, originally the home of China Trade merchant Thomas Handysyd Perkins in 1833, but acquired by the insurance company in 1854.



Historic corner of Bromfield and Province Streets



Historic facades of 37 Temple Street

Frame and enhance key view corridors that connect Washington Street and the Boston Common and alleys that contribute to the areas smaller scale.

The combination of narrow one-way through-streets and alleys shape the public realm of the Ladder Blocks. Through-streets like Bromfield Street serve as view corridors to Downtown Crossing and beyond, while others like Winter Street are also important high pedestrian traffic connectors between the Common and Washington Street.

Historic alleys provide mid-block connections or access to building service areas. Some of these key remaining historic alleys include:

- The narrow alley of Winter Place, long the home of one of the city's oldest restaurants, Locke-Ober, connecting Winter Street and Temple Place through a private passageway.
- Bosworth Street, begins at Tremont Street and concludes with a series of 17th century granite steps, historically known as Province House steps, leading down to Province Street. The steps are the only remnant of the 1679 Province House, home of the royal governors in the 18th century, demolished in 1922

Coupled with smaller footprint buildings and blocks, this tight-knit collection of cross streets and alleys creates a unique and historically rich urban fabric that defines the character of the small-scale, pedestrian-oriented Ladder Blocks.



Winter Street connects the Common and Washington Street



Winter Place Alley



Music Hall Place, a short alley in the Ladder Blocks

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Ladder Blocks

Ladder Blocks Design Priorities

- a. Maintain the small-grained scale of building frontages, parcels, public alleys, and streets.
- b. Create ground floors that respond to the scale and pattern of existing historic ground floor frontages.
- c. Find opportunities for the restoration of historic facades and the adaptive reuse of buildings to avoid demolition in the area. Key areas include the NRHP Temple Place Historic District, West Street Historic District, and Washington Street Theatre District.
- d. Complement historic architectural styles and facade articulation while finding alternatives to directly mimicking historic ornamentation.
- e. Frame and enhance key view corridors that connect Washington Street and the Boston Common and alleys that contribute to the areas smaller scale.

List of Boston Landmarks

Designated

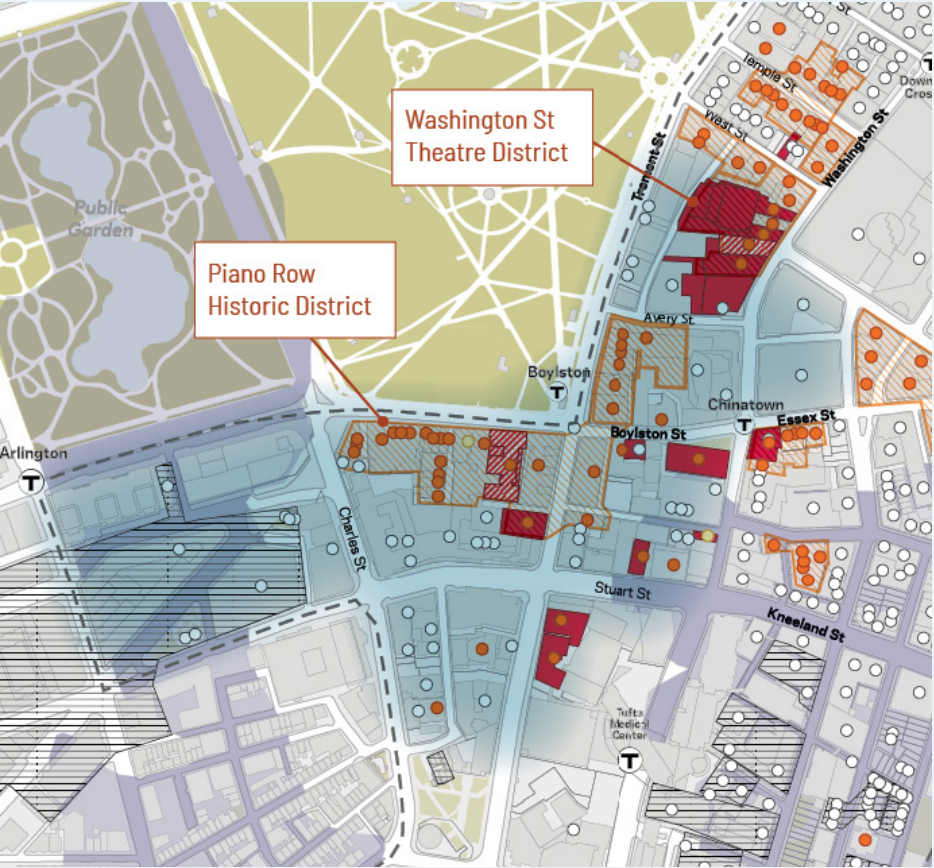
- Bromfield Street, 20-30
- Hutchinson Building
- Parker House
- Peabody Bookstore (former)
- Tremont Temple
- Jeweler’s Building

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Fine grain ground floors along West Street



Theater District



- 2024 MACRIS Inventory

 - NRHP
 - Inventoried
 - PR
 - MHL
- 2024 BLC Inventory

 - ▨ NRHP
 - ▨ Inventoried
 - Designated Landmark
 - ▨ Pending Landmark
- CFROD

 - ▨ Study Area

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Projects should enhance the Theater District’s identity as a cultural and entertainment hub, characterized by its historic theaters, nightlife, and diverse architectural styles.

The Theater District developed as Boston’s center for performing arts from the late 1800s until the Depression. The character area extends from the southeastern side of the Boston Common to the Park Plaza area, between Bay Village and the Public Garden.



Boylston Street cuts through the Theater District



Boylston Place alley at Emerson College

Ensure the project massings and footprints respond to the Theater District’s various street patterns and block scales.

The Theater District is at the intersection of several street grids. The block structure along the Common is a continuation of the historic Ladder Blocks, with wide through-streets like Tremont and Boylston, and internal alleys, such as Boylston Place by Emerson College. The Park Plaza area follows a very different street pattern that attempts to stitch together the surrounding neighborhoods. Much of this area is on man-made land created in the 19th century by filling the tidal flats surrounding the Shawmut Peninsula. The current state of the Park Plaza area is the result of redevelopment efforts in the 1920s, 1960s, and 1970s of a former rail yard site for the Boston-Providence railroad.

The distinction between the two sub-areas of the Theater District is even more evident at the parcel and building scale. The sub-area closer to the Common preserves much of the finer-grain 19th century fabric, mixed with early 20th century historic theater buildings, while the Park Plaza sub-area features buildings with large footprints (more than 20,000 square feet), which occupy entire blocks.

As these street and block patterns come together they create opportunities to strategically locate entrances and frame and showcase different elements of a buildings massing and facade.



View of “Piano Row” and Emerson College forming the corner of Tremont St and Boylston St

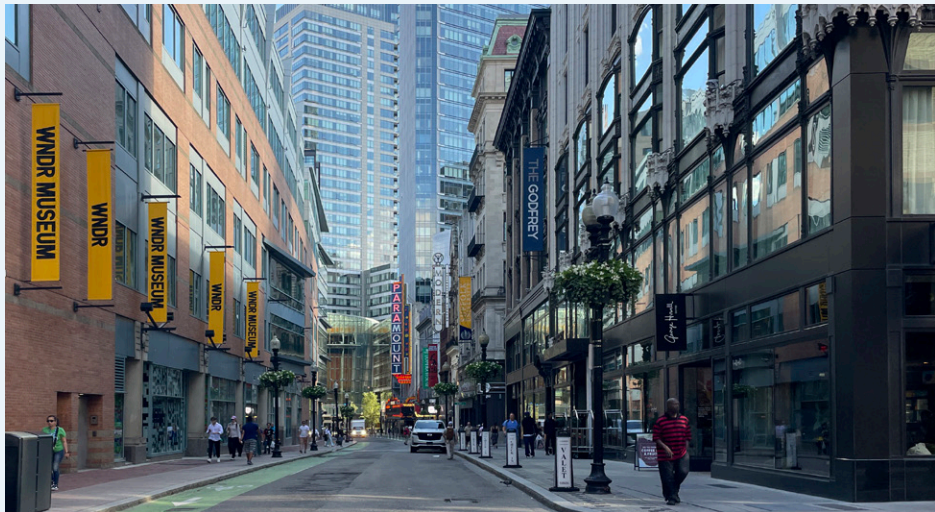
Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Theater District

Compliment and maintain the visual prominence of historic theaters and facades and iconic street walls in the Theater District.

The Theater District includes a wide range of historic structures. The number of historic buildings constructed from 1850 to 1900 and from 1900 to 1950 is split equally. As in most other Downtown neighborhoods, the most common historic style is Classical Revival, but unlike Ladder Blocks, Downtown Crossing, and the Financial District, the use of brick is more common here.

A key historic cluster in the Theater District is the sequence of theaters along Washington St, creating a cohesive historic street wall from the Modern Theater (Clarence Blackall, 1914), to the Opera House (or Savoy Theater, Thomas Lamb, 1928), to Paramount Theater (Arthur Bowditch, 1932), all designated Boston Landmarks. Other notable theaters and landmarks are near the intersection of Tremont and



View of Opera House (1928) and Paramount Theater (1932) looking down Washington Street

Stuart streets, including the Emerson Majestic Theater (or Saxon Theater, John Galen Howard, 1901), the Wilbur Theater (Clarence Blackall, 1913), and the Wang Theater (Blackall, Clapp & Whittemore, 1923).

The Theater District also features significant historic commercial buildings, such as the Boylston Building (Carl Fehmer, 1887, designated Boston Landmark) at the intersection of Washington and Boylston streets, an early example of a skeleton-framed building in Boston, and the Steinert Building (Winslow & Wetherell, 1896), once the headquarters of the piano distributor Steinert and Co., whose success attracted other piano businesses to the area, known as “Piano Row.” The Piano Row district, at the intersection of Boylston and Tremont streets, is a prominent edge to the Common, characterized by a historic mix of late 19th-century and early 20th-century commercial buildings, which range in height (four to twelve stories), street frontage width, and primary materials.



Street wall of the Wang (1923) and Wilbur Theaters (1913)



Facade of the Emerson Majestic Theater (1901)



“Piano Row”, a prominent edge to the Common



The Steinert Building (1896)



The Liberty Tree Plaza, framed by the Liberty Tree Block (1849)



Edgar Allan Poe Square, with the poet's statue and views to the Common.



Statler Park, framed by the Park Plaza Hotel (left, 1925) and the Motor Mart Garage (right, 1926-1929)

Enhance and frame key urban spaces and the connections between them.

The Theater District features a collection of small, but historic plaza spaces. In front of the Boylston Building lies Liberty Tree Plaza, the only open space within the dense historic fabric of the Theater District. The plaza is located opposite the Liberty Tree Block (1849), a designated Boston Landmark, which is significant as an example of a 19th century brick commercial building, and a corner building that is the focal point at the end of Boylston Street. Liberty Tree Plaza is not part of the Liberty Tree Block landmark designation, but includes a memorial that marks the location of a historic tree that served as the rallying point for the colonists who protested the Stamp Act of 1765.

The Park Plaza sub-area features a few larger open spaces that result from the diagonal cut-through of Columbus Ave, including Statler Park (Arthur Shurcliff, 1925), and Lincoln Square. These spaces are framed by early 20th century buildings like the Park Plaza Hotel building (George B. Post, 1925) and the Motor Mart Garage (George Harrington Doane, 1926-29). The Park Plaza area also includes two triangular spaces formed at the intersection of Charles and Boylston streets, one of which is Edgar Allan Poe Square, a small plaza dedicated to the writer (and featuring his statue), whose house once stood nearby.

This collection of small plazas creates a vital patchwork of public spaces. Future development should focus on enhancing these spaces, improving connectivity between them, and preserving their historical significance while adapting to contemporary urban needs.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Theater District

Theater District Design Priorities

- a. Ensure the project massings and footprints respond to the Theater District's various street patterns and block scales.
- b. Compliment and maintain the visual prominence of historic theaters and facades and iconic street walls in the Theater District.
- c. Enhance and frame key urban spaces and the connections between them:
 - The view south along Tremont St to Stuart St showcasing theater marquees.
 - The iconic theaters and facades in the NRHP Washington Street Theatre District
 - The vibrant entertainment, dining, and student hub at the intersection of Tremont St and Boylston St.
- d. Find opportunities for adaptive reuse to avoid demolition. Key areas include the NRHP Washington Street Theatre District and Piano Row Historic District.
- e. Sites within the Coastal Flood Resilience Zoning Overlay District must follow the City's climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines.

