

# CHINATOWN REZONING

Updated Draft Zoning Amendment | April 28, 2026



6:05 PM



Planning Department

CITY of BOSTON

# Agenda

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- 1 Introduction
- 2 Engagement Summary
- 3 Updated Draft Zoning
- 4 Additional Feedback
- 4 Next Steps





# Introduction



# About PLAN: Downtown

Chinatown Rezoning is a part of implementing PLAN: Downtown (2018-2023).

Creates a **framework for the growth, enhancement, and preservation** of Downtown Boston.

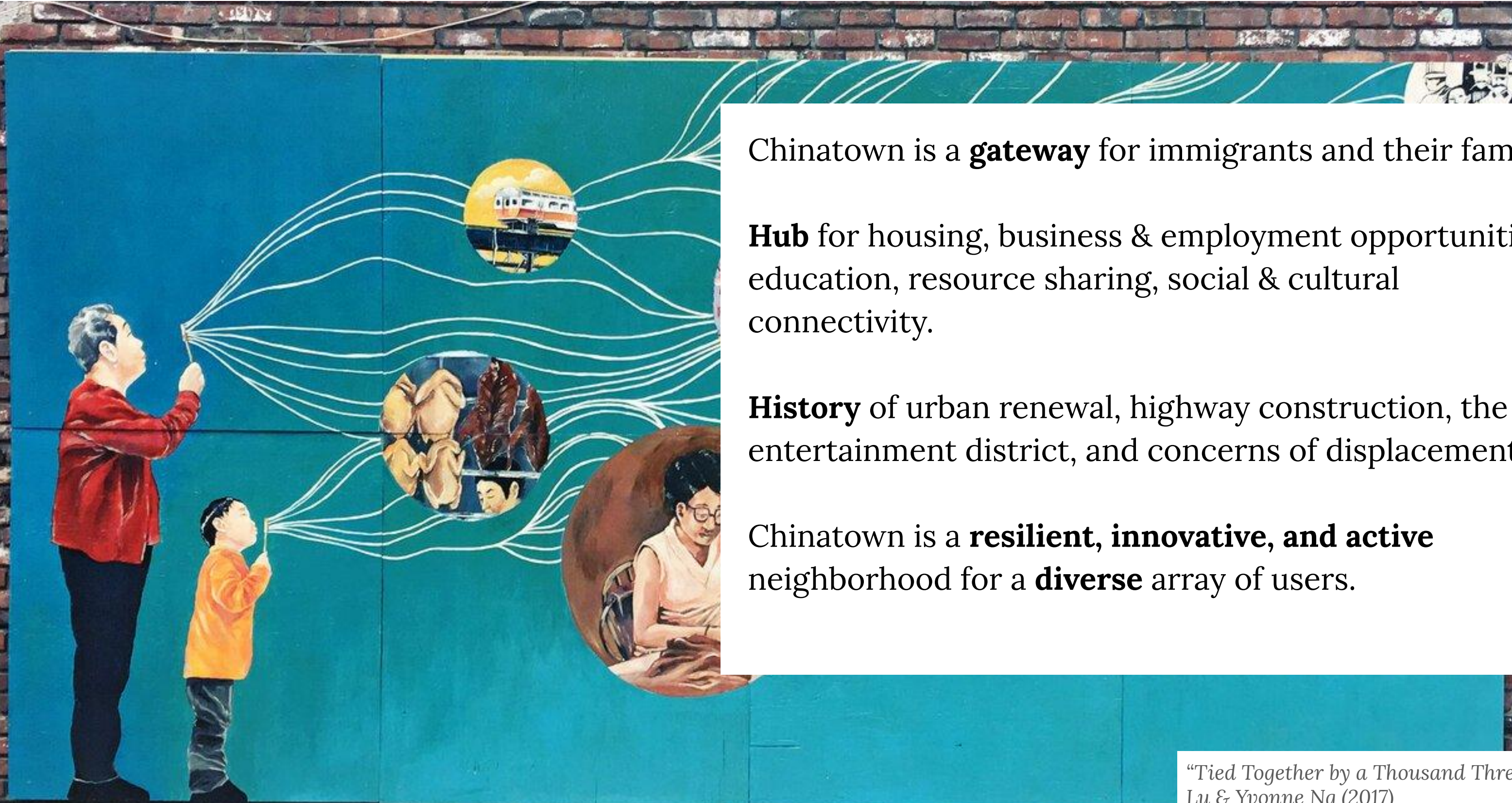
Encourages a **greater mix of uses** for a more inclusive and vibrant Downtown that meets **diverse needs of residents, workers, and visitors.**

PLAN: Downtown engagement identified Chinatown as a unique cultural and community hub that needs its own rezoning process.



*Adopted by the BPDA Board on December 14, 2023*

# Understanding Chinatown Context



Chinatown is a **gateway** for immigrants and their families.

