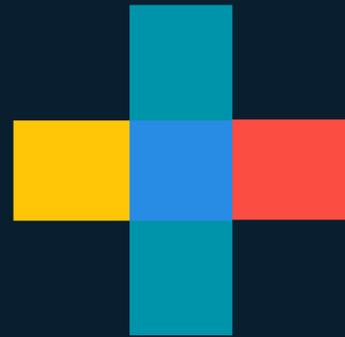


December 2023

SQUARES



STREETS

PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY
Fall 2023

SQUARES
+
STREETS

PLAZAS
+
CALLES

廣場
+
街道

广场
+
街道

PLAS
+
RIYO

QUẢNG
TRƯỜNG
+
ĐƯỜNG
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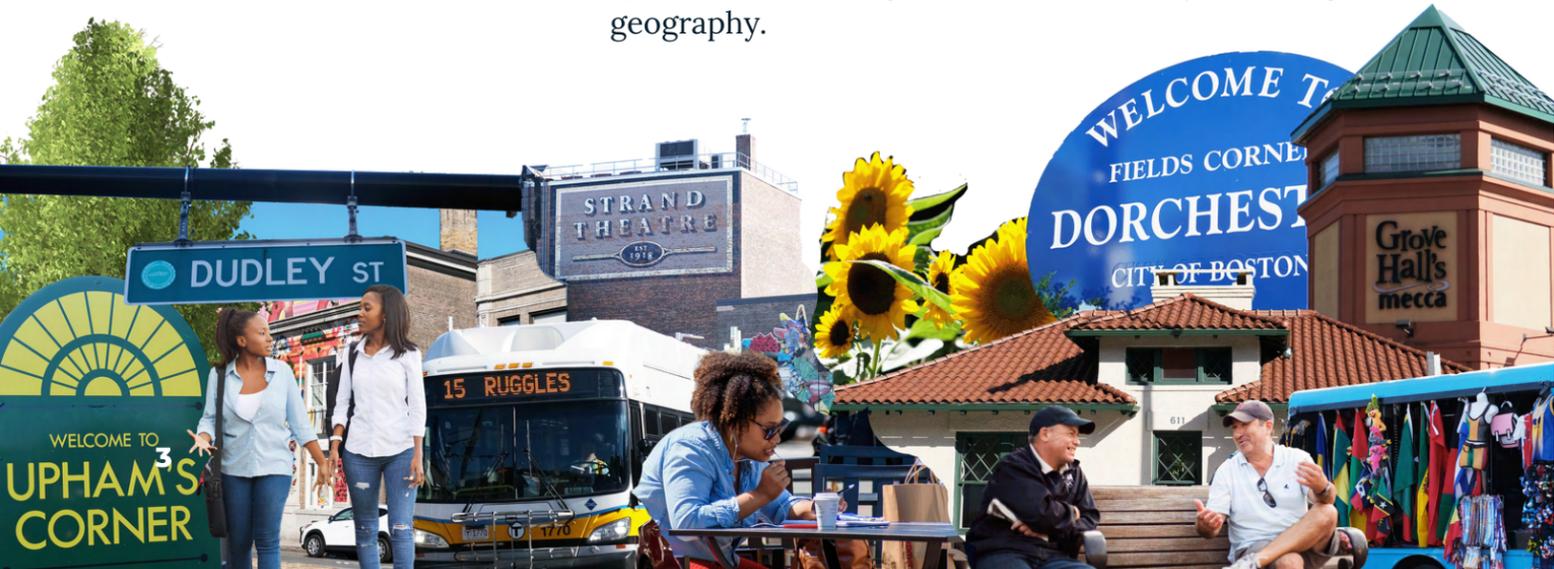
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1.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of Squares + Streets Phase 1 engagement, which took place in Fall 2023, from September through December. Squares + Streets is a planning and zoning initiative focused on adding, supporting, and improving housing, public space, small businesses, and arts and culture, in transit-accessible neighborhood centers and along main streets. The first phase of this process introduced residents and community organizations across the city of Boston to the project and sought input on the development of draft proposals.

Planning for Squares + Streets is one of the first citywide zoning reform initiatives in Boston. The planning goal is to partner with communities in the development of high-impact and actionable recommendations that can be bolstered by capital projects and programmatic funding from City departments. Squares + Streets plans will be completed in intensive 6-9 month timeframes and will include detailed mapping exercises to identify the most appropriate zoning districts to apply to a given geography.




PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES
764

The survey asked for ideas on how to best engage people and suggestions on shaping neighborhood centers and main streets



COMMUNITY PLANNING MEETINGS
29

Community Meetings with neighborhood associations, Main Street organizations, and local advocacy groups

260 (estimated participants)



POP-UP EVENTS
24

5 Planner Pop-ups + 19 Intercept Surveys

1490 (Estimated interactions)



ZONING MEETINGS
4

Public Meetings, (287 Participants)

16 Online community office hours (36 Registrants)



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
2

Workshops with the Mayor's Youth Council



BUS ADS

Exterior ads on buses in high-traffic city routes:

50 Arborway Bus Route: 50 buses out of 120 buses

50 Cabot Bus Route: 50 buses out of 205 buses



BALLOT BOXES
26

Ballot boxes and surveys forms placed in libraries and community centers across the city

1.1

SQUARES + STREETS TEAMS

There are two project teams working on Squares + Streets. Through Fall 2023, the Comprehensive Planning team focused on planning policy and the Zoning Reform team focused on updating the Boston Zoning Code, the document that governs the allowed shape, density, and use of private property in a given area. The Zoning Reform team focused their work plan on drafting text amendments, including an updated land use table to serve Squares + Streets areas. At the same time, the Comprehensive Planning team worked to spread the word about the mission of Squares + Streets, and what residents and stakeholders should expect of BPDA staff as the process unfolds.

A large component of Squares + Streets zoning is to guide development that encourages a mix of building uses and heights, densities, housing diversity, and growth opportunities that encourages active streets. During this engagement period, the Zoning Reform team used community feedback to refine the proposed dimensional regulations and update the land use table and definitions for each proposed new zoning district. This was to ensure that they are applicable in a variety of neighborhood contexts. On their own, none of these changes have an immediate effect on existing neighborhood zoning districts anywhere in the city. The changes added Squares + Streets zoning districts as options in the City's zoning code. As a next step, the most appropriate district options will be mapped to the Squares + Streets areas through the community processes. Building on what was learned in the first phase of engagement, the Planning team will prepare a Plan Primer for each of the upcoming areas that will include the unique background context for that location and a timeline of the plan development.



Images from the youth workshops and multiple neighborhoods pop-ups in Dorchester, West Roxbury, and Hyde Park

The Phase 1 Fall engagement process focused on informing residents and stakeholders about the planning process and ensuring that community voices were heard, elevated, and incorporated in imagining a city that is more resilient, equitable, and affordable. This report provides an overview of the engagement efforts and the responses from community members during the Fall outreach period. In Phase 2 engagement, which will start in early 2024, the BPDA will invite residents, businesses, students, and community organizations to engage in Squares + Streets planning for a number of areas across the city.

1.3

OVERALL ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

The engagement findings for comprehensive planning were broad and revealed the following key themes:

- **General support for investment in key neighborhood centers** and main streets that will respect the neighborhood's existing character and will address displacement and gentrification concerns.
- Strong **support for creating more affordable housing, business, and retail opportunities** and finding ways to better stabilize existing tenants, services, and businesses.
- Some **concerns regarding the condensed timeline for future programs**, including the Squares + Streets plan process and the need to deeply and effectively engage residents and businesses in those areas.
- A **skepticism about the feasibility of the proposed reforms** and their underlying intentions.
- A **need to continue to engage the community in a meaningful way** that meets them where they are and enables them to shape the process constructively.
- A call to **enable more activation opportunities and keep the center of the commercial areas open and inviting** for live music, entertainment, and community gathering spaces for people from all backgrounds.



S+S-Fall Engagement | Open Streets

The engagement findings for zoning were focused on the drafting of and revisions to the zoning text amendment. As such, the comments and feedback were more focused on design, regulations, and uses that relate to zoning. The key comments included:

- Desire for **housing development** that carefully considers the need for **public and open space**.
- Desire for **updated land use regulations** to allow for a variety of active uses in and around main street buildings, including spaces for community gatherings, local service establishments like barbershops and salons, and spaces for shopping and entertainment.
- Concerns about **building scale and impact on existing local neighborhood identity**.
- Concerns about **congestion** and the effective management of current transportation inefficiencies within the region.
- Questions about **how zoning will be respectful of historical inequities** when mapped throughout Boston.
- General **support towards reforming the zoning code** to be more transparent and accessible.
- Concerns with the **amount of time to give feedback** on the draft zoning code, particularly over the holiday season.

