

CHINATOWN ZONING AMENDMENT SUMMARY

April 2026

UPDATED DRAFT ZONING

The [Chinatown Rezoning Process](#) is part of the larger [PLAN: Downtown](#) comprehensive strategy. A Draft Chinatown Zoning Amendment and Design Guidelines was released in November 2024, followed by a series of in-person and virtual public engagement opportunities. This summary covers changes made to the draft as a result of engagement as we move towards adopting the zoning.

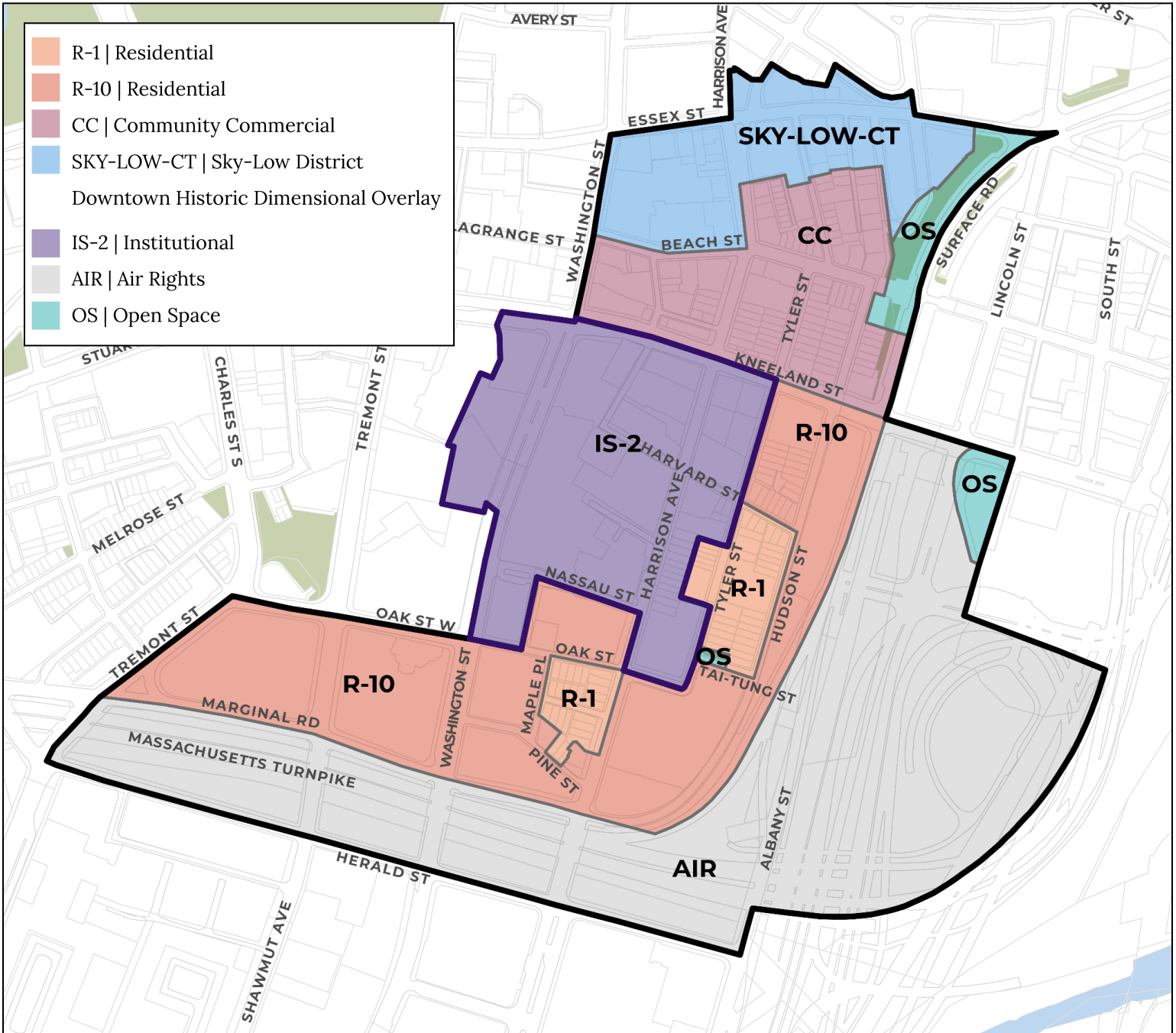
Informed by the feedback from the community throughout the planning and draft zoning process, the proposed zoning changes are aimed at recognizing Chinatown's multifaceted identity as a neighborhood. We heard that:

- Chinatown helps to support new immigrants, elders, low-income families and individuals;
- There is a need for more affordable housing and commercial spaces;
- Chinatown is a commercial place that needs to serve both residents and visitors for the neighborhood to stay competitive with other places that offer similar goods and services, particularly to the regional diasporic community; and
- There should be more housing opportunities for middle-income households who have strong cultural identity and affinity with Chinatown.