List of Boston Landmarks

Designated

- Boston Young Men's Christian Union Building
- Boylston Building
- Hayden Building
- Jacob Wirth's Restaurant
- Keith Memorial/Opera House
- Liberty Tree Block
- Modern Theater
- Paramount Theater
- Saxon Theater/Emerson Majestic
- Wang Theater
- Wilbur Theater

Pending

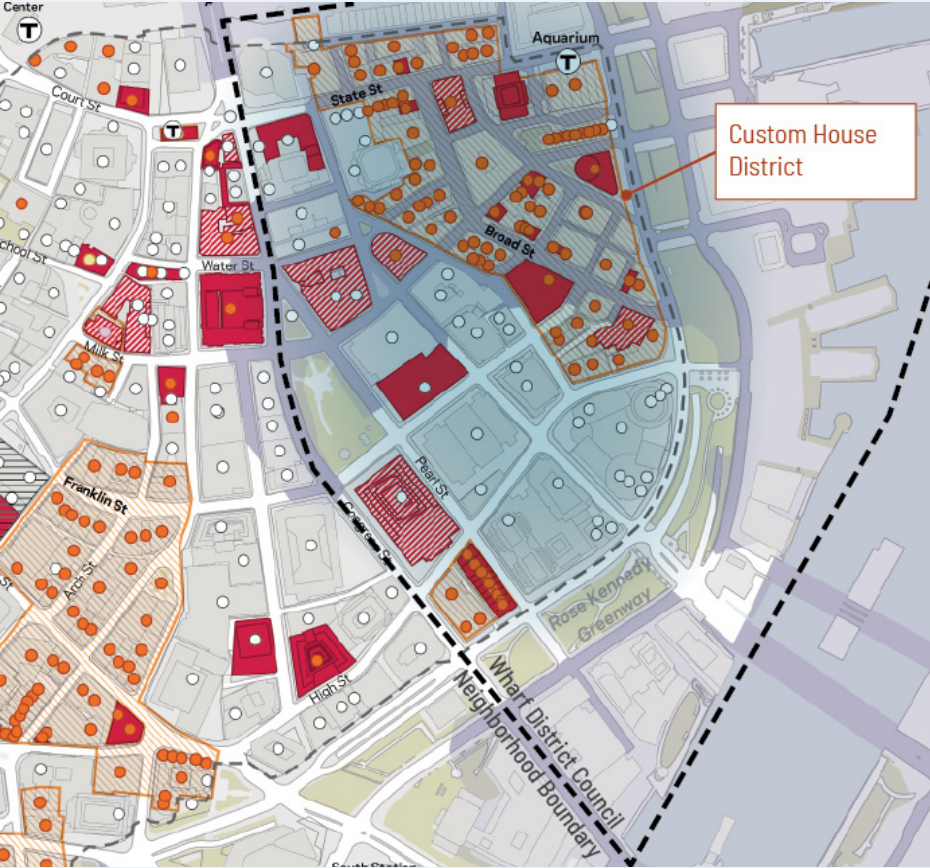
- Bijou Theater/Amusement Center
- Colonial Theater

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Right: Continuous street wall of historic theaters; Opera House (1928) and Paramount Theater (1932)



Wharf District (within the PLAN: Downtown study area)



- | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 2024 MACRIS Inventory | 2024 BLC Inventory | |
| ● NRHP | ▨ NRHP | ■ Designated |
| ○ Inventoried | ▨ Inventoried | ■ Landmark |
| ● PR | | ▨ Pending |
| ● MHL | | ■ Landmark |
| | | ▨ Study Area |
| | | ■ CFROD |

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Projects should enhance and maintain the Wharf District’s smaller-scale parcels and historic fabric, shaped by warehouses and other maritime commerce structures that helped give the district its name.

The portion of the Wharf District neighborhood that is within the PLAN: Downtown study area developed incrementally through a series of expansions of the Shawmut peninsula to construct wharves, warehouses, and other structures for maritime commerce along the Boston harbor. The area of the Wharf District east of Battery March Street features a series of small historic blocks that are a result of this process.



Cohesive scale of warehouse buildings along Broad Street

Maintain the Wharf District’s fine grained street pattern connecting Downtown to the Rose Kennedy Greenway and waterfront.

As an expansion to the Shawmut peninsula, the Wharf District continued Downtown’s original street patterns, aligning with wharves and warehouses that led to the water’s edge. Today this street pattern of trapezoidal blocks gets smaller as it moves from the large blocks of the Financial District to the Rose Kennedy Greenway and the Wharf District neighborhood on the east side of the Greenway.

The blocks between India and Broad Sts were part of the India Wharf development designed by Charles Bulfinch in 1803. East of India Street, between Central and Milk Sts is part of the original Central Wharf development constructed in 1817. The 1840 U.S. Custom House sits between Central and State streets. Another landfill site for warehouses, built in 1858, sits across from the Custom House, between the then Central and Commercial wharves.

Within this street pattern, projects should consider how street walls align with existing facades and frame either existing buildings, small open spaces, or the Greenway and waterfronts at the street’s terminus.

Transition and step-down project massings between taller and lower areas and maintain clusters of smaller parcels, especially within the Custom House District.

The Custom House area between Battery March St and the Greenway is characterized by a mixture of historic warehouse buildings with small footprints (under 10,000 square feet) and maritime commerce services buildings with larger footprints (between 10,000 and 40,000 square feet). Buildings in the area range in scale, overall transitioning both in height and parcel size from the taller large block towers of the Financial District to the lower and smaller block structures scattered closer to the Greenway. Projects should continue to step down building massings to respond to the surrounding context and look for opportunities for the adaptive reuse, especially of smaller footprint buildings that preserve the fine-grained scale of the area and lend themselves to residential or hotel uses.



Maritime commerce services buildings; the U.S. Custom House (left, 1890) and the Board of Trade Building (background, 1908)

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Wharf District

Complement the range of building architectural styles and time periods and their overall facade articulation that help define the street walls of the Wharf District.

Most historic buildings in the Wharf District were built during the second half of the 19th century. However, about one-fifth was constructed earlier, from 1800 to 1850 and the Wharf District features many notable buildings from these two eras. Prominent building eras include:

- Early 19th-century buildings in the area include the Bulfinch-designed or Bulfinch-attributed, four to five-story, red brick warehouses at 25-27 India Street, 64- 68 Broad Street, 72 Broad Street, 102 Broad Street (1805, designated Boston Landmarks), and at Central Wharf (1816), which add a small-scale character along Broad, India, Milk, and Central streets. It also includes the U.S. Custom House (1837-1847, designated Boston Landmark), a stark contrast to the smaller warehouse buildings as a large-scale granite structure with a 1915 tower addition, which stood prominent as Boston’s tallest building for several decades.
- Post-1850 examples include the James Bowdoin Building at 50-52 Broad St (Charles E. Parker, 1853, designated Boston Landmark), a small-scale warehouse and one of the few surviving examples of the granite construction prevalent in mid-19th century Boston, and the Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge (H.H. Richardson’s firm successors)-designed Chamber of Commerce Building (1890, designated Boston Landmark), a Richardsonian Romanesque structure constructed on a triangular block with rounded corners that give it a distinct character at the ground level.

- The area also includes a considerable number of early 20th-century buildings, including the Board of Trade Building (Winslow and Bigelow, 1908), the Batterymarch Building (Harold Field Kellogg, 1918, currently the Dagny Hotel), and the Insurance Exchange Building (Coolidge & Shattuck, 1923), which occupies entire blocks and is a mid- to high-rise building.



Central Wharf warehouses (1816)



Historic cluster at the Intersection of Milk and India Streets



Relationship of the Batterymarch Building facade (1918) to the frontage of Broad Street

Enhance and frame key open spaces and their connections, as well as view corridors leading to and from the waterfront and Rose Kennedy Greenway.

The Wharf District has a few open spaces and cultural landscapes, mostly located in the area east of India Street, framed by a setting of significant historic buildings. These small spaces provide essential pockets of public space while creating urban spaces to showcase surrounding historic buildings. Open spaces in the Wharf District include McKinley Square, a linear space between the State Street Block (Gridley J. F. Bryant, 1858) and the Custom House (Ammi B. Young, 1837-1847, with tower added by Peabody & Stearns, 1915), the Jenney Plaza in front of the Central Wharf block, and the triangle plaza in front of the Chamber of Commerce building.

Key street connectors and view corridors help stitch Downtown with the Greenway, the greater Wharf District neighborhood, and the waterfront to the east. This most notably includes State St with its dynamic view from Old State House to the Custom House and the waterfront and connectors like Milk St, Franklin St, and Broad St. Projects should look for opportunities to enhance and expand the public realm along these connections and ensure they continue to help enhance view corridors both to and from the waterfront.



Projects should consider how they are viewed both within neighborhood streets and from the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

Wharf District Design Priorities

- a. Maintain the Wharf District's fine grained street pattern connecting Downtown to the Rose Kennedy Greenway and waterfront.
- b. Transition and stepdown project massings between taller and lower areas and maintain clusters of smaller parcels, especially within the Custom House District.
- c. Complement the building eras and architectural styles and their overall facade articulation that help define the street walls of the Wharf District.
- d. Enhance and frame key open spaces and their connections, as well as view corridors leading to and from the waterfront and Rose Kennedy Greenway, including:
 - Direct view corridors towards the Rose-Kennedy Greenway, such as along State St.
 - McKinley Square in front of the Custom House
 - Jenney Plaza in front of the Central Wharf block
 - India and Milk St plaza
- e. Adhere to the Greenway District Design Guidelines for projects along the Rose Kennedy Greenway.
- f. Sites within the Coastal Flood Resilience Zoning Overlay District must follow the City's climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines.

List of Boston Landmarks

Designated

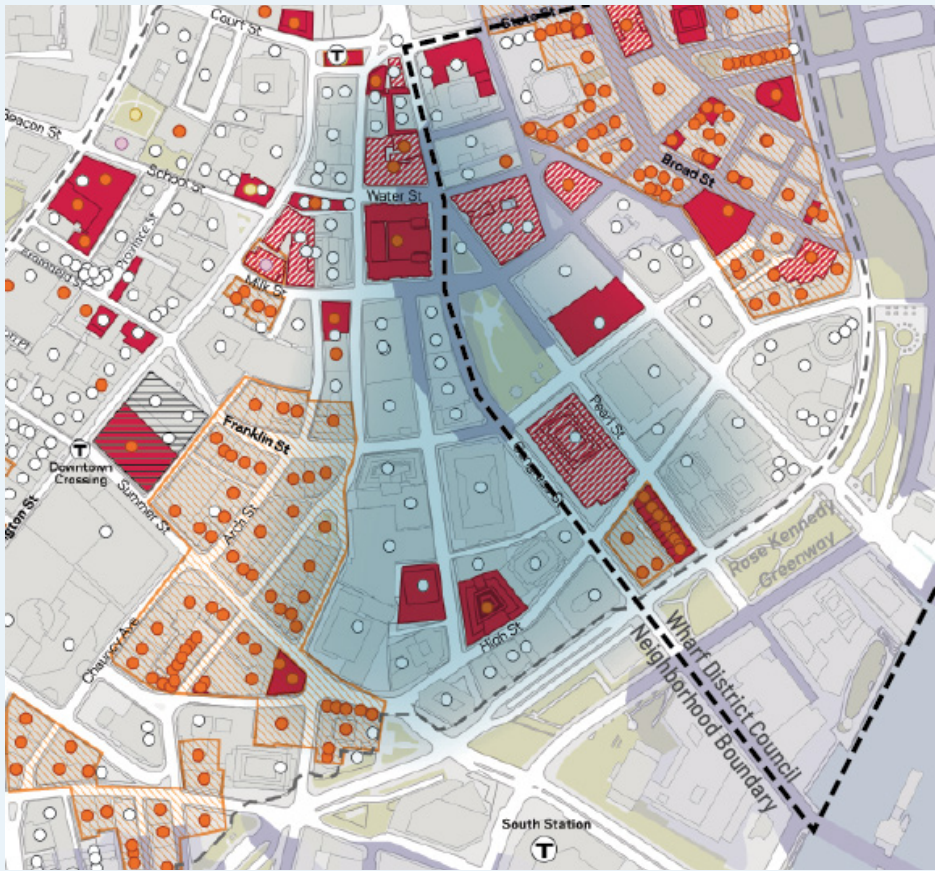
- Batterymarch Building
- Broad Street, 5-7
- Broad Street, 9
- Broad Street, 50-52
- Broad Street, 64
- Broad Street, 66
- Broad Street, 68
- Broad Street, 72
- Broad Street, 102
- Broad Street, 109-113
- Broad Street, 115-119
- Broad Street, 123-125
- Broad Street, 127-133
- Flour & Grain Exchange
- India Street, 25-27
- Richards Building
- U.S. Custom House
- Board of Trade Building

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Right: Liberty Square



Financial District



- 2024 MACRIS Inventory

 - NRHP
 - Inventoried
 - PR
 - MHL
- 2024 BLC Inventory

 - NRHP
 - Inventoried
 - Designated Landmark
 - Pending Landmark
- CFROD

Study Area

Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.