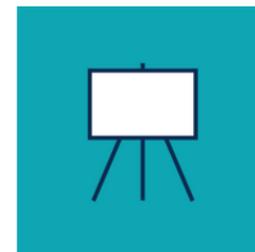


PROJECT BACKGROUND

Under the leadership of Mayor Wu and in partnership with the City of Boston (CoB), the Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) launched Squares + Streets in Q3 2023. Squares + Streets was launched in the wake of the release of *Reforming the Boston Zoning Code* (1), a report completed by Sara Bronin of the National Zoning Atlas and commissioned by the BPDA. It is a first step towards reforming zoning across the city, utilizing planning as a tool that Bostonians are familiar with.

With an ongoing housing crisis and anticipated population growth of nearly 18% to 800,000 residents by 2050 (2), the City of Boston is taking concrete steps to significantly expand its current housing supply. Squares + Streets is focused on realizing the benefits of housing production in Boston's transit-accessible squares and main streets.

1. Bronin, Sara (2023) *Reforming the Boston Zoning Code*
 2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census, *Demographic and Housing Characteristics File* (DHC)



Rooted in the values of resilience, affordability, and equity, Squares + Streets will seek to achieve the following goals:

- **Update zoning** to support mixed-use development and better allow for a diverse range of housing and commercial opportunities
- **Preserve, enhance, and produce affordable housing, retail, and cultural spaces** with the use of policy, design, and funding resources
- **Coordinate local transportation and public space improvements** to increase accessibility and promote more active forms of transportation.
- **Identify capital and program investments** across City departments to signal coordinated investment in these geographies

- **Identify discrete design interventions** to expand tree coverage, mitigate heat, prepare for an electric future, and otherwise advance climate resilience
- **Preserve and promote places and institutions** that are integral to community identity
- **Seek opportunities to retain small businesses and enable new small businesses** that will meet resident's needs
- **Promote arts and culture preservation and development** that is reflective of a neighborhood's character



ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

As the BPDA shifts away from planning at the neighborhood scale, the agency sought to familiarize residents with how they can help shape citywide zoning districts and get involved in the upcoming Squares + Streets planning process. The BPDA did specific outreach to inform residents why and how the BPDA is transitioning to planning that is more comprehensive, integrated, and impactful.

Fall engagement included an additional focus on neighborhoods that have not undergone a recent neighborhood planning process and have a higher likelihood of being included in the Squares + Streets initiative, such as Dorchester, West Roxbury, Hyde Park, Roslindale, and Jamaica Plain.

3.1

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Throughout the Squares + Streets Fall engagement process, residents, business owners, and stakeholders were invited to contribute to planning recommendations and provide input on the draft zoning.

The Planning outreach goals included:

- **Raise awareness** of the overall initiative and build community investment in the outcomes.
- Ensure **key stakeholders are informed and consulted** on the overall initiative.
- Communicate to the public how the BPDA and the City of Boston are **shifting toward a new planning approach** for developing plans.
- **Test new ways of engaging community members** to increase diverse participation and broaden community feedback.

The Zoning outreach goals included:

- **Communicate the connection between Squares + Streets planning and citywide zoning reform**, and how they inform each other.
- Receive **input on engagement ideas, key themes to shape future Squares + Streets areas, the draft zoning proposals** to revise them and inform the next steps of this project.

SQUARES + STREETS



- SQUARES + STREETS KICKS OFF
- LAUNCH THE SQUARES + STREETS PLANS

3.2

EXPANDING THE REACH

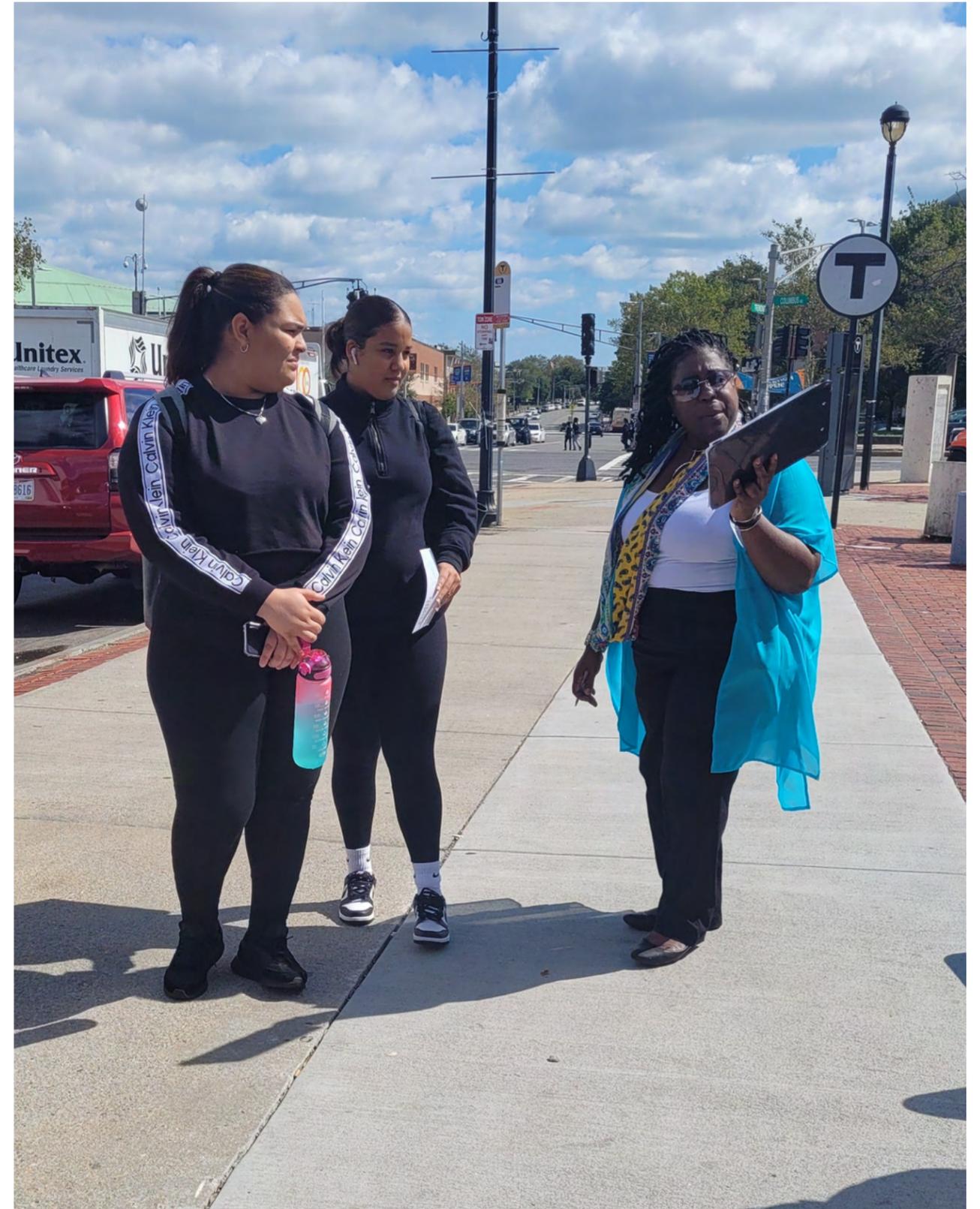
To ensure our outreach was expansive and equitable, the BPDA focused on identifying specific opportunities to engage communities historically underserved in planning processes. This included the following approaches:

- **Target populations:** To enhance equitable representation, the team identified several groups for engagement and sought meaningful avenues to connect with them, including visitors, residents, and families within neighborhoods, youth and students, and minority groups such as English as a Second Language (ESL) communities, ethnic communities, and low-income communities. These groups were connected through pop-up events and community meetings.
- **Languages:** In line with the BPDA Language Access Policy, interpreters for the threshold languages were present at various public events, including the online zoning meetings. In an effort to go above and beyond the requirement, interpreters were also present at the many pop-up and intercept survey events. Additionally, the Squares + Streets materials were translated into the city's threshold languages, which include Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole, Vietnamese, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese. (For more information see the BPDA's Language Access Guide)

3.3

ENGAGEMENT METHODS

The following is an overview of the engagement methods used during Phase 1 engagement. The responses and feedback from the various methods have been summarized in the following chapters. Please refer to the appendix for a complete list of meetings that BPDA staff hosted or attended and locations of the in-person events.