MAP AMENDMENT SUMMARY

Map amendments are changes in the geographic location of the specific zoning rules outlined in Zoning Articles. The current Zoning Map that regulates Chinatown is “Map 1G Chinatown District.” The boundaries of different zoning areas, or zoning “subdistricts”, are shown on this map and refer back to Chinatown’s Article 43. The official Zoning Maps contain a lot of information and may be difficult to read, so a simplified version is available below:



ZONING SUBDISTRICTS

R-1 | RESIDENTIAL

R-1 is mapped in the historic row house areas of the neighborhood, including the Johnny Court area and between Tyler Street and Hudson Street. The R-1 Subdistrict downzones existing row house areas to protect low-rise, small-scale residential properties that are historically and culturally significant.

Land Use Highlights

- Maximum of 14 dwelling units
- Small commercial uses conditionally allowed on the ground floor

Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- Maximum height reduced from 80 feet to 45 feet
- Rear yard minimums at 10' to allow for some small additions

New in this draft: Some updated land use regulations make it easier for Family Associations to operate within their buildings.

R-10 | RESIDENTIAL

R-10 is mapped along the southern and eastern portions of the neighborhood where there are currently larger apartment buildings along Hudson Street and between Oak Street and Marginal Road. The R-10 Subdistrict reflects the higher-density residential areas of the neighborhood, including recent developments.

Land Use Highlights

- Any number of residential units are allowed
- Civic uses, like community centers, and social clubs are allowed
- Small commercial spaces and grocery stores allowed on the ground floor of buildings

Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- Requiring a minimum amount of outdoor amenity space for residents and visitors
- Requiring a minimum area of the lot to be permeable surfaces that can let water filter through the ground and encourage more green space



- Maximum building height of 155' for all buildings

New in this draft: *There is no longer an Affordable Housing Overlay District, so the maximum height for all uses in this subdistrict is 155'.*

CC | COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL

CC is mapped in the heart of Chinatown's commercial area, primarily along Tyler Street, Hudson Street, Beach Street, and Harrison Ave. The CC Subdistrict preserves the small-scale nature of this area and sets regulations to encourage similar-looking buildings.

Land Use Highlights

- Commercial uses allowed on all floors of buildings
- Residential uses are allowed on upper floors, but require case-by-case approval when located on the ground floor
- Larger commercial uses like large retail and large service establishments require case-by-case approval
- Small hotels require case-by-case approval

Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- Higher maximum lot coverage to recognize existing patterns of buildings
- Smaller building floor plates to maintain small-scale character
- Maximum building height of 80'

New in this draft: *Increased the maximum building floor plate from 2,000 sf to 2,500 sf to better reflect the lot and building sizes in this area.*

SKY-LOW-CT | Sky-Low District Downtown Historic Dimensional Overlay

New in this draft: *The SKY-LOW-CT Subdistrict replaces the former MU-10 Subdistrict. The land use and dimensional regulations are nearly identical to the formerly proposed MU-10, but setting up the Historic Dimensional Overlay for Chinatown helps recognize the significance and history of Chinatown to all downtown.*

The Sky-Low-CT Subdistrict maximizes opportunities for the conversion, adaptation, and expansion of existing buildings, and sets dimensional regulations for new development to align with existing buildings.



Land Use Highlights

- Civic uses and residential uses allowed
- Commercial uses like medium entertainment/events, large grocery stores, restaurants, and retail allowed, with large hotels as conditional uses that must be approved by the ZBA

Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- Maximum building height of 155'
- Requires ground floor outdoor amenity space for large lots

IS-2 | INSTITUTIONAL

IS-2 is a new institutional subdistrict that best aligns with medical and academic institutions. This serves as an update to the existing institutional district and is mapped under both the Tufts University IMP and the Tufts Medical Center IMP.

Land Use Highlights

- Higher education and health care uses are allowed
- Restaurants, grocery stores, retail stores, and service establishments allowed as they are supportive uses to institutions
- Residential uses are allowed

Dimensional Regulation Highlights

- High building lot coverage maximum to affirm urban setting and the built form of medical and academic institutions like Tufts Medical Center and Tufts University
- Maximum height of 300' and maximum building floor plate of 25,000 sf

New in this draft: Clarifying that Institutional Master Plans (IMPs) will supersede this underlying zoning, adding allowances for residential and research lab uses, and updating dimensional regulations to better match the existing built form.

AIR | AIR RIGHTS SUBDISTRICT

The AIR subdistrict covers parts of the highway and the tangle of on- and off-ramps; regulations here are the same as the neighboring R-10, to help stitch together both sides of the highway. Planned Development Areas (PDAs) are allowed here, because projects over major infrastructure, particularly when not located on



terra firma, require new parcelization and new infrastructure best accommodated in a PDA.

OTHER CHANGES

ARTICLE 43: CHINATOWN NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT

Changing the name from “Chinatown District” to “Chinatown Neighborhood District.”

ARTICLE 23: OFF-STREET PARKING

Stating that there are no minimum parking requirements for projects in Chinatown.

ARTICLE 49A: GREENWAY OVERLAY DISTRICT

Removing the Greenway Overlay District from Chinatown, which covers portions of the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