Projects should enhance and break down the large commercial blocks of the Financial District, highlighting its blend of historically significant structures from different eras and its key public spaces.

The Financial District became the core of Downtown Boston’s financial activity during the second half of the 20th century. This area is often viewed as overlapping with the Wharf District Council Neighborhood boundary and is roughly defined as the large commercial blocks between Devonshire St and Oliver St.



Large-scale commercial buildings in the Financial District

Enhance the pedestrian experience by breaking up large blocks by expanding the public realm, introducing mid-block connections whenever possible, and breaking up long facades with active uses, lobbies, windows, and artwork to create a more engaging streetscape.

Similar to Downtown Crossing, the Financial District has preserved much of the original street pattern, following the topography of the Shawmut Peninsula in a fan shape with blocks of varying sizes and trapezoidal or triangular shapes. Over time many of the original blocks in the district were consolidated to accommodate large office building footprints, resulting in fewer historic alleys in this part of Downtown. Due to this, the Financial District is characterized by buildings with large footprints, more than 40,000 square feet. The large block sizes inhibit the area’s walkability and make it challenging to activate ground floors and the public realm. Projects should find opportunities to break up large blocks with public connections and by making active dynamic street edges, avoiding long blank facades.



Some existing large-scale commercial blocks break up long frontages with fenestration, facade articulation, lobbies, and small plazas.

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Financial District



The Quaker Lane block features contemporary additions within a historic setting



Small and large-scale historic buildings along Water Street



Hawes Street Alley, flanked by the State Mutual Insurance Company Building (left, 1902) and the Codman Building (right, 1874)



Historic street wall along Congress Street



Sequence of commercial row buildings at the Richardson Block (1873-1876)

Maintain the small-grained scale and enhance the public realm of smaller parcel clusters in the district.

There are key exceptions to the larger blocks of the Financial District, where the assemblage of the smaller parcels should be avoided. These include:

- At the triangular block between Devonshire, Water, and Congress Sts, across from the historic Stock Exchange Building (Peabody & Stearns, 1889, with tower addition, WZMH, 1981-84, designated Boston Landmark), and south of the intersection of State and Congress Sts, Boston’s historic financial center.
- The Quaker Lane historic alley (pending Boston Landmark) breaks down the scale of the triangular block, featuring multiple smaller, six to ten-story, late 19th and early 20th century buildings. A couple of contemporary additions can be found here, including the Hyatt Centric Hotel at 54 Devonshire St (2018).
- West of Liberty Square, at the block between Water St and Exchange Place. The block is split by the historic Hawes St alley. Facing Exchange Place is the ten-story Classical Revival-style State Mutual Insurance Company Building (1902). South of Hawes St alley are two long and narrow, six-story buildings; the steel frame and stone Hornblower & Weeks Building (1908), and the red brick Codman Building (1874, Sturgis and Brigham).
- West of Post Office Square, along Congress St, where a series of seven to ten-story historic buildings form a historic street wall.
- Between Pearl St and Gridley St alley, a collection of nine, four-story, marble and brick commercial row buildings (except for 115-117 Pearl St, a five-story, red brick building), in what is historically known as the Richardson Block (1873-1876, designated Boston Landmark).

Frame and enhance key open spaces, large and small, that showcase the Financial District’s range of buildings and time periods.

The Financial District features a few historic open spaces that occurred organically in the triangular shapes formed by the street pattern. The edges of these spaces showcase the area’s mix of historic and modern buildings. These include:

- Angell Memorial Sq (built in 1912 to designs by Peabody & Stearns; remodeled by Flansburgh & Associates, 1982), flanked by two buildings from the 1920s, the Art Deco granite and limestone skyscraper, Ten Post Office Sq (1924, pending Boston Landmark), and the Federal Courthouse building (designated Boston Landmark, Cram & Ferguson, 1929-31).
- Winthrop Sq, framed by the One Winthrop Sq (Emerson & Fehmer, 1873) commercial block and the contemporary Winthrop Center Tower
- Despite sharing a similar form, Post Office Sq did not occur by chance but was instead formally developed as an open space beginning in the 1980s. Burying an above ground parking garage that occupied the location allowed for the creation of the much-needed substantial green space, the Norman B. Leventhal Park (Ellenzweig Associates, 1990-91). Surrounded by a number of significant buildings from different eras of the twentieth century, from the Renaissance Revival Langham Hotel (R. Clipston Sturgis, 1921), to the Federal New England Telephone and Telegraph Building (Cram & Ferguson, 1947), to the late modern 100 Federal Street (Campbell, Aldrich & Nulty, 1971), the park provides a center to the district.

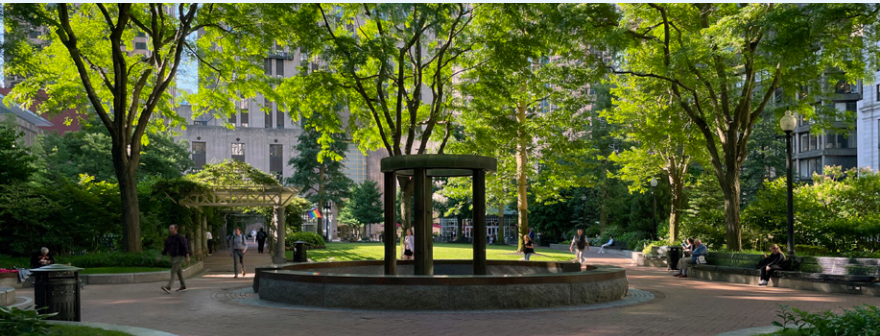
These spaces are vital gathering areas and breaks in the large blocks of the Financial District that projects should continue to help enhance and showcase.



Winthrop Square, framed by old and new buildings



Liberty Square, among historic brick and stone buildings



Post Office Square, an essential green space among the mid- and high-rise buildings of the district

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Financial District

Find opportunities for density that build on the range of styles within the Financial District and respond to the neighboring context through stepbacks and massing changes.

Most historic buildings in the Financial District were built in the first half of the 20th century in the Classical Revival style. The area is distinct from other character areas in that almost a quarter of its historic buildings were constructed after 1950, creating a true blend of historically significant structures from different eras that create new opportunities for growth. Contemporary projects like Winthrop Center Tower (Handel Architects, 2023) demonstrate how projects can reference neighboring structures and styles while breaking down large blocks with mid-block connections, becoming significant mixed-use icons for Downtown.

List of Boston Landmarks	
Designated	Pending
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Federal Reserve BankMcCormack Federal Bldg/Post Office/CourthouseRichardson BlockSecond Brazer BuildingStock Exchange Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">National Shawmut Bank BuildingNew England Telephone and Telegraph BuildingPost Office Square, 10Samuel Appleton BuildingWorthington BuildingQuaker Lane
Consult with the Office of Historic Preservation for the most up to date information.	

Financial District Design Priorities

- a. Enhance the pedestrian experience by breaking up large blocks by expanding the public realm and introducing mid-block connections whenever possible and breaking up long facades with active uses, lobbies, windows, and artwork to create a more engaging streetscape.
- b. Maintain the small-grained scale and enhance the public realm of smaller parcel clusters in the district.
- c. Frame and enhance key open spaces, large and small, that showcase the Financial District's range of buildings and eras.
- d. Find opportunities for density that build on the range of styles within the Financial District and respond to the neighboring context through stepbacks and massing changes.
- e. Adhere to the Greenway District Design Guidelines for projects along the Rose Kennedy Greenway.
- f. Sites within the Coastal Flood Resilience Zoning Overlay District must follow the City's climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines.

Right: Angell Memorial Square, flanked by Ten Post Office Square (1924) and the Federal Courthouse building (1929-1931)



Case Studies

The following case studies showcase project designs that effectively respond to their historical context. These projects range from restoring historic facades and landmarks, adaptively reusing or adding to historic buildings, or undertaking new construction that continues the area's long history of growth and density in the heart of Downtown. Each case study highlights key design considerations made during the process. While these projects may not exemplify all the design guidelines outlined in this document, they demonstrate various ways in which projects can enhance and celebrate Downtown's rich architectural and cultural history.

Godfrey Hotel

Adaptive Reuse, Historic Facade Preservation | Ladder Blocks

The 2016 Godfrey Hotel project renovated and restored two historic buildings, the Blake Building and the Amory Building into a 243 room hotel along Washington St.

- **Historic Preservation:** Utilizing federal and state Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, restored the Blake and Amory Buildings, which date back to the early 20th century, preserving original architectural details, including terracotta facades, decorative cornices, and historic window designs.
- **Adaptive Reuse:** Vacant office buildings were re-purposed to a hotel and ground floor retail spaces, that alongside a restored historic lobby, helped activate the surrounding area.
- **Modern Addition:** Modern ground-level storefronts provide some contrast to the historic context and the building's original historic features above.



Finegold Alexander Architects

Congress Square

Adaptive Reuse, New Addition, Historic Facade Preservation | Downtown Crossing

This 2019 project involved the renovation of five historic buildings and the addition of a new modern mixed-use tower. It included approximately 600,000 square feet of office space, 20,000 square feet of retail space, and a 200-room hotel.

- **Historic preservation:** Carefully restored five existing historic buildings, which date back to the early 20th century, including windows and ornamental details of their facades.
- **Adaptive reuse and sustainability:** Combined and adapted five existing office historic structures into hotel, retail, and office spaces. Advanced City sustainability goals and policies through both the reuse of the existing buildings and sustainability and energy efficiency upgrades to building systems.
- **Maintained urban fabric:** Maintained mid-block alleys, streets, and facade elements such as entries, fenestration, historic bluestone paving slabs and architectural ornamentation that help break up the large block.



Arrowstreet

- **Contrast between old and new:** Created a dynamic contrast between the masonry and intricate details of the existing historic buildings and the new 350,000 square foot modern glass addition constructed above.
- **Coordination with BLC:** BLC reviewed massing, materiality, and coloration of the project, especially for the addition to the National Shawmut Bank Building (a pending landmark).



Arrowstreet

Design Guidelines

5. Historic Context | Case Studies

80 Broad St - Folio

New construction, Preservation | Wharf District

The 2006 80 Broad St. project infilled a block in the Wharf District with a residential building and ground floor retail, replacing a former parking lot while preserving and incorporating a 1807 historic structure on the site.

- Historic preservation: Preserves and incorporates a 4,000-square-foot structure designed in 1807 by architect Charles Bulfinch.
- Ground floor transparency and activation: Retail spaces with large windows and granite details wrap around three sides, providing maximum street exposure and defining the property's edge.
- Massing breakdown and stepbacks: Building massing is divided into two distinct masses that step down and stepback to create small terraces and reduce its overall scale in keeping with its surroundings and the lower four-story Bulfinch building at its base.



CBT

Modern Theatre

New Addition, Facade Preservation | Theater District

The 2011 Modern Theatre Cultural and Residential Project restored the historic facade of the Modern Theatre and created a 197-unit student residence hall, studio theater, and art gallery.

- Historic Preservation: Utilizing federal and state Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, restored the early 20th century Blake and Amory Buildings preserving original architectural details, including terracotta facades, decorative cornices, and historic window designs.
- Adaptive Reuse: Vacant office buildings were re-purposed to a hotel and ground floor retail spaces, that alongside a restored historic lobby, helped activate the surrounding area.



CBT

- Modern Addition: Modern ground-level storefronts provide some contrast to the historic context and the building's original historic features above.



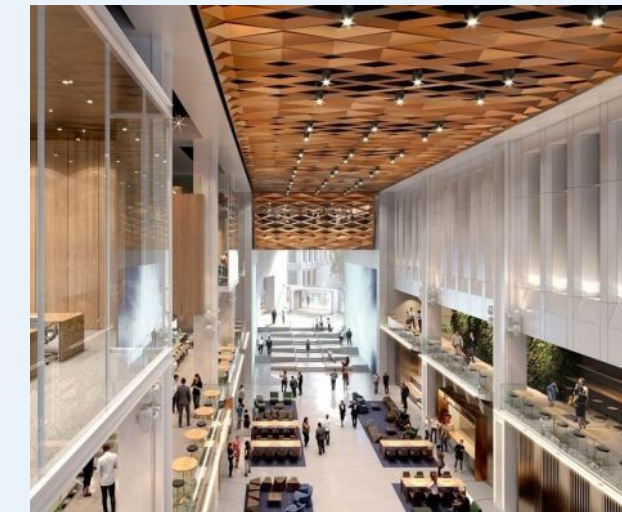
CBT

Winthrop Center

New Construction | Financial District

The 2024 Winthrop Center is the tallest tower Downtown and largest Passive House office project in the world, with a program that includes office, residential project, and a through-block public space.

- Mid-block connection: Introduced an interior through-block connection, breaking up an otherwise long block and creating a connection to the public space of Winthrop Square.
- Contextual stepback: Upper-story stepbacks align with neighboring buildings.