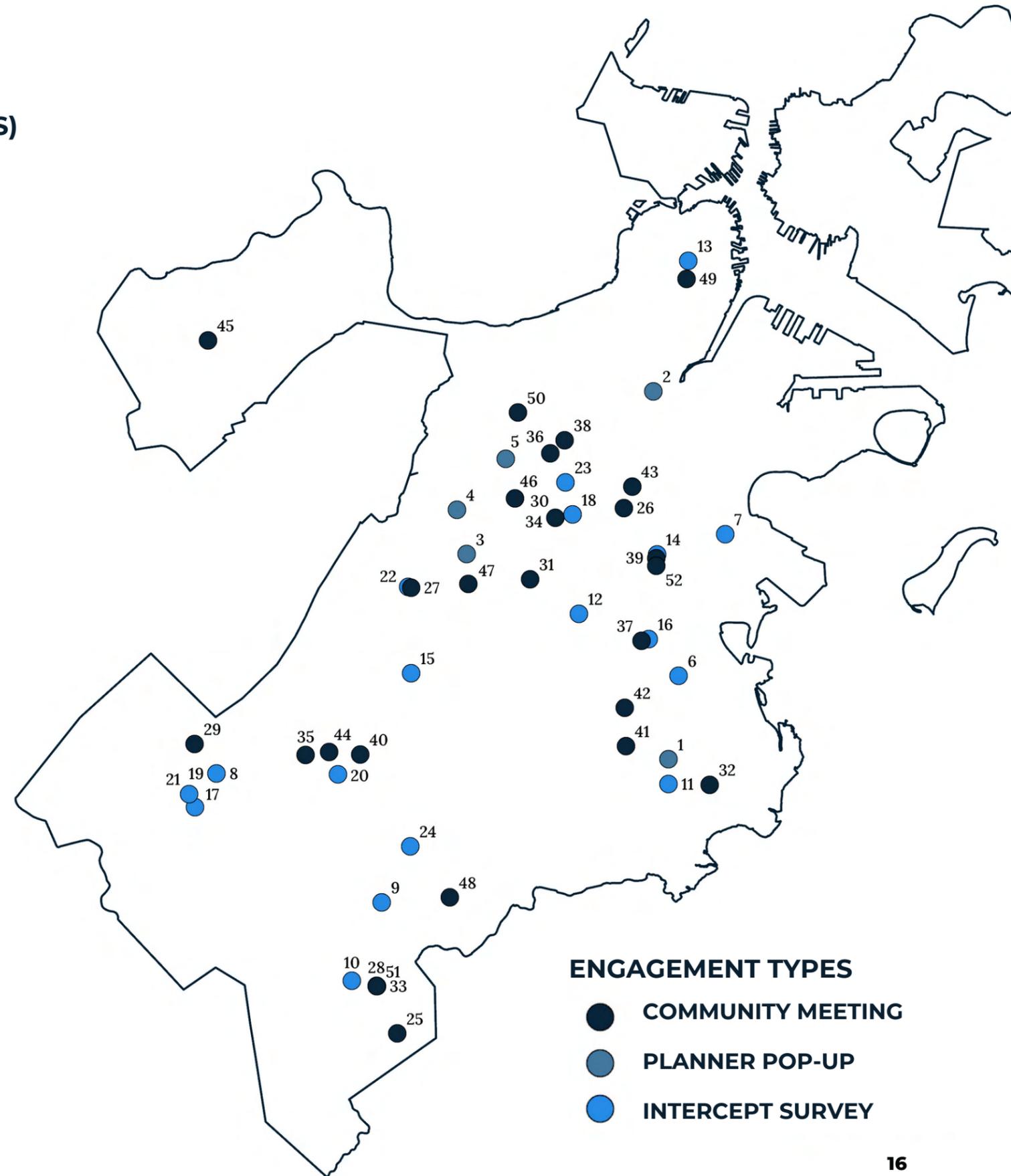


Fall Engagement | Farmers' Market Pop-up

IN-PERSON + VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT (LOCATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS)

1. Open Streets Dorchester
2. South End Festival
3. Egleston Farmers Market
4. Codman Square Farmers Market
5. Mission Hill Farmers Market
6. Field's Corner T-Stop
7. JFK / UMass T-Stop
8. Roche Bros. West Roxbury
9. America's Food Basket Hyde Park
10. Hyde Park Station
11. Red Line Ashmont
12. Stop & Shop, Grove Hall
13. Boston City Hall Plaza
14. Roche Bros. Uphams Corner
15. Forest Hills T-Stop
16. America's Food Basket, Bowdoin St
17. Billings Field and Playground
18. "Feed the Hood", Roxbury
19. Roche Bros., West Roxbury
20. Roslindale Square
21. West Roxbury Public Library
22. Centre Street near J.P. Licks
23. Roxbury Public Library
24. Stop & Shop on American Legion Highway
25. Hyde Park West Fairmount Community Group
26. Leeland Street Community Garden
27. Jamaica Plain Business and Professional Association
28. Hyde Park Main Streets
29. West Roxbury Neighborhood Council
30. Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee
31. Roxbury Neighborhood Council
32. Ashmont/Adams Neighborhood Association
33. Hyde Park Neighborhood Association
34. Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee

35. Longfellow Area Neighborhood Association
36. Madison Park Development Community Action Team
37. Bowdoin Geneva Main Streets
38. Reclaim Roxbury
39. The Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI)
40. Healy 2 Cummins Neighborhood Network
41. Codman Square Neighborhood Council
42. Four Corners Main Streets
43. Transformation Community Advocates
44. WalkUP Roslindale
45. Brighton Main Streets
46. Highland Neighborhood Association
47. Egleston Square Neighborhood Association
48. Rosebery-Ruskindale Rd. Neighborhood Association
49. Massachusetts Community Development Corporation
50. West Village Neighborhood Group
51. Hyde Park Neighborhood Association
52. Uphams Corner Main Streets



PUBLIC SURVEY

The Phase 1 survey focused on gathering engagement ideas and high-level themes important to shape a commercial square or main street. The survey ran from September 13 until December 1 and had 764 responses. The public survey was made available in six of the major threshold languages. Translators were available at the various pop-up events described below and collected feedback in the major threshold languages of that neighborhood. Those survey responses were translated and recorded in English for BPDA staff to analyze. The survey responses were diverse and covered a range of topics.

HOW THE FEEDBACK WILL BE USED:

ENGAGEMENT:

- **Connecting with local groups** - A number of people noted the best way to connect with them was through local neighborhood groups and their existing listservs. In advance of the next engagement phase, the team will identify and connect with local groups and organizations in the different areas to get this word out about the plans.
- **More opportunities for local and diverse engagement** - Several survey participants noted that they wanted more accessible and convenient opportunities to provide feedback in their local area. The team noted the many suggestions such as attending local sporting and cultural events in multiple locations and will coordinate meetings and pop-ups in those locations once they commence the various Squares + Streets plans.

SHAPING FUTURE SQUARES + STREETS:

- **Increasing housing opportunities** - A number of people noted that the city needs a variety of housing for all income ranges. The upcoming process will involve working closely with the Mayor’s Office of Housing to develop and implement housing strategies in these areas.
- **Ensuring the right commercial mix** - The main commercial uses people shared that they would like to see in their neighborhood are those that help them fulfill their daily needs, such as smaller, local vendors, healthy food options, and a greater variety of retail options. The small area process will include an analysis of existing and potential commercial and retail mixes and provide recommendations on the types that should be encouraged in an area.
- **More gathering spaces** - Feedback included calls for more gathering spaces with parks, plazas, parklets, pocket parks, indoor and outdoor seating. The small plan process will include recommendations on improving public space, enhancing both public and private open space, and making all spaces more accessible to all ages, abilities, families, youth and socio-economic backgrounds. These recommendations will include enhanced landscaping, weather protection, and activation opportunities.

- **Safer, cleaner spaces** - To encourage more people to actively use their neighborhoods, there were calls for spaces to have enhanced cleaning, public realm improvements, and better safety at all times of the day and night. The small plan process will look at implementing street improvements such as crosswalk enhancements and lighting and also look to create strategies with other local service providers that create cleaner, safer and more protected areas.

“ KEY QUOTES FROM THE SURVEY

“Higher density housing in key squares near transit to support local businesses within easy walking distance.”

“I liked when there was a little festival right in Hyde Park this past summer. Made me as a HP resident feel seen. It made me feel like I was actually part of Boston.”

“Leaving the train and showing up in a place that is full of people creates a sense of community and safety.”