Handel Architects



Handel Architects



ZONING UPDATES

Changes are needed to the zoning and development review process to create a more transparent framework for development and growth that will result in public benefits for the community. These changes should 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 simplify outdated zoning boundaries so there is a clear and contextual regulatory framework.

PLAN: Downtown proposes zoning changes to be implemented in the short, near, and long term.

Near-term

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.
- Create zoning pathways to residential development, particularly affordable residential development, within Downtown through the office conversion program.
- Focus on enabling residential development and adaptive reuse, particularly in the Ladder Blocks and areas of the Wharf District.
- Ensure existing theaters continue to be prioritized in zoning and development review.

New District Boundaries

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

Mid-term

Chinatown Zoning

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

Height and density

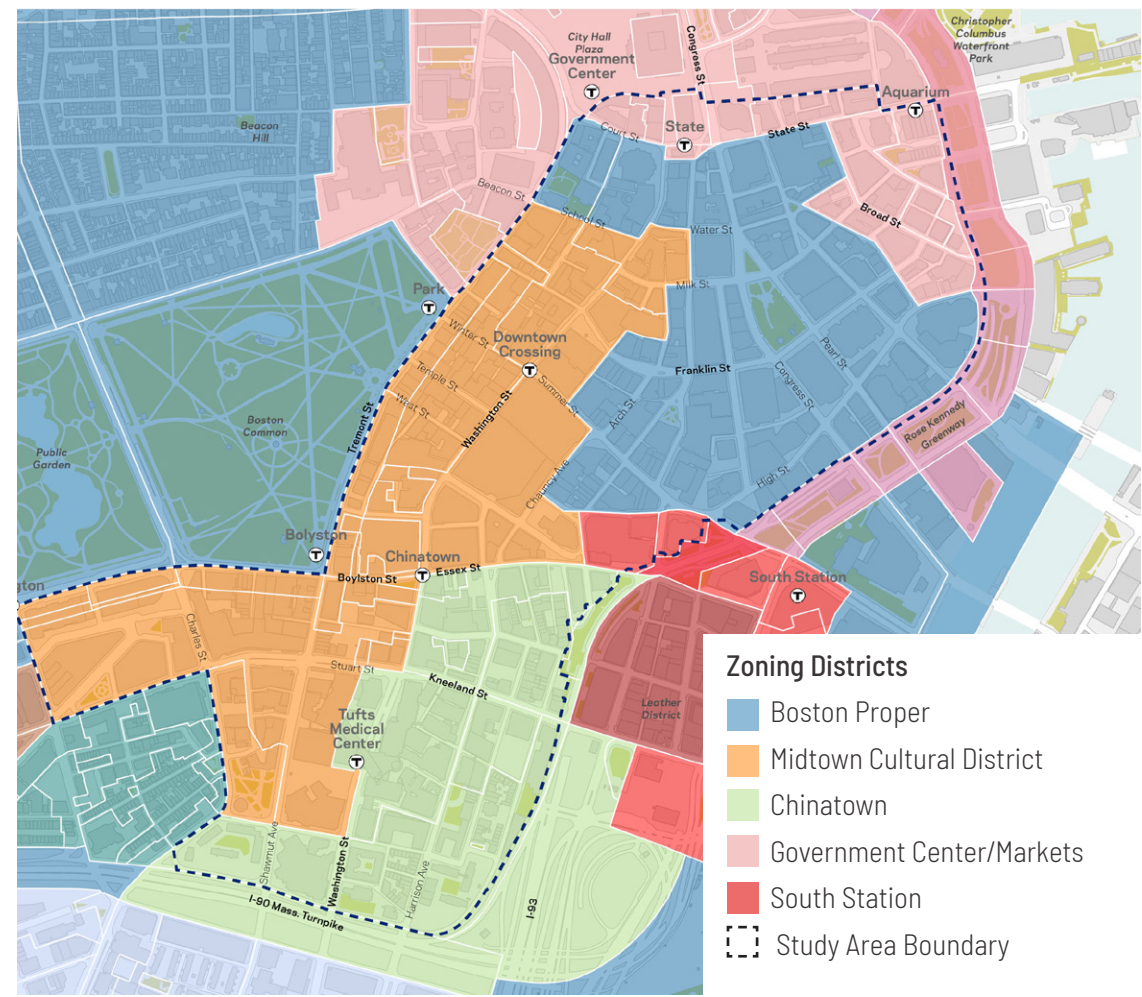
- Change heights to match the scale of planned for growth and Downtown's historic character areas.
- Require massing restrictions like a floor plate reduction for large buildings exceeding the height of the surrounding context to reduce the impact of taller buildings on the public realm and surrounding context.

Long-term

Streamline Project Mitigation

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

Existing Zoning



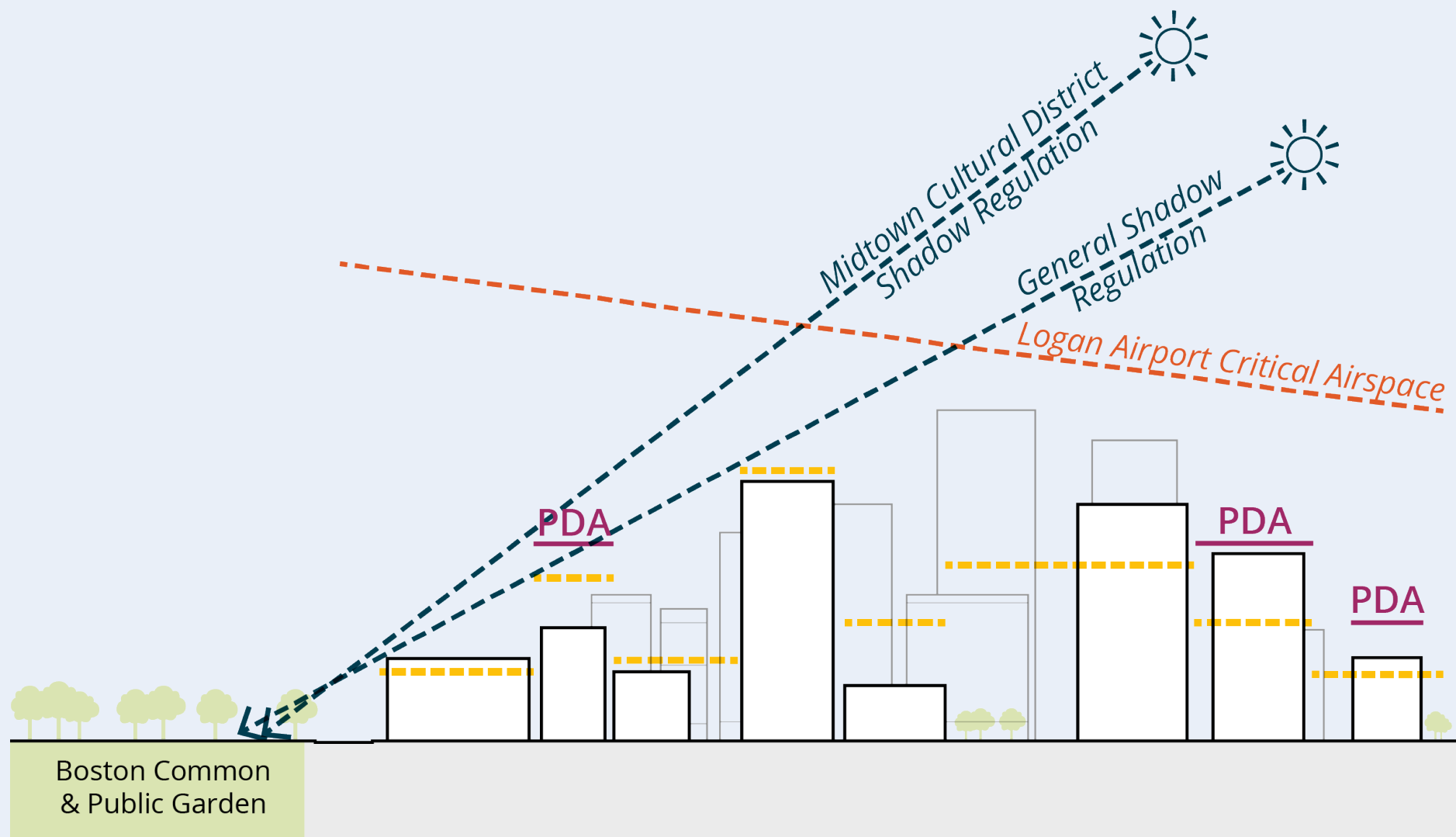
Existing zoning boundaries date back to the 1950's. Over time they have accumulated many small-scale subdistricts in Chinatown, the Midtown Cultural District, as well as Planned Development Areas (PDAs). More than 20 different height limits exist today. This accumulation of zoning districts, PDAs, and 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 and PDAs. 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.

State and Other Height Restrictions

There are height restrictions outside of the City's authority:

- The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Massport have critical airspace maps and a process to determine heights.
- State shadow laws 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.



City zoning height regulations:

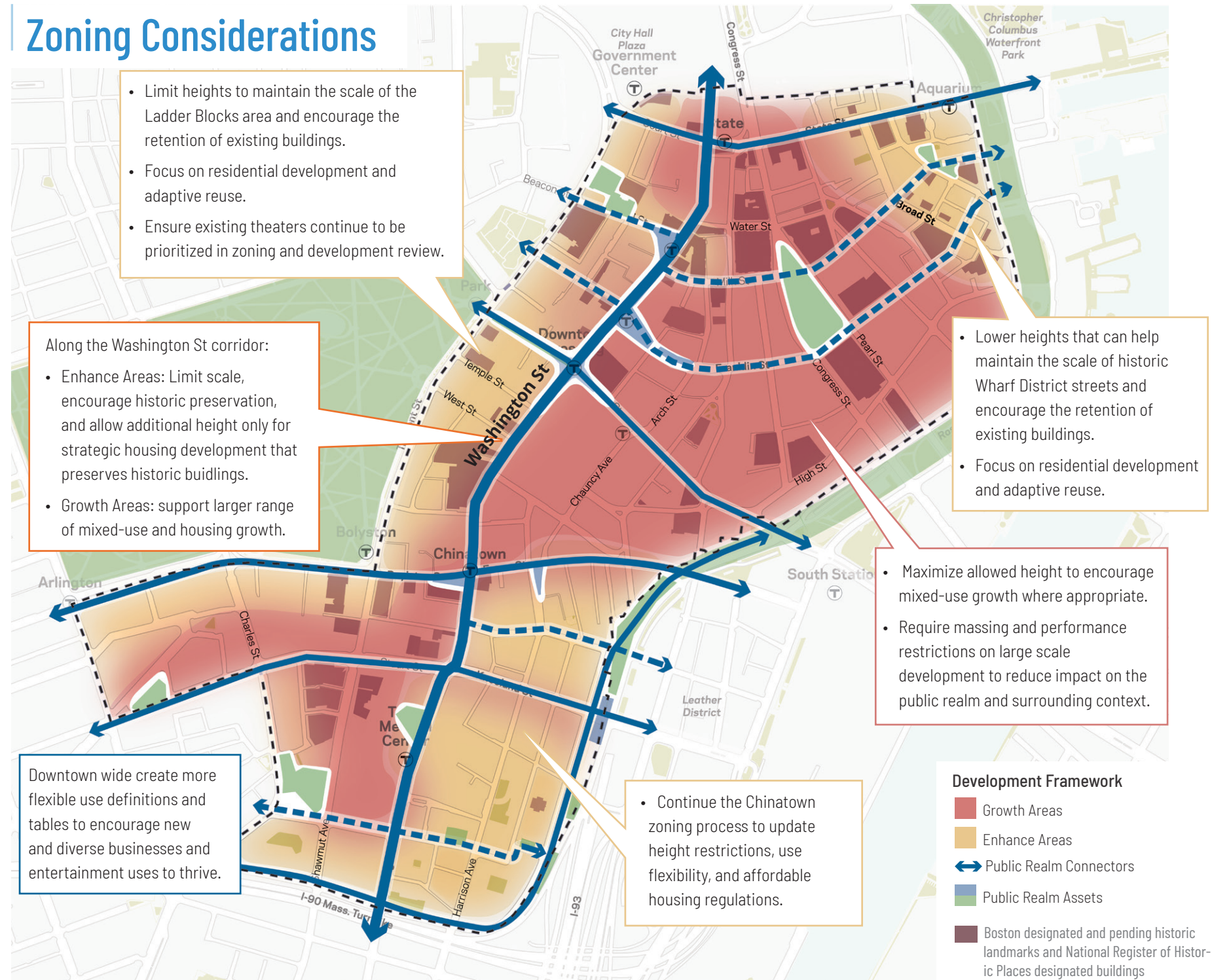
- Base Zoning Height Limit
- Planned Development Area (PDA)

State and other height regulations:

- Logan Airport Critical Airspace
- State Shadow Regulations

Note: The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Massport have critical airspace maps and a process to determine heights. More information can be found at: <https://oeaaa.faa.gov/oeaaa/external/portal.jsp> and <https://www.massport.com/logan-airport/about-logan/logan-airspace-map/>

Zoning Considerations



Development Framework

- Growth Areas: Mixed-Use Focus**
Allow height in these areas to encourage housing and mixed-use growth where appropriate. Ensure that all opportunities to incorporate housing in mixed-use development of workplaces and hospitality are explored. Evaluate high-impact uses like research labs, light manufacturing and trade uses, and large hotels on a case-by-case basis to ensure compatibility with the overall mixed-use character of the area and avoid negative impacts on neighboring uses and the overall pedestrian character of Downtown.
- Enhance Areas**
Limit heights and building footprints to maintain the scale area and encourage the retention of existing buildings. Prioritize adaptive reuse and additions to existing historic buildings and facades. Projects should consult with the Boston Office of Historic Preservation to advance historic preservation and ensure that new development enhances existing buildings. Creative economy uses, including smaller-scale office and cultural uses, are appropriate in these areas, especially when they help advance adaptive reuse and the continued vitality of Boston's economy.
- Western Edge of the Washington St Corridor**
Limit scale and prioritize the adaptive reuse of historic buildings and facades, while allowing additional height only for predominantly residential developments that preserve historic buildings. Projects should consult with the Office of Historic Preservation to evaluate existing historic buildings and appropriate preservation approaches.

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.**
Existing use definitions and tables are inconsistent across districts creating obstacles for new retail and entertainment uses that could help activate the streetscape. These include, for example, narrow definitions for retail that prohibit yoga studios or coffee shops or restaurants that have take-out. In Chinatown, regulations restrict uses like restaurants to specific floors despite several existing vibrant, but non-conforming examples. Lowering these regulatory barriers will create more flexibility for diverse local businesses to thrive, expand, and fill vacant spaces consistently across Downtown.
- Ensure existing theaters continue to be prioritized in zoning and development review.**
Theater are currently protected within the Midtown Cultural District and Chinatown. Protection provisions should continue to ensure remaining theater spaces are preserved.
- Ensure large-scale office and hotel developments incorporate housing when possible.**
All opportunities to encourage and incentivise housing should be explored, including incorporating housing as a part of large-scale office and hospitality mixed-use developments.
- Ensure large scale hotel development is appropriate for the site and context.**
While all areas of Downtown are significant tourism destinations, large-scale hotel development must be carefully considered to ensure that the uses, particularly the demand for pick-up/drop-off or valet facilities, avoid and mitigate any impacts on the pedestrian-priority of Downtown's sidewalks and streets. Larger-scale hospitality uses should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the site is appropriate for the use, and the design and programming of the space complement and improve the area.

Zoning Considerations

Height & Density

Change heights to match the scale of planned for growth and Downtown’s historic character areas.

Heights should be maximized in areas like Downtown Crossing, Theatre District, and the Financial District and limited in areas like the Ladder Blocks, Chinatown, and parts of the Wharf District to encourage retention of existing buildings. (See appendix for the height scenarios tested throughout the study).

Require massing restrictions like a floor plate reduction for large buildings exceeding the height of the surrounding context to reduce the impact of taller buildings on the public realm and surrounding context.

The massing restriction should consider exemptions for small building footprints and parcels.

Chinatown Zoning

Create a Chinatown zoning process that builds on the findings of PLAN: Downtown and Chinatown Cultural Plan.

It became clear during the PLAN: Downtown planning process that an additional **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 align with MOAC’s Chinatown Cultural Plan and continue to refine the Chinatown recommendations that have been explored throughout the PLAN: Downtown process. The zoning updates will include updated use regulations to lower barriers for existing and new retail, services, and cultural uses and updated height and density regulations that leverage opportunity areas for new development and affordable housing while protecting key historic and cultural areas identified by the community and the Chinatown Cultural Plan.

Streamlined Project Mitigation

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 alleviate the status quo of project-by-project negotiation so that project mitigation could support long-standing needs Downtown.

The key mitigation categories established by this PLAN include: Open Space and Public Realm Improvements, Local Transit and Mobility Infrastructure, Climate and Resilience Infrastructure, Small Business Support and Retail Activation, and Historic Preservation Investment.

The City’s current legal framework however is severely limited in its ability to create a streamlined project mitigation model. Article 80 modernization is needed in order to properly assess impact fees and mitigation payments to ensure development projects support these categories. Updates to Article 80 and the review process will allow for additional development conditions like a height-bonus that is tied to mitigation categories that support projects in the area.



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 "Office to Residential Conversion Program," announced on July 10th, 2023 and launched in October 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.

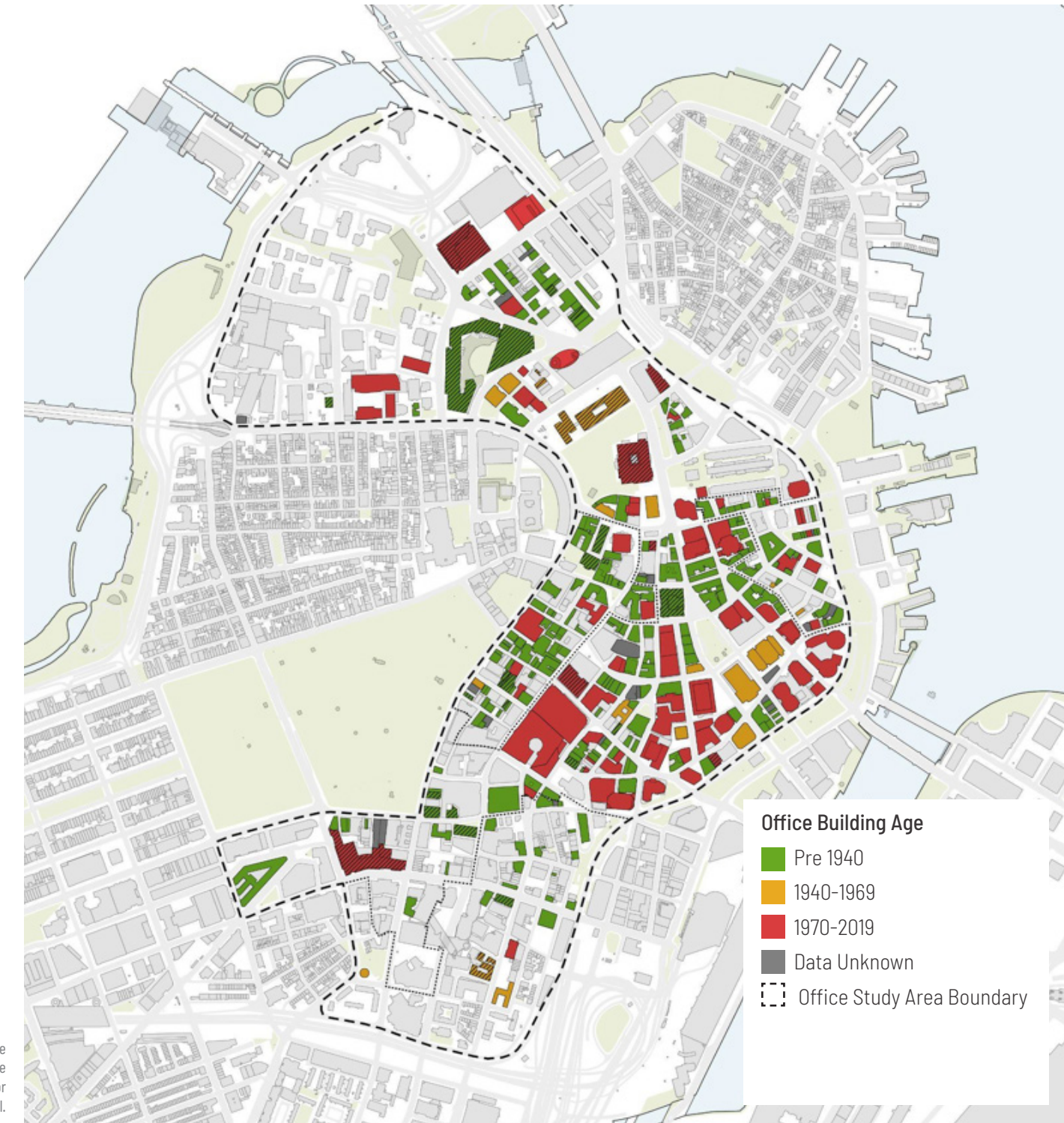
The program incorporates a combination of policy tools that can be used as market conditions change to encourage the conversions of different building types. These include tax tools- reducing property taxes for a period following conversion- and process tools- lower barriers for conversions with expedited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



APPENDIX

Prior Plan Summaries	90
Downtown Office Conversion Summary	94

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



2020 Boston Chinatown Master Plan & Chinatown Master Plan 2010
Published June 2020 & December 2010

Published every ten years since 1990, the Chinatown community develops a master plan meant to serve as an education, advocacy, and organizing tool for community members and as a guide to policy makers and developers. The 2020 Boston Chinatown Master Plan builds off of and affirms the goals of Chinatown Master Plan 2010, focusing on stabilizing Chinatown as both a diverse residential neighborhood anchorerd by immigrant and working class families and as a sustainable social, economic, and cultural hub, while also accounting for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.



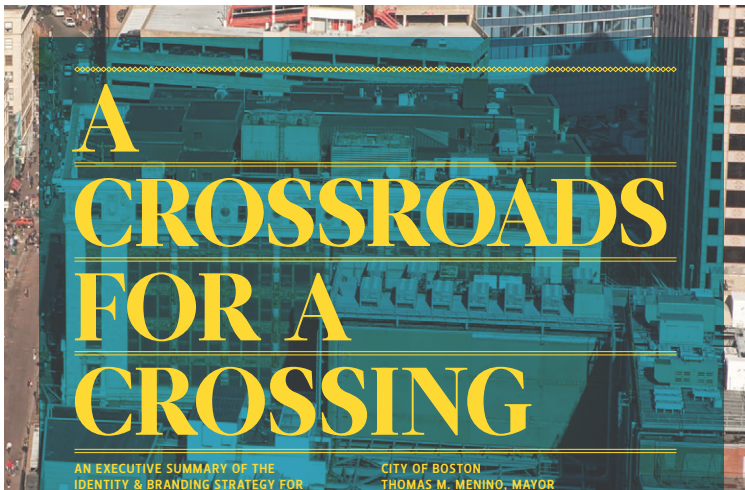
Go Boston 2030: Imagining our Transportation Future
Published March 2017

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

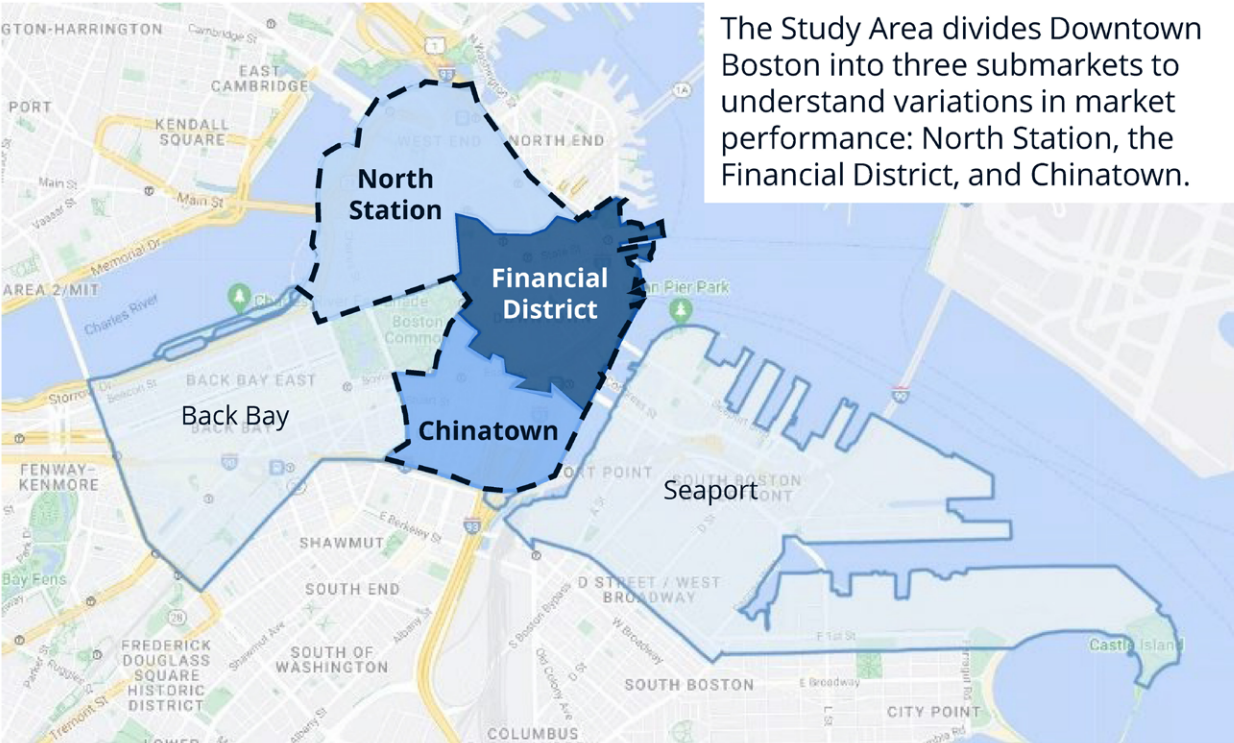
← **Responsive to the City’s policy objectives** →