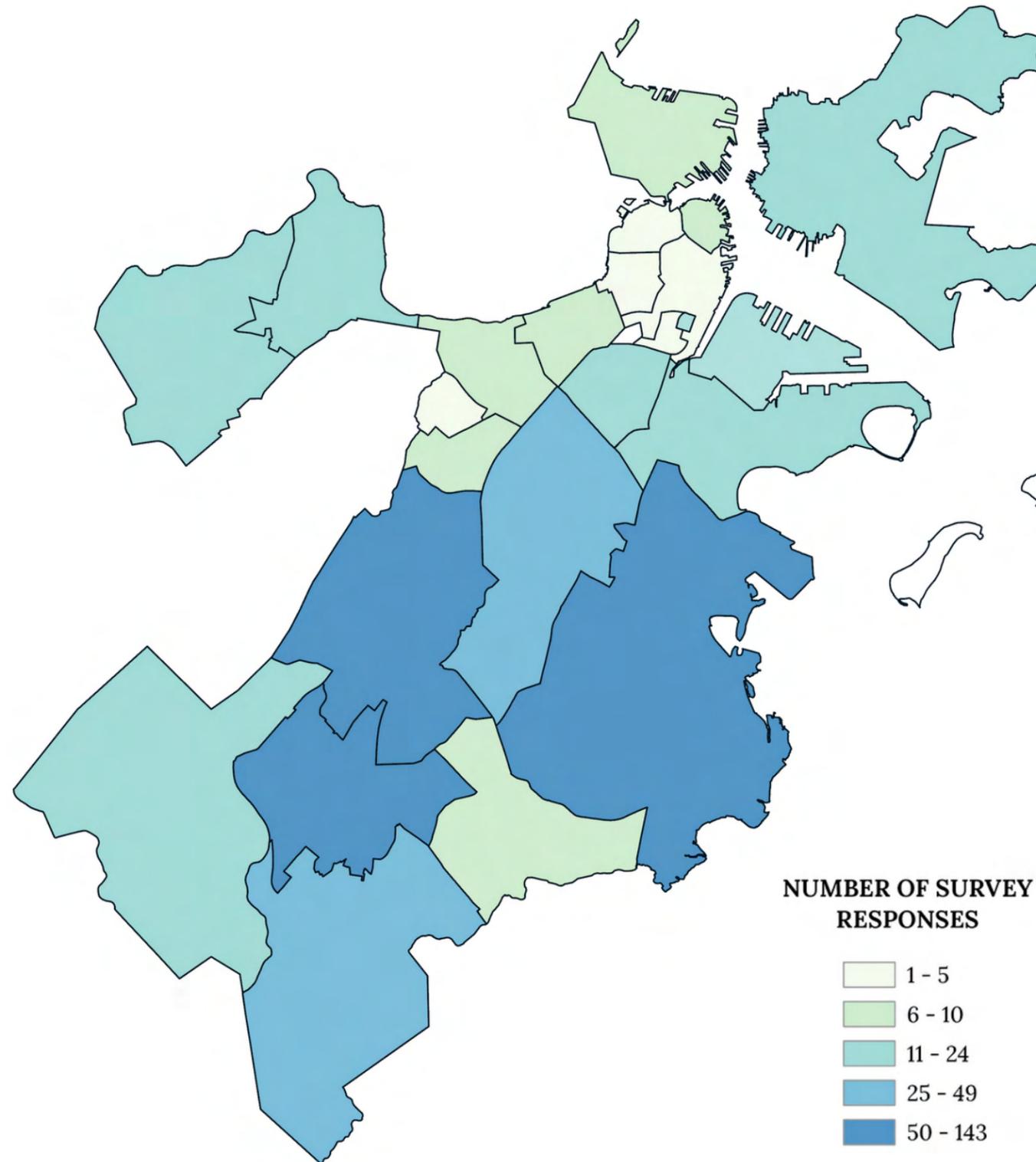
“I’d love to say goodbye to that horrible bus facility right by the Forest Hills T stop. Could really use a grocery store there. In general, I’d say fewer banks and empty storefronts and more restaurants and parklets.”

“I’d like to see the neighborhood character-defining buildings preserved. Please don’t tear them all down & build bigger cookie-cutter structures that all look alike so you can’t even recognize which neighborhood you’re in.”

“Decoración otoñal y festivales q involucran a familias completas.” (Translation: Autumn decorations and festivals that involve entire families)

“More pedestrianized areas. More planters and green space. More places to sit. More places to go to the bathroom. More places to exist in public without spending money.”

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS - WHERE THEY LIVE



POP-UP EVENTS & INTERCEPT SURVEYS

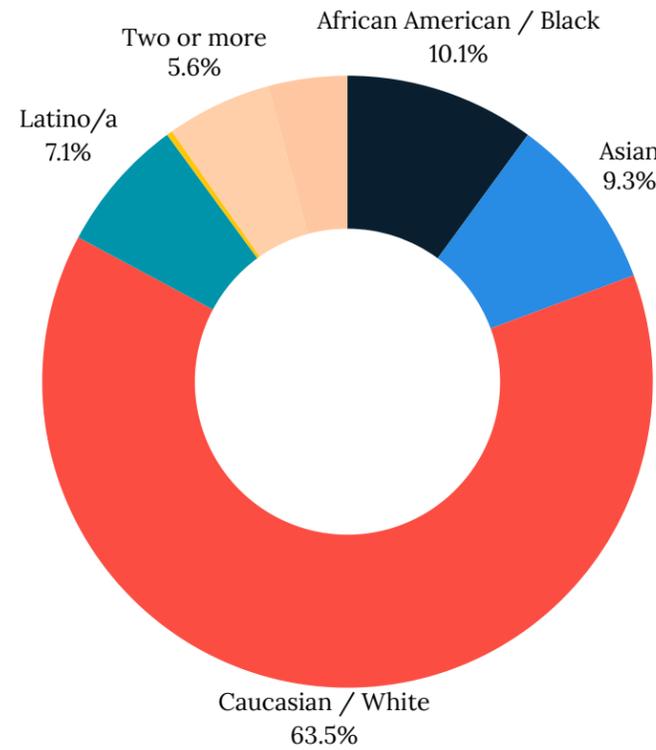
The pop-ups events were small, informal, in-person conversations held outdoors across the neighborhoods. These events were attended by a mix of planning staff and several interpreters (who were selected based on the neighborhood's language thresholds). This effort to incorporate more informal engagements was to connect with new audiences who have not historically participated in BPDA public meetings, and meet folks where they are.

- **Planner Pop-ups** were longer events where interpreters and planning staff set up a table at a local farmers market or open streets festival for the duration of the day. Staff engaged as many shoppers as possible about Squares + Streets and encouraged folks to fill out the fall engagement survey.

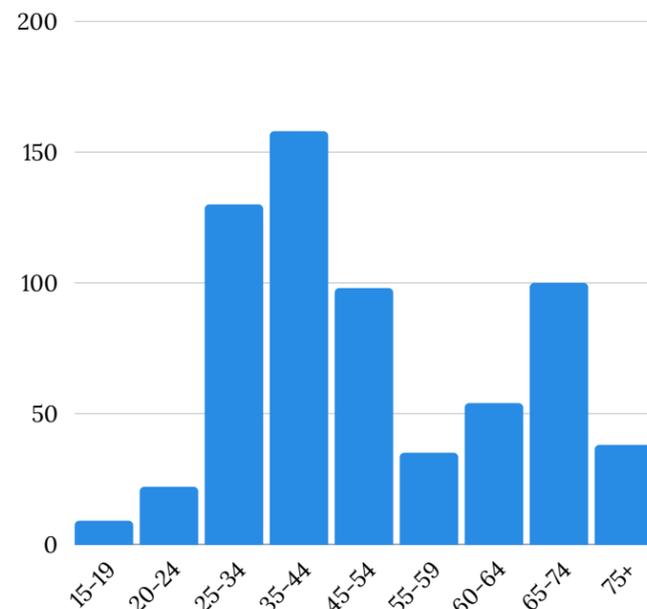
- **Intercept Surveys** were shorter events where interpreters and planning staff would set up Squares + Streets boards at high-traffic locations, including transit stations, local grocery stores, and community centers, with the goal of reaching residents with a range of socio-economic statuses. Staff involved provided information on the project and encouraged passersby to respond to the survey.