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**

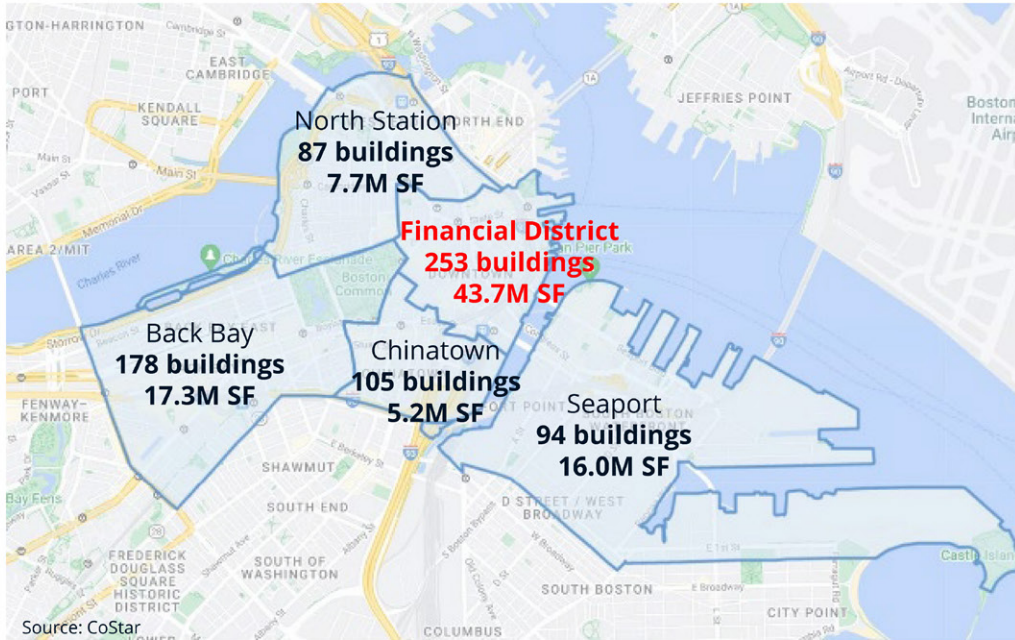
The office market has seen a flight to quality not just in terms of building class but also neighborhood quality and amenities.

- 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.

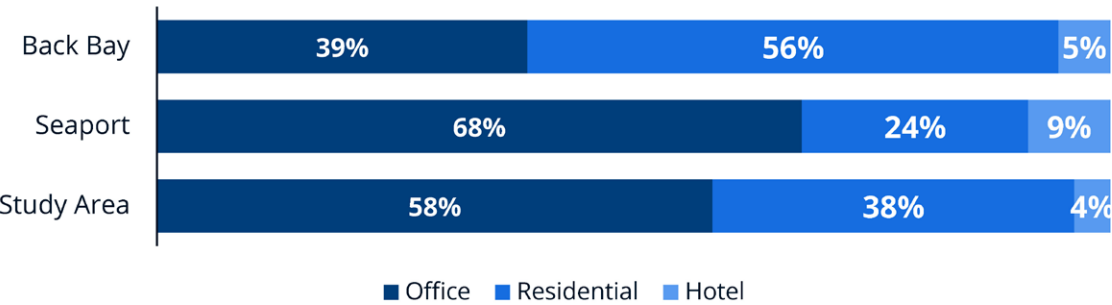


Market Analysis | Key Findings: Office Market

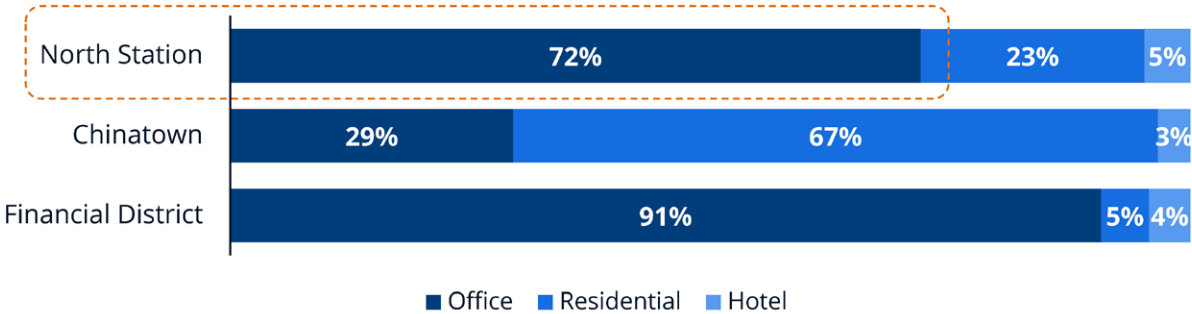
The Study Area does not have the desired mix of uses nor quality of office to compete with neighboring submarkets. Conversion of existing stock could make it as desirable.

- 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)



Building Stock by Typology within Study Area (2022)

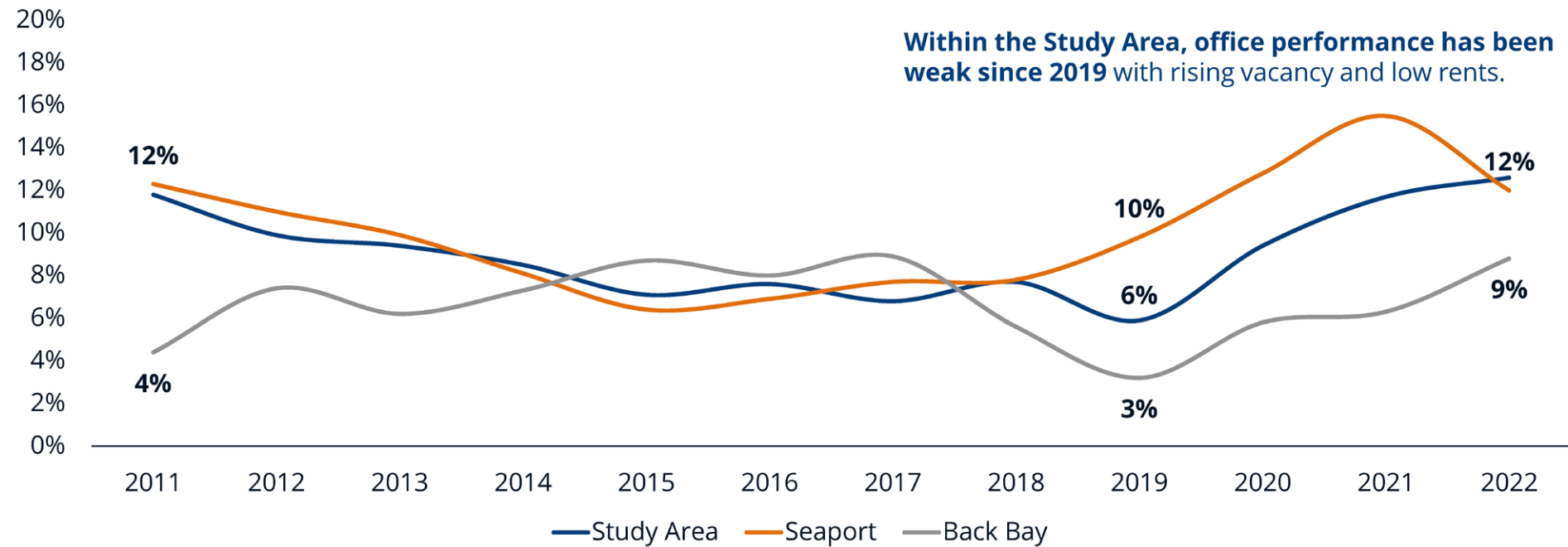


Market Analysis | Key Findings: Office Market

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)

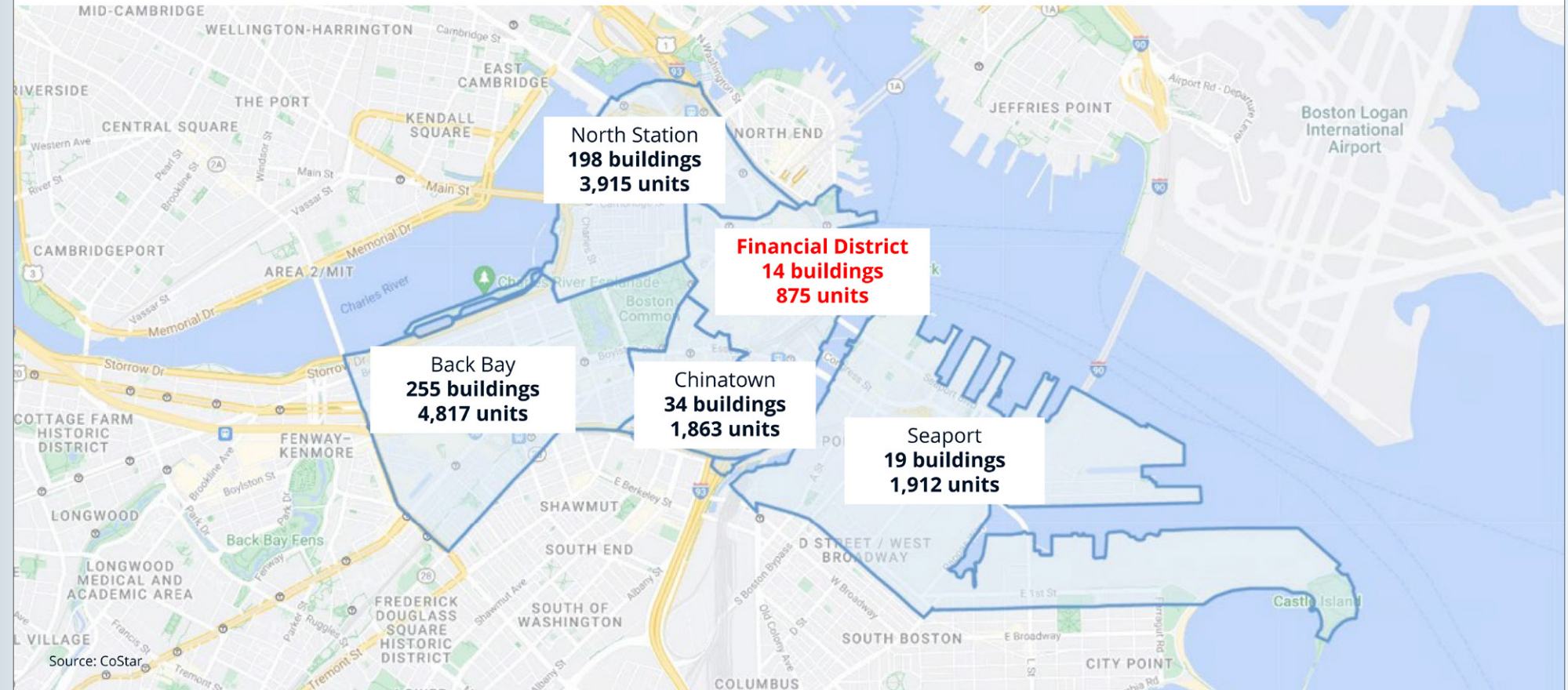
Within the Study Area, office performance has been weak since 2019 with rising vacancy and low rents.