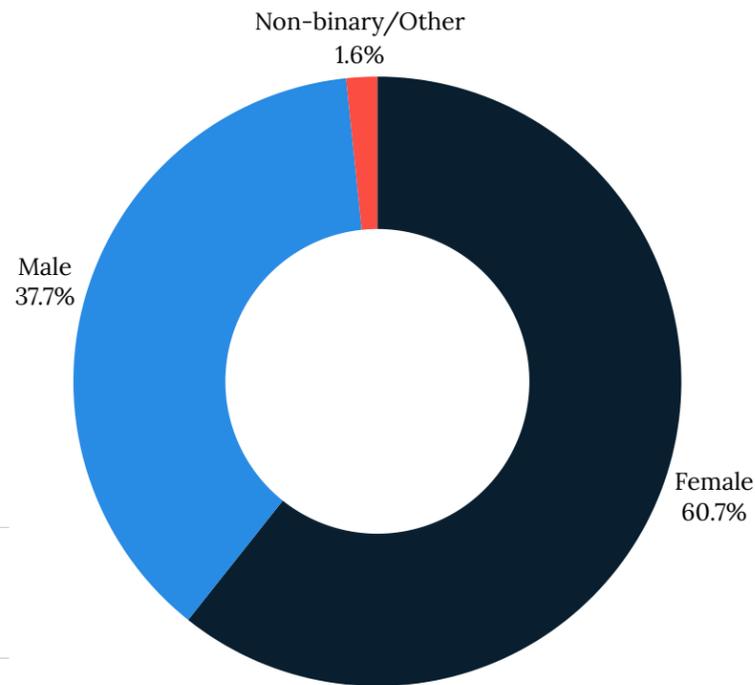
SURVEY PARTICIPANTS - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA



Ethnicity (if answer provided)



Age Range (if answer provided)



Gender Identity (if answer provided)

The team recognizes that more work needs to be done to capture demographics that are reflective of the city. They will look to address this in future phases of Squares + Streets engagement.

HOW THE FEEDBACK WILL BE USED:

- **More in-person events** - Many people appreciated the outdoor and in-person opportunities to connect with planning staff and provide feedback in convenient settings. Staff will look to expand these opportunities in the upcoming engagement for the area plans.
- **Making it more convenient and public** - Across many of the neighborhoods, the team heard the desire to make it more convenient to engage with the process. Based on this feedback, the team will consider deep forms of local engagement such as sending mailers to people's homes to inform them of upcoming engagement opportunities in their local areas.
- **Concern for growth and change** - Many members of the public noted apprehension with the development process and change in their neighborhoods that was resulting in the displacement of existing residents and businesses. The upcoming process will involve working with a number of other departments, such as housing, transportation, arts & culture, and economic inclusion to develop integrated plans that respond to local needs and create strategies to stabilize and grow areas.
- **Retaining the existing community key businesses and assets** - There was a recognition that each of the neighborhood centers across the city has a distinct identity and commercial mix. Many people expressed the desire to retain existing businesses and services that service their community. The upcoming planning process will work with the community to identify key local commercial, cultural, historic, social and built fabric elements that should be highlighted and retained where possible.
- **Specific service and retail needs** - Each of the different neighborhoods had a specific request related to the commercial mix. Some communities were looking for the addition of small bespoke retail offerings (e.g. cafes, hardware stores, etc.), whereas others had needs for larger commercial big-box or low-cost stores (e.g. Stop & Shops or dollar stores). The plan process will involve an audit of existing commercial and retail mix in an area, in addition to surveying the local community. This will form the basis of economic strategy for the area.

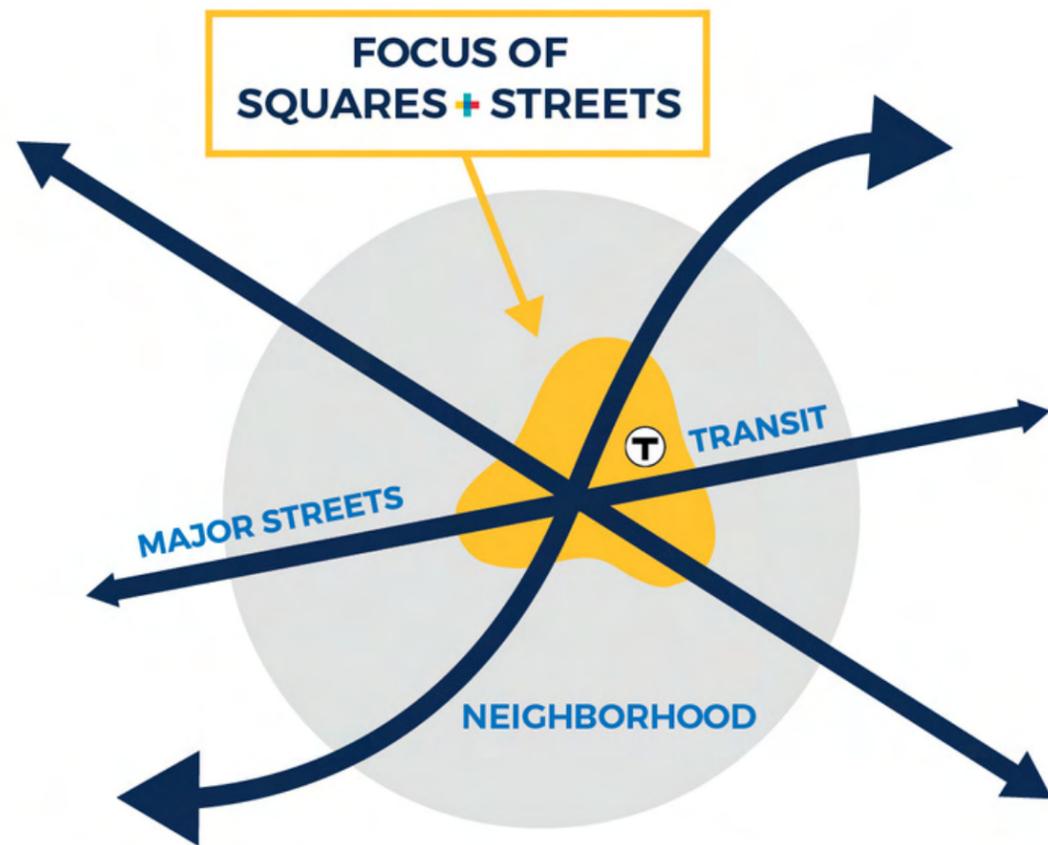


FOCUS GROUPS

To assist the Squares + Streets Planning and Zoning teams in thinking intentionally about the planning scope and draft zoning regulations, they hosted seven focus group workshops with key professionals. These focus groups included designers, local development firms, and Community Development Corporations (CDCs). The discussion focused on how the draft zoning amendments could be applied in neighborhood areas and what would be needed to ensure that they are successful.

HOW THE FEEDBACK WILL BE USED:

- **The need for affordable housing, commercial, and cultural spaces** - Residents are struggling to live and operate businesses in their own neighborhoods. As the BPDA and City streamlines zoning and creates opportunities for more development, they will continue to collaborate and think intentionally about how to better support current residents and business owners through programming and funding.
- **Intensive timeline** - Focus group participants expressed concern that Squares + Streets' intensive 6-9 month process may be too condensed to achieve thoughtful zoning and planning recommendations. The Squares + Streets team plans to be present and readily available in the community and stakeholders throughout the process to work with residents, business owners, community development groups to ensure recommendations are impactful and actionable.
- **Respecting Boston's uniqueness** - As the BPDA streamlines the planning process and brings a consistent zoning approach across many different neighborhoods in Boston, it is still important to remember that not all neighborhoods look and feel the same. The small plan process will look to establish design guidelines in line with the Design Vision for each area that is reflective of that area's distinct character and uniqueness.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION MEETINGS

To diversify engagement, the team involved numerous smaller, local community organizations that had strong ties within their respective communities. The team attended just under 30 community and neighborhood association meetings where staff provided an overview of the Squares + Streets planning process, a summary of the zoning reform effort, and a brief update on the Boston Design Vision. Group members had the opportunity to ask the project team questions as well as provide comments. Many of the organizations that the team connected with were main streets organizations and neighborhood associations. The project team also understood the need to expand its reach to other cultural, youth, advocacy-based organizations, and other community-based organizations and meetings were also organized with a smaller number of these groups.

HOW THE FEEDBACK WILL BE USED:

- **Clarity on the program, roles and timelines** - Several groups were interested in understanding the scope of the project, how it differed from previous engagement processes, and how they could stay involved. The team explained the high-level objectives of Squares + Streets planning and zoning and provided supporting materials. Staff noted that they would release an overall engagement template that would identify when, where, and how they would look to engage the community organizations and broader community in each of the areas and establish a standard of care.
- **Understanding historical significance and preserving the neighborhood's character** - Several groups, including a preservation group, advocated for opportunities for elders, businesses owners, and residents to share local stories and histories with BPDA staff members with the objective of informing the preservation of certain cultural and physical aspects of the plan area. Given this feedback, staff have incorporated a story session, among other opportunities, which will kick off and set the tone for each of the Squares + Streets planning processes.
- **Area identification process** - A number of groups were interested in understanding which areas would be included in this process and the criteria used to determine those. Staff confirmed that the rollout of the areas will be based on a number of criteria, including proximity and access to transit, existing commercial mix, and the proposed or potential capital improvement projects in those areas. The team will provide a deeper overview of the selection process in the engagement material for the next phase of the project.

ZONING PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Zoning Reform team held several online public meetings where staff presented draft zoning and facilitated a discussion on what further considerations they should take in revising the draft. The engagement process aimed to introduce stakeholders to the proposed Squares + Streets zoning and to provide transparency from initial analysis through to the creation of the draft zoning text amendment.