Source: CoStar

Market Analysis | Key Findings: Residential Market

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

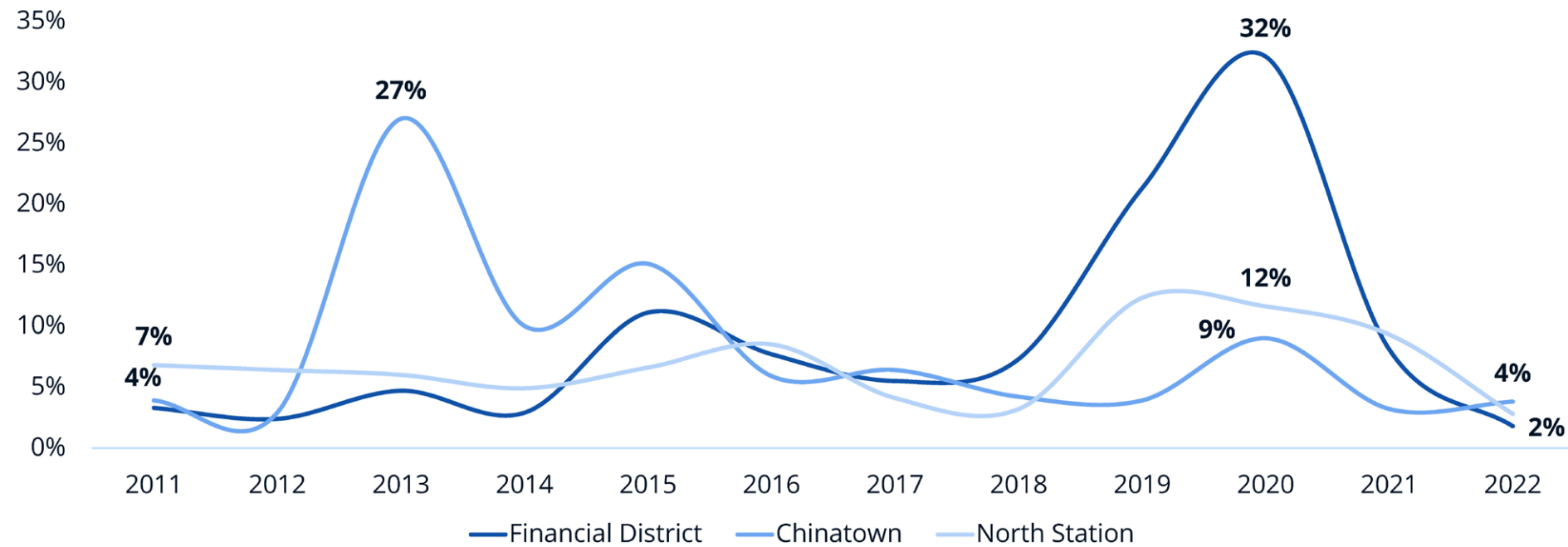


Source: CoStar

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)



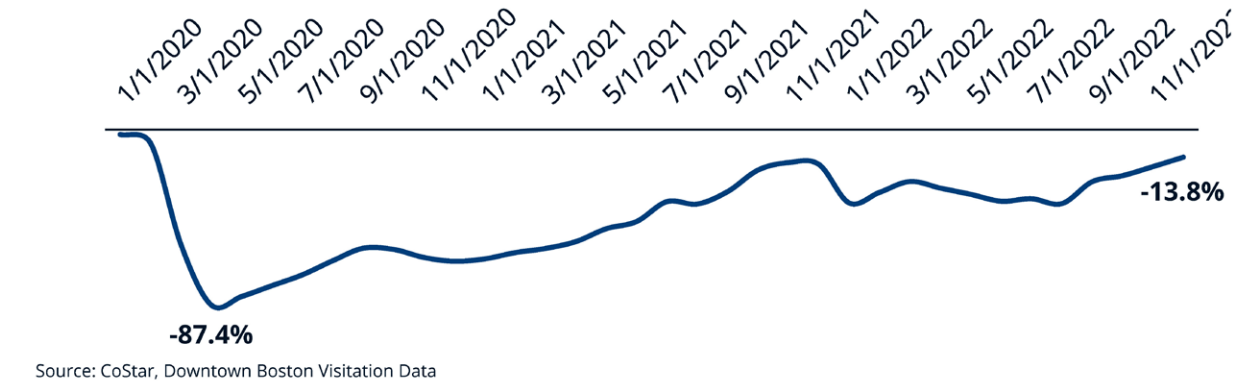
Source: CoStar

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).

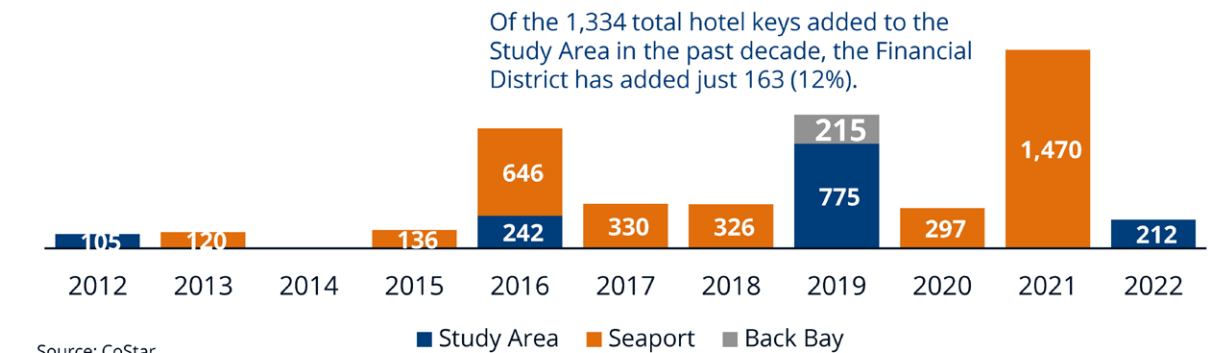
- Monthly visitation to Boston was down over 87% at the start of the pandemic. Visitation has recovered rapidly but is still down by nearly 14%.
- The Financial District in particular has an appropriate mix of tourist attractions, historic assets, and access to transit to support more hotel deliveries.
- 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.

Percent change in Visitation



Source: CoStar, Downtown Boston Visitation Data

Hotel Deliveries (2012 - 2022)



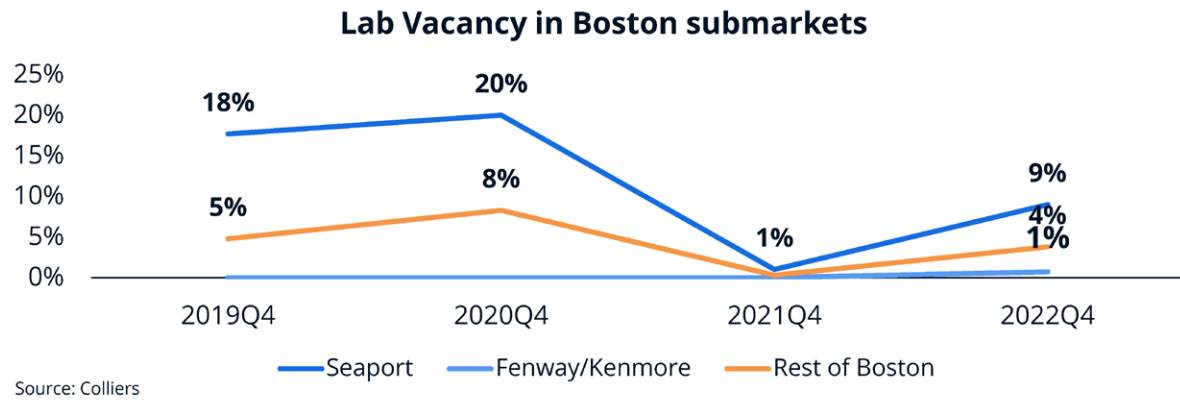
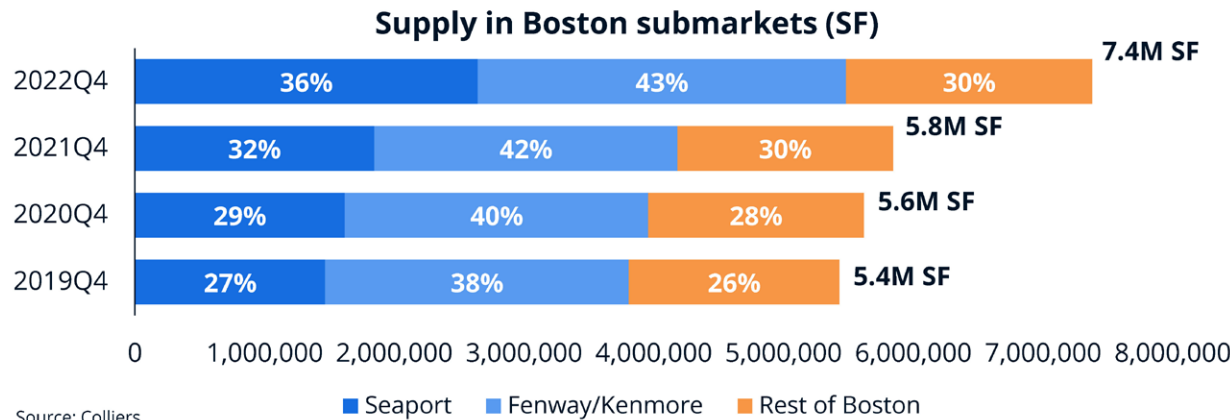
Source: CoStar

Of the 1,334 total hotel keys added to the Study Area in the past decade, the Financial District has added just 163 (12%).

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.**

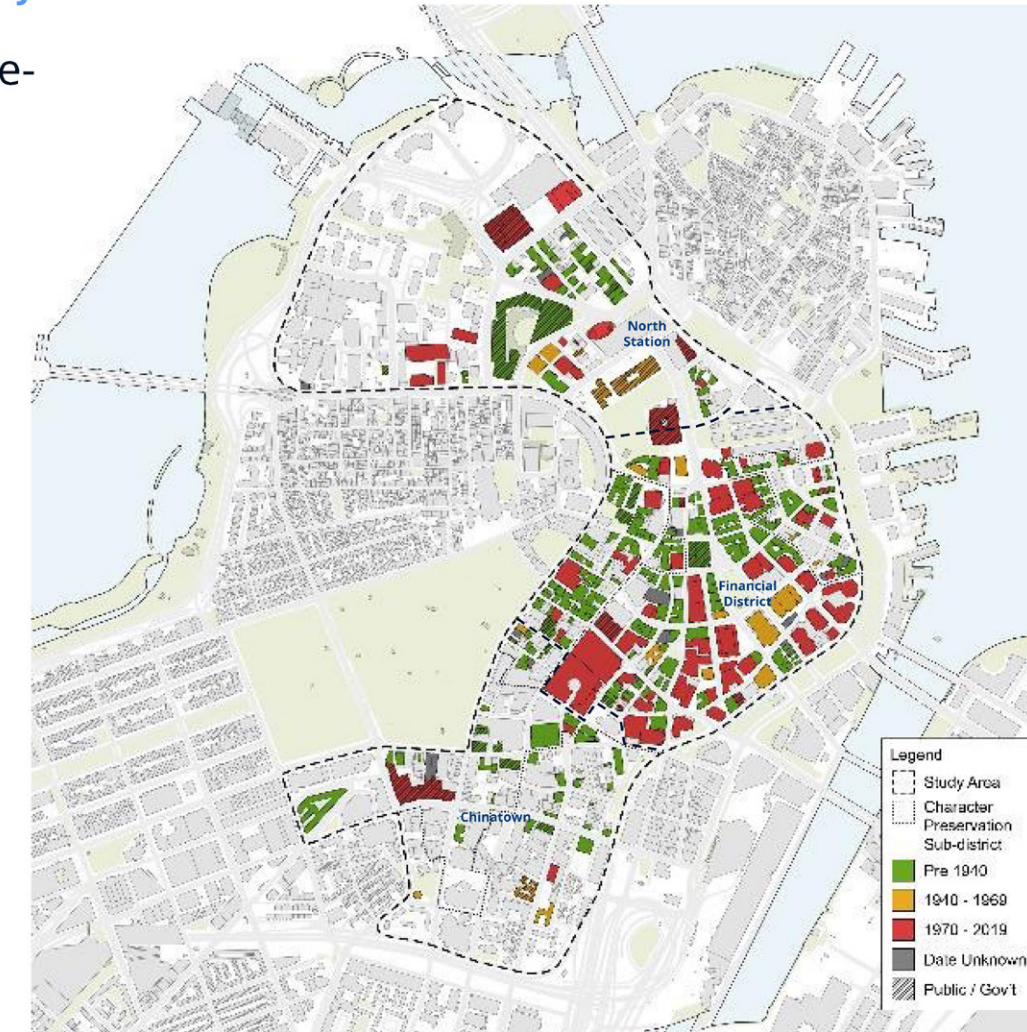


Building Inventory Analysis | Office Floorplates in Study Area

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.

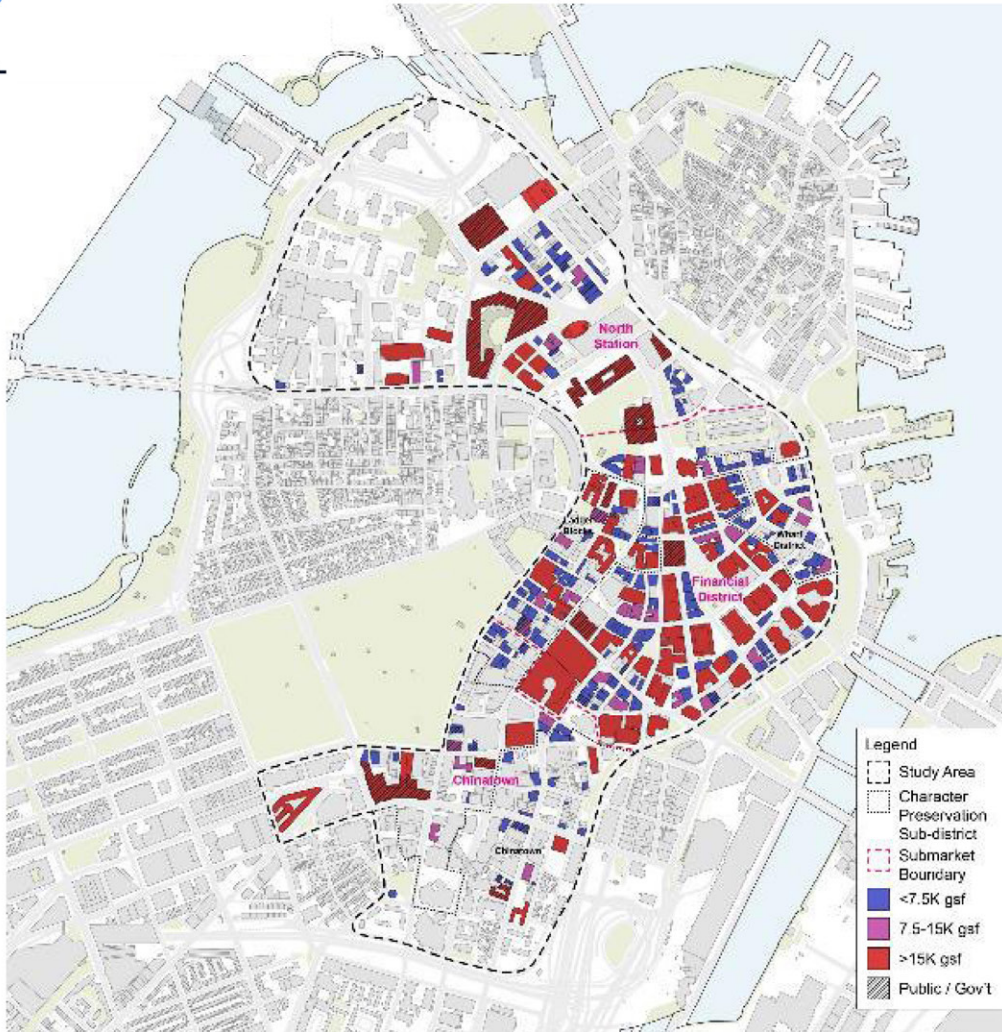
Count of buildings by year built		
	Pre-1940	245 count
	1940-1969	26 count
	1970-2019	84 count
	Unknown	25 count
	Total	380 count



Building Inventory Analysis | Office Floorplates in Study Area

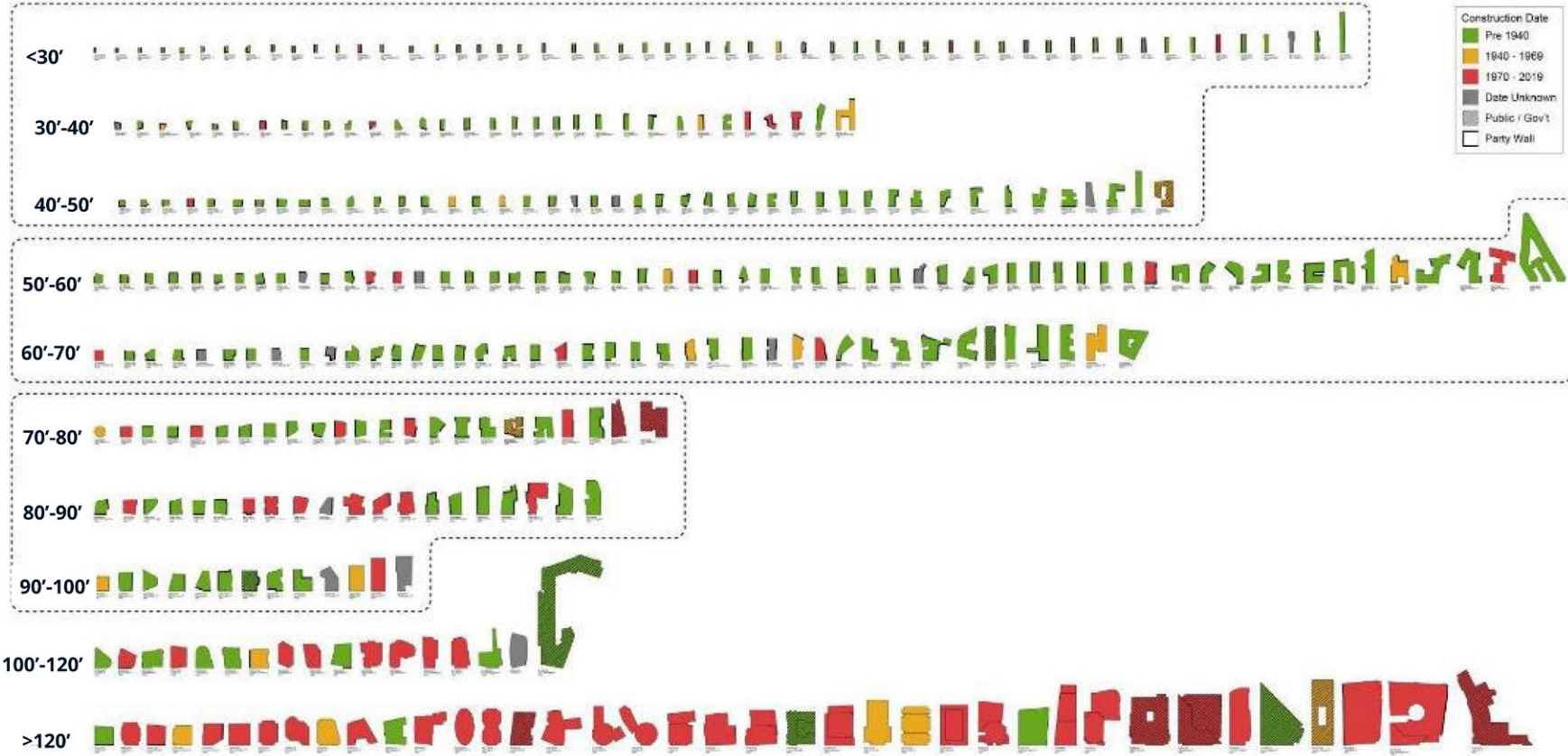
The majority of office buildings were built pre-1940 or post-1970, with the latter primarily comprised of large floorplates (>15,000 SF).

Count of buildings by floorplate size		
<div></div>	<7,500 GSF	243 count
<div></div>	7,500 – 15,000 GSF	28 count
<div></div>	>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

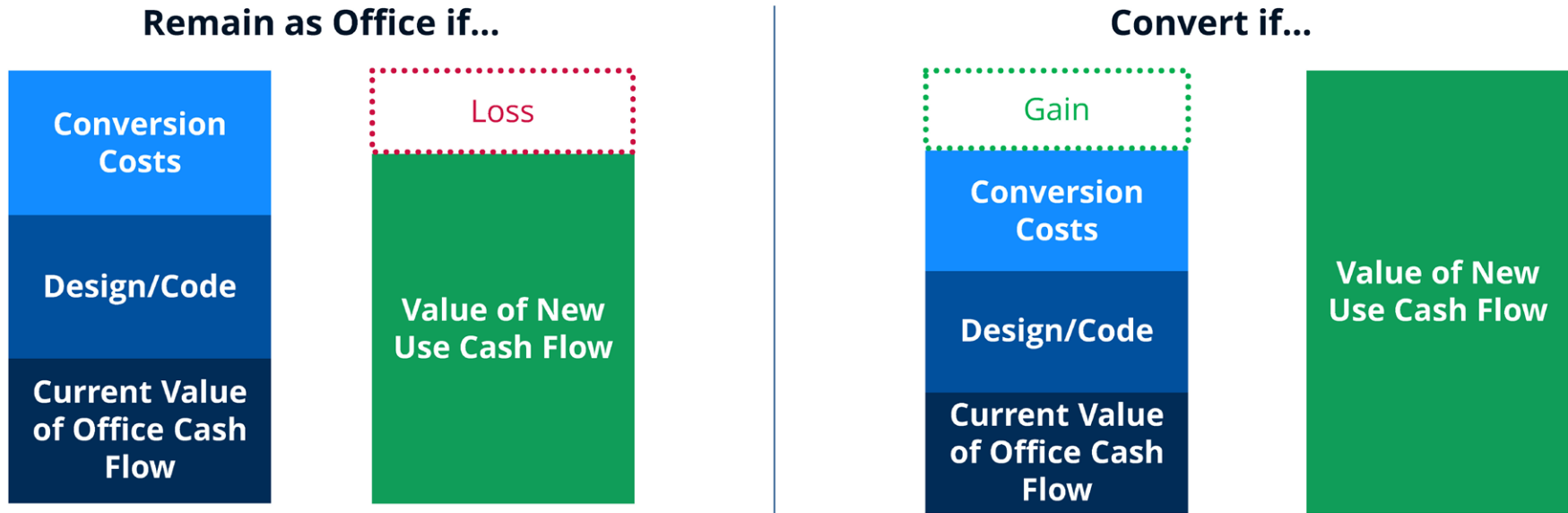


Regulatory requirements

- 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.

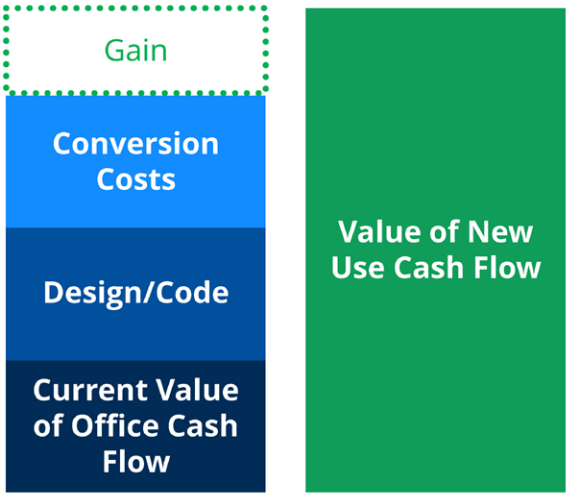
Process Tools

- 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).

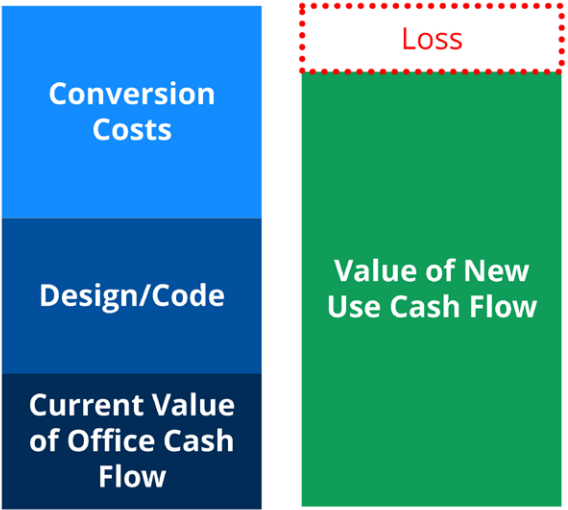
Policy Analysis | **Modeling Overview**

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

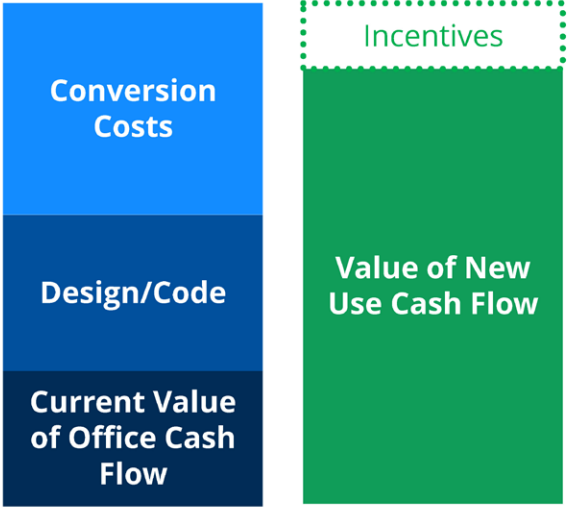
1. Started with buildings that would convert without incentives in the baseline scenario



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 rents72.5% 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	<div>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)</div>
Supportive incentive(s)	<div>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</div>
Target Geography	<div>Financial District, since it has the highest concentration of office buildings and the least diverse mix of uses</div>
Implementation	<div>Considerations for BPDA as it develops the policy:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mandatory vs optional regulatory requirementsAs-of-right district-wide approach, or request for proposals (RFP) for a specific sub-districtProgram caps or goals, such as number of projects or unitsOther funding sources? Is there a cap on funding</div>