The zoning-specific engagement included a series of four public meetings over the Fall where the Zoning Reform staff explained:

- The analysis process used to understand zoning in neighborhood commercial areas, including a review of building code standards, development trends, and incongruencies or misalignments between the Zoning Code and existing buildings.
- The zoning recommendations that were proposed based on that analysis and feedback from focus groups with building inspection, housing development, and design professionals.
- The initial draft zoning text amendment that detailed the potential zoning updates.

The team also organized a recurring series of online drop-in community office hours for anyone who wanted to engage in a more informal, conversational dialogue on the proposed changes. Further, a few residents conferred with staff via email and in-person neighborhood walks.

HOW THE FEEDBACK WILL BE USED:

- **Testing zoning options in different areas** – Community members across neighborhoods expressed concern that the proposed zoning options may not align with their main streets and neighborhood squares. Throughout the draft revision process, the proposed zoning is being modeled and tested in different parts of the city to refine its applicability and to have more examples during future community engagement of how this zoning could fit at a more local level.

- **“Active Uses” that reflect local needs** – Community members and development professionals emphasized the need for land uses in the “active uses” category to reflect more than primarily commercial uses to better fill vacant storefronts. The Zoning Reform team continues to update the land uses section of the draft zoning based on this feedback to reflect the need for local social services, community resource spaces, and spaces that require flexibility for the activities they conduct.
- **Parking and Congestion** – Residents and business owners expressed concerns about the lack of a minimum parking requirement as it could produce congestion, while local housing and mixed-use developers expressed support for the flexibility that comes without that requirement. A new land use to address some of those concerns called “Shared Parking” has been added that would allow parking spaces to be shared amongst business and residents in a nearby area.



Fall Engagement | An illustrative example of Neighborhood Districts

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The team held two workshops with members of the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) to incorporate youth voices in planning for the future. During these workshops, the Squares + Streets team prepared 2D models of main streets that were representative of various building types seen across the city. Members of the MYC were then able to draw on these sheets and share their priorities, which resulted in a discussion about what they would like to see in their neighborhood centers.

HOW THE FEEDBACK WILL BE USED:

- **Cultural and environmental preservation and resilience** - Many youth had a deep interest in more opportunities for open space and opportunities which advance urban biodiversity and climate resilience. Further, youth had specific interest in seeing more opportunities in the built environment for the recognition of different cultural groups' contributions to the space and acknowledgement of how it should be more inviting. The engagement plan for each small area plan will include a specific youth-centered component to further this conversation.
- **The need for a diversity of housing options** - Many youth understood the need for a diversity of housing options, both in terms of affordability and building types for their families. For example, courtyards were brought up as something they would like to see more of, as well as more low-income housing options to alleviate financial pressure. The draft zoning amendment will make it easier to build a diversity of housing forms.
- **More spaces to connect and gather outside of downtown** - A lot of the youth participants referenced the desire for a wider diversity of affordable places to hang out with their friends. Many noted that they don't feel like many of those places exist in their neighborhoods, leading them to commute all the way downtown for recreational activities. The small plan process will look at opportunities to create spaces for all ages and abilities with a greater diversity of activation opportunities.



Fall Engagement | Youth Workshop



Fall Engagement | Youth Workshop

3.4

ENGAGEMENT METRICS

During Phase 1 Fall Engagement, a wide array of communication tools were utilized to engage residents, businesses, stakeholders, and organizations. Below are the types of engagement methods used and the respective outreach metrics to illustrate the extent of interaction with various groups:

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT (IN-PERSON AND ONLINE)

Public Survey	This asked about ideas on how to best engage people and suggestions on how to shape neighborhood centers and main streets.	764 survey responses
Pop-up Events	These were small informal, in-person conversations with staff and interpreters held outdoors across the neighborhoods. The intent of these was to inform people about the project and help them to fill in the survey.	<p>24 Pop-up Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Planner Pop-ups which were longer events at Farmers' Markets 19 Intercept Surveys which were staff attending high-traffic, public locations, such as transit stops <p>Approximately 45 interpreters attended the various pop-up events (Estimated 1490 public interactions)</p>
Focus Groups	These were workshops with key professionals in areas such as design, land use development, and community economic development.	7 Focus Groups, 44 Participants
Community Organization Meetings	The team attended numerous smaller, local community organization meetings to provide a project overview and get direct feedback on the survey questions.	29 Community organization meetings with neighborhood associations, main streets organizations, and local advocacy groups (estimated 260 participants)
Zoning Meetings	The Zoning Reform team held several online public meetings where staff presented this draft zoning and facilitated a discussion on what further considerations should be included.	4 Public Meetings, 287 Participants 16 Online Community Office Hours, 36 Registrants
Youth Engagement	The team held two workshops with members of the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) to engage youth voices in planning for the future.	2 Workshops with the Mayor's Youth Council 60 High school students from across the city attended



COMMUNICATIONS

Fall Engagement | Bus Ad

Bus Ads	<p>Exterior ads on buses in high-traffic city routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arborway Bus Route: 50 buses out of 120 buses. Cabot Bus Route: 50 buses out of 205 buses <p>(Estimated no. of impressions by Outfront Media: 38,484,250)</p>
Digital Subway Live Board Ads	25 Digital boards posted at two major transit hubs: Broadway and Boylston (Estimated no. of impressions by Outfront Media: 200,000)
Mobile Ads	200,000 mobile ads through wifi connections at transit stations (Estimated no. of impressions by Outfront Media: 1,066,050)
Bus Shelter Ads	50 Ads on bus shelters at bus stops across the city
Ballot Boxes	30 ballot boxes and surveys forms placed in libraries and community centers across the city
Newsletter Updates	<p>Weekly updates in the BPDA newsletter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 updates sent out every week from September 15 to December 1 Approximately 5,937 recipients per newsletter <p>Updates in the ONS newsletter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 updates sent Approximately 15,000 recipients
Newspaper Ads	8 newspaper ads in local and citywide publications, including two Spanish newspapers
Social Media	<p>The team ran a series of social media posts and educational videos on various channels. In total, there were 21,672 social media impressions. The reach included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instagram 3,753 accounts reached, 5,625 plays/views X (formerly Twitter): 16,300 views on S+S planning posts Facebook: 1,619 accounts reached

4.

WHAT WE HEARD

1

Support for change through opportunities and investments in vital neighborhood centers and main streets, carefully balanced with considerations for displacement.

▪ **Housing opportunities**

Many, but not all, participants welcomed the idea of additional housing opportunities across the neighborhoods including the need to address the housing affordability crisis.

▪ **Limiting the displacement of homes and businesses**

It was suggested that this program needs to occur in a meaningful way that seeks to enhance the neighborhood and avoid the loss of existing homes and businesses.

▪ **Proposed reforms**

There was some skepticism about the proposed planning reforms, particularly concerning their feasibility, intent, and the simultaneous changes impacting community involvement (e.g., abolishing the BPDA, Article 80 reforms, and zoning modifications happening at once).

▪ **Site selection**

A number of community and neighborhood organizations were interested in confirming whether their commercial area was set to be included in the initial roll-out of Squares + Streets plans. They also wanted to know the process to be included if they were not.

▪ **City coordination**

There was strong support for the City to better coordinate across departments to better deliver both services and investment in the neighborhood centers.



KEY QUOTES FROM THE SURVEY

“Would like to see a diversity of restaurants and have new ones. New buildings. New stores, would like to see a new dollar store in the area. More housing”



2

The creation of more affordable housing and business opportunities

▪ **Mixed-use neighborhoods**

There was strong support for the development of more mixed-use commercial centers with a variety of restaurants, retail, and cultural uses to serve the community.

▪ **Housing mix**

Development groups suggested focusing on the allowance of financially-feasible housing types.

▪ **Affordable housing definition**

A few organizations raised questions about what affordable housing means, who it serves, how it applies to the plan area, and its compatibility with the proposed new housing types.

▪ **Affordable commercial, civic, and cultural space**

Several participants noted the need to incorporate affordable commercial, civic, and cultural space.

▪ **Smaller, local, minority-owned businesses**

A few organizations highlighted the disproportionate need to support smaller, local, minority-owned establishments (e.g. local restaurants, hair salons, grocery stores, etc.) that were key to the character of their main street.

▪ **Creating affordable and inviting spaces**

There were a number of calls to think about how low-income folks, other users, and low-cost shoppers would be considered and catered to as part of this.

3

Spaces for the community to come together

▪ **Gathering spaces**

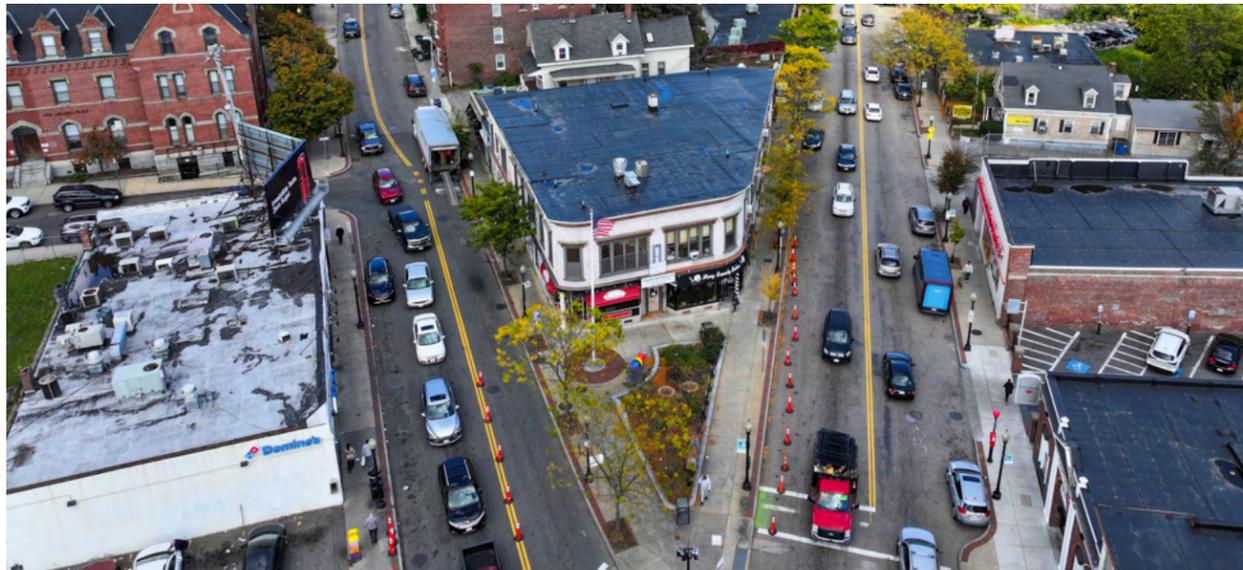
Several people, particularly in the planning survey, noted the need for additional gathering spaces, both public and private, but with an emphasis on the need for this to be free and accessible (i.e. third spaces, public squares, parklets, pocket parks, etc.). There were also a number of suggestions about how to make these spaces more youth, family, and senior-friendly.

▪ **Active squares and centers**

They also suggested that the BPDA keeps the center of the commercial areas for live music, entertainment, art, pop-up activities, food trucks, and community gathering. The idea being that these commercial areas should become active spaces for the community to gather and express their identity with public art, cultural activities, and entertainment.

▪ **Street safety**

Safety was also raised as an issue to address in terms of street design (e.g. the need for better lit crosswalks and public spaces) and ensuring that people feel safe walking on the street.



4

Concerns for the condensed timeline for Squares + Streets and clarity on the selection process

▪ **Selection process**

Many community organizations wanted to know which geographies were going to be selected to undergo the Squares + Streets plan process. They expressed concern about their area being selected before they had the opportunity to review the proposed zoning changes to ensure they would work for their neighborhood.

▪ **Engagement period**

Several community organizations expressed concern about the tight schedule for the proposed zoning code reform and the 6-9 month Squares + Streets plan engagement. They felt this constrained timeline would not allow them sufficient time to review and prepare comments. They suggested addressing this issue for future planning. On the other hand, there was also a recognition that broadly the BPDA and the planning system move slowly, with some development taking years. Ultimately, striking a balance will be difficult.

5

The need for balanced growth that aligns with the community's vision for what works in each of these unique, established areas

▪ **Unique neighborhoods**

There was a broad recognition that the unique character and design found in Boston's neighborhoods is what makes them special. While many participants supported creating additional opportunities for housing and commercial development, they wanted to ensure that their distinct identity and specific assets would be retained and development balanced in their neighborhoods.

▪ **Community assets**

For some neighborhoods, this unique character was defined by a specific restaurant or retail outlet, for others it was a historic building or community gathering space.

6

The need to bring additional retail, amenities, gathering spaces, and public realm improvements to neighborhood centers



- **Additional amenities**
 Each neighborhood had a specific request related to the need for additional amenities, services, and commercial mix in their neighborhoods.
- **Types of services needed**
 Some communities were looking for the addition of small bespoke retail offerings (e.g. a variety of cafes, restaurants with healthy food options and an emphasis on more sit-down establishments, bookstores, hardware stores, daycares, etc.), whereas others had needs for larger grocery or low-cost stores (e.g. Trader Joe's or dollar stores). There were also calls for more co-working, makerspaces, and places to repair or resell items.
- **Fulfilling daily needs**
 A key response from survey participants was that they were looking to their local area to fulfill their daily needs without the need to travel further.
- **Transportation improvements**
 A number of participants wanted to know what opportunities might exist through this project for expanding or improving transportation. This included infrastructure such as bus stops, bike lanes, and transit stations. There were also comments about improving the sidewalk experience (e.g. landscaping, green spaces, more trees, weather protection, outdoor dining, wider sidewalks to encourage more walking and access, and publicly-accessible restrooms).

7

Increased engagement opportunities and the need to meet people where they are at and enable the inclusion of more voices

- **Engaging directly**
 Many of the local residents that the teams met with in-person, either at community meetings or in-person public pop-up events, appreciated the opportunity to engage directly with staff in the early stage of the plan and zoning reform process.
- **Further deep engagement**
 It was highly recommended that the team look for additional opportunities to robustly engage the community in any plan-making that would impact a neighborhood. There were suggestions to meet with neighborhood groups, hold evening office hours, and find enhanced ways to involve harder-to-reach populations such as renters, working-class residents, working families, and youth. One suggestion was to pay people for their time.
- **Engaging in-community**
 There were a number of suggestions to increase engagement outreach and bring it to places where it is more convenient for the community to participate (e.g. at community events, local stores, through community groups, or directly reaching people in their homes, etc.).
- **Increase communications**
 Notably, it was suggested that the team look for additional opportunities to provide more notice on changes using multiple different ways (e.g. newspapers, bulletin boards, posters at businesses, in community centers, etc.). The materials should be published in multiple languages and copies left in accessible places.



8

Concerns with managing congestion and existing transportation issues

▪ **Impact of additional density**

A number of participants noted their concern with the impact of additional density in the form of congestion with increased development in their areas. This was particularly in light of the current issues with the transit system.

▪ **Loss of parking**

Transportation issues including the loss of parking and its connection to commercial viability along commercial corridors and accessibility for different groups (e.g. the elderly or those with accessibility challenges) were raised.



9

General support for a reform of the zoning system, with questions on balancing citywide standardization with local unique character

▪ **Reforming the zoning code**

A number of groups and individuals familiar with the complex Boston zoning system were supportive of the proposed changes to the zoning code.

▪ **Additional flexibility**

Some groups appreciated the proposed additional flexibility in the zoning code and the proposed districts for things such as heights and setbacks. They hoped that this would clarify the process and ensure more financially feasible projects, particularly for housing.

▪ **Community input**

There were some concerns that the proposed amendments would lead to less community input for individual development projects and lead to too much additional height and density in areas.

▪ **How the changes would apply**

Many people wanted to better understand exactly how the zoning changes might be applied in specific areas and how they would be applied in the next phase.

▪ **Encouraging small-scale developers**

It was suggested that if the BPDA really wants to encourage more local and small-scale developers, it needs to provide more opportunities for education and technical assistance.



Example of setbacks and yards

Zoning is a set of laws that are used to guide development. They help define the design, dimensions, and land use for a site.

5.

NEXT STEPS

THANK YOU

Phase 2 of Squares + Streets will involve rolling out a series of plans across various neighborhoods in a sequenced approach across 2024/25. Engagement in the following rounds of this project will focus on creating targeted connections with residents, organizations, businesses, families, and visitors in each of the selected site areas and enable them to shape the zoning and policy recommendations.

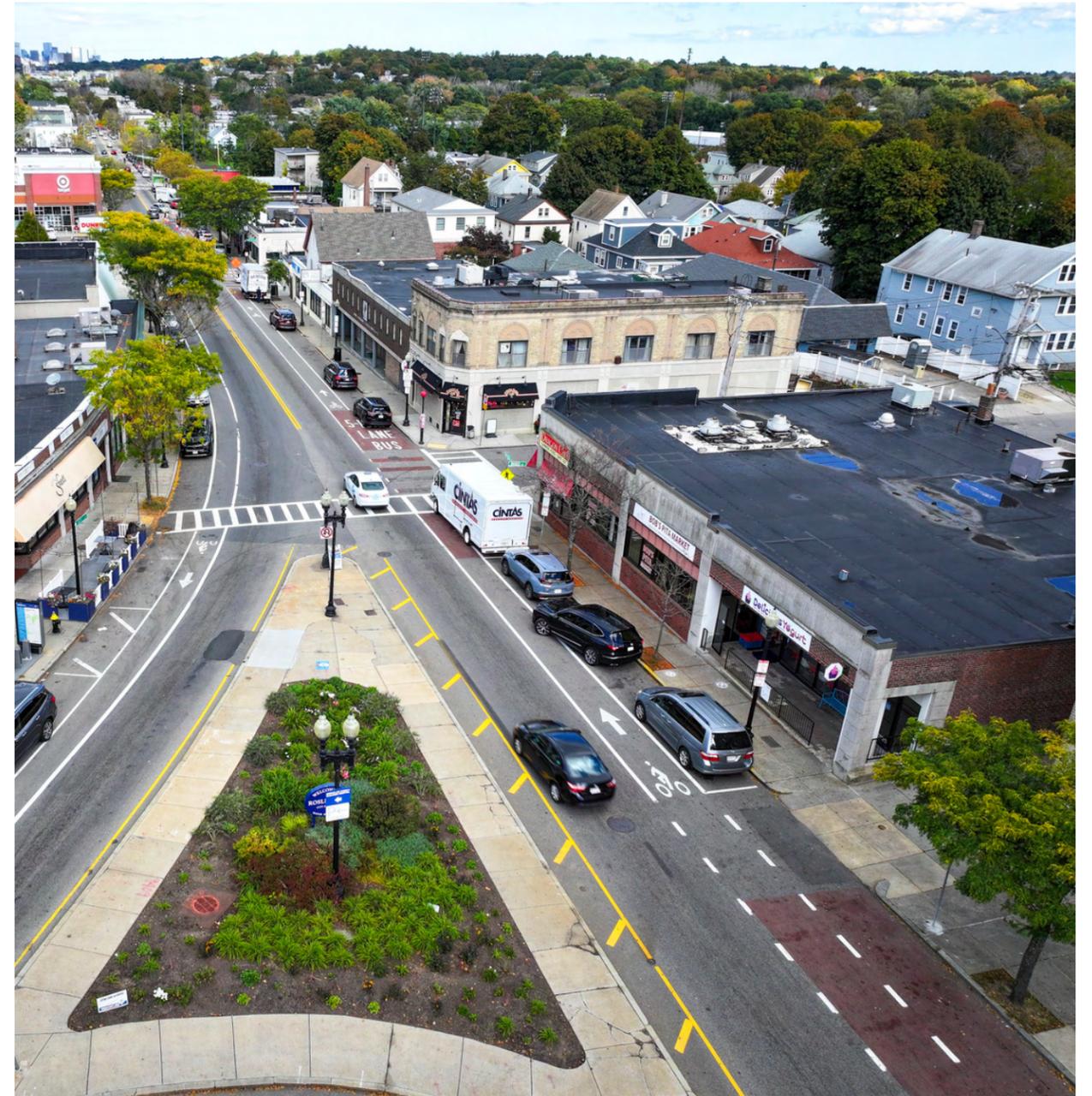
5.1 USING THE FEEDBACK

In summary, the engagement in Phase 1 helped shape the following parts of the process:

- Engagement suggestions from the survey, pop-up events, and meetings were applied directly to the Fall engagement process, including the suggestion to meet with local organizations and organize pop-ups in convenient public locations across the city.
- The team also took further suggestions on engagement and incorporated them into the development of the Squares + Streets Engagement Plan template that will be used for each of the upcoming Squares + Streets plans.
- Feedback on the length of the engagement process was also considered and the team made efforts to extend the comment period for the zoning reform public survey.
- The feedback from the community meetings and comprehensive planning survey was reviewed and applied to the draft zoning amendment.
- The overall feedback from this phase of engagement will shape the themes and draft content of the forthcoming Squares + Streets plans.

5.2 THANK YOU

Staff at the BPDA and the City of Boston would like to extend a significant thank you to all the community members, residents, businesses, visitors, community organizations, and volunteers who engaged in the first phase of this project. Your time and feedback were invaluable in shaping the priorities and timeline of the next steps. The BPDA looks forward to your continued involvement in Squares + Streets to shape the future of Boston together.





APPENDIX

ENGAGEMENT LOCATIONS AND DATES

POP-UPS

1. Open Streets Dorchester, Sun, Sep 17
2. South End Festival, Sun, Sep 17
3. Egleston Farmers Market, Sat, Sep 23
4. Codman Square Farmers Market, Sat, Sep 30
5. Mission Hill Farmers Market - Roxbury Crossing, Fri, Oct 13

INTERCEPT SURVEYS

1. Field's Corner T-Stop, Mon, Sep 25
2. JFK / UMass T-Stop, Tues, Sep 26
3. Roche Bros., West Roxbury, Thurs, Sep 28
4. America's Food Basket, Hyde Park, Fri, Sep 29
5. Hyde Park Station, Mon, Oct 2
6. Red Line Ashmont, Tue, Oct 3
7. Stop & Shop, Grove Hall, Wed, Oct 4
8. Boston City Hall Plaza, Thurs, Oct 5
9. Brother's Market Uphams Corner, Fri, Oct 6
10. Forest Hills T-Stop, Wed, Oct 11
11. America's Food Basket, Bowdoin Street, Thurs, Oct 12
12. Billings Field and Playground, Sat, Oct 14
13. "Feed the Hood", Roxbury, Sun, Oct 15
14. Roche Bros., West Roxbury, Mon, Oct 23
15. Commuter Rail Line in Roslindale Sq, Tues, Oct 24
16. West Roxbury Public Library on Centre Street, Fri, Oct 27
17. Centre Street near "J.P. Licks", Fri, Oct 27
18. Roxbury Branch of the Boston Public Library, Sat, Oct 28
19. Stop & Shop, American Legion Highway, Tues, Oct 31

LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS

The local community groups and organizations in-person and online meetings included:

1. Hyde Park West Fairmount Community Group
2. Leeland Street Community Garden
3. Jamaica Plain Business and Professional Association
4. Hyde Park Main Streets "Pocket Committee"
5. West Roxbury Neighborhood Council
6. Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee (Internal Board)
7. Roxbury Neighborhood Council
8. Ashmont/Adams Neighborhood Association
9. Hyde Park Neighborhood Association
10. Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee (General Body)
11. Longfellow Area Neighborhood Association
12. Madison Park Development Community Action Team
13. Bowdoin Geneva Main Streets
14. Reclaim Roxbury (Connected with Director)
15. Great Neighborhoods, Livable Streets Alliance
16. The Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI)
17. Healy 2 Cummins Neighborhood Network
18. Codman Square Neighborhood Council
19. Four Corners Main Streets (Connected with Director)
20. Transformation Community Advocates
21. WalkUP Roslindale
22. Brighton Main Streets (Connected with Director)
23. Highland Neighborhood Association
24. Egleston Square Neighborhood Association
25. Rosebery-Ruskindale Rd. Neighborhood Association (General Body)
26. Massachusetts Community Development Corporation (General Body)
27. West Village Neighborhood Group
28. Hyde Park Neighborhood Association (Internal Board)
29. Uphams Corner Main Streets (Internal Board)

SQUARES



STREETS

FOCUS GROUPS

1. Designers Focus Group, Oct 1 + Oct 16
2. Community Development Corporations (CDCs), Oct 18 + Dec 14
3. Local Developers Focus Groups, Oct 19 + Dec 15 + Dec 18

LIBRARIES + COMMUNITY CENTERS THAT HOSTED A BALLOT BOX

- Adams Street Library
- Codman Square Library
- Connolly Library
- Egleston Square Library
- Field's Corner Library
- Grove Hall Library
- Hyde Park Library
- Jamaica Plain Library
- Lower Mills Library
- Parker Hill Library
- Roslindale Library
- Roxbury Library
- Upham's Corner Library
- West Roxbury Library
- BCYF Blackstone
- BCYF Curtis Hall
- Hennigan Community Center
- Holland Community Center
- Hyde Park Community Center
- BCYF Leahy-Holloran
- Marshall Community Center
- BCYF Ohrenberger
- Perkins Community Center
- BCYF Shelburne
- BCYF Tobin
- BCYF Vine Street

ZONING PUBLIC MEETINGS

1. Neighborhood commercial areas meetings, Oct 16 + 30
2. Zoning recommendations, Nov 13
3. Initial draft zoning text amendment, Dec 5

This report and the supporting Phase 1 engagement materials will be made available on the Squares + Streets website at bostonplans.org/squares and bostonplans.org/zoning4squares

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