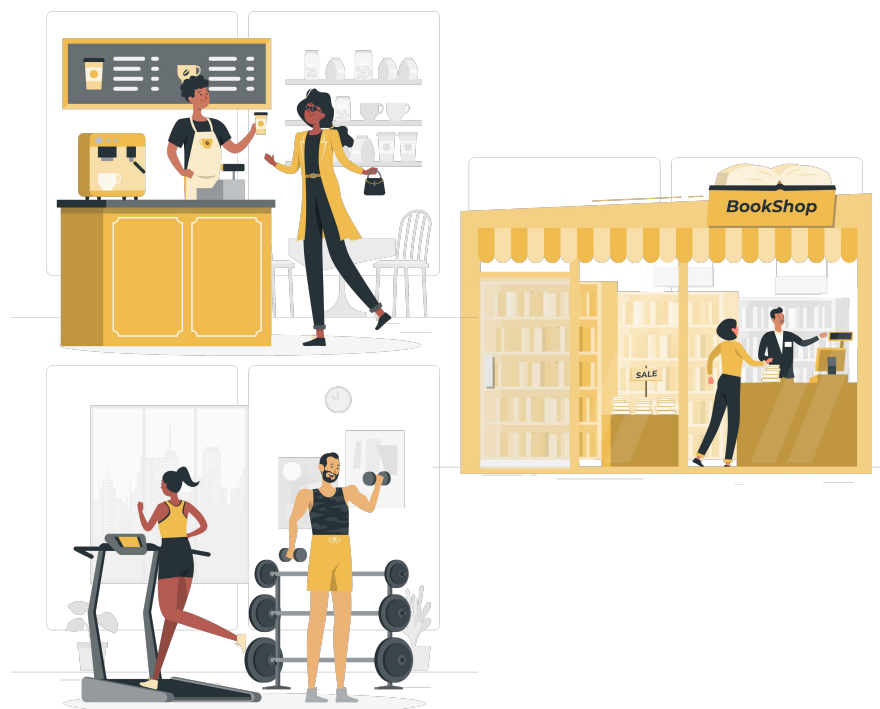
**Hub** for housing, business & employment opportunities, education, resource sharing, social & cultural connectivity.

**History** of urban renewal, highway construction, the adult entertainment district, and concerns of displacement.

Chinatown is a **resilient, innovative, and active** neighborhood for a **diverse** array of users.

# What is Zoning?

Zoning is a set of laws that are used to guide development by dictating the **allowed land use, shape, and density of a building or structure** in a given area. Some of what zoning regulates includes:



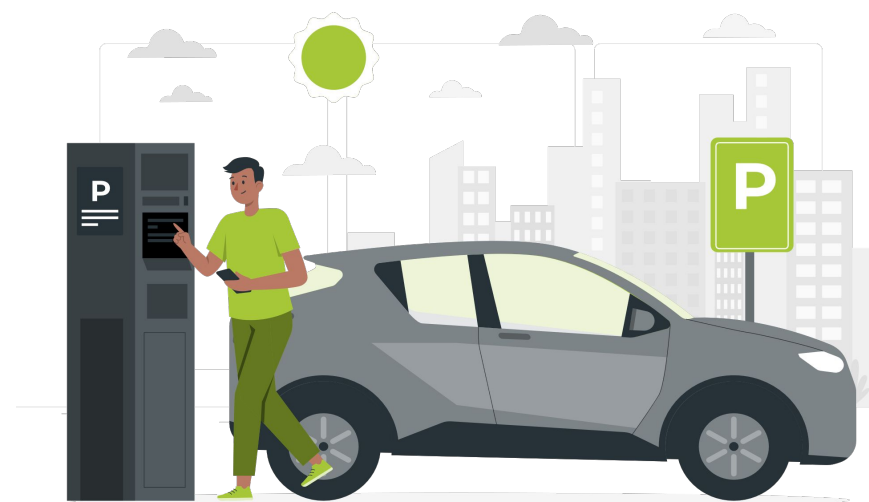
## LAND USES

*the types of activities allowed within a given area*



## BUILDING DIMENSIONS

*how much space a building takes up, its height, and the open space around it*



## OTHER REGULATIONS

*parking and loading, signage requirements, roof deck allowances, and many more.*

**Zoning doesn't build or demolish anything; it acts as guides and limits to what people can build.**

# Who Does Zoning Apply To?

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## SUB-ARTICLE 80

Changing the use of a property

Constructing an addition on your building

Adding take-out to your restaurant

Construction under 20,000 sf

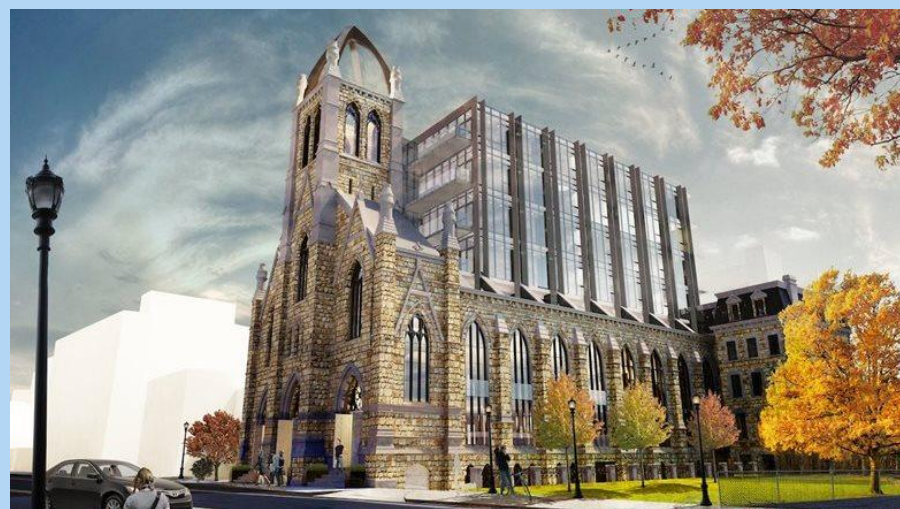
Other building changes...

2

## ARTICLE 80 SMALL PROJECTS

Projects between 20,000 sf and 50,000 sf

15 or more housing units



*Holy Trinity Church (South End)*

3

## ARTICLE 80 LARGE PROJECTS

Projects over 50,000 sf



*288 Harrison | 86,950 sf*

# Beyond Zoning



Zoning is just one of many different tools to help achieve community goals in Chinatown.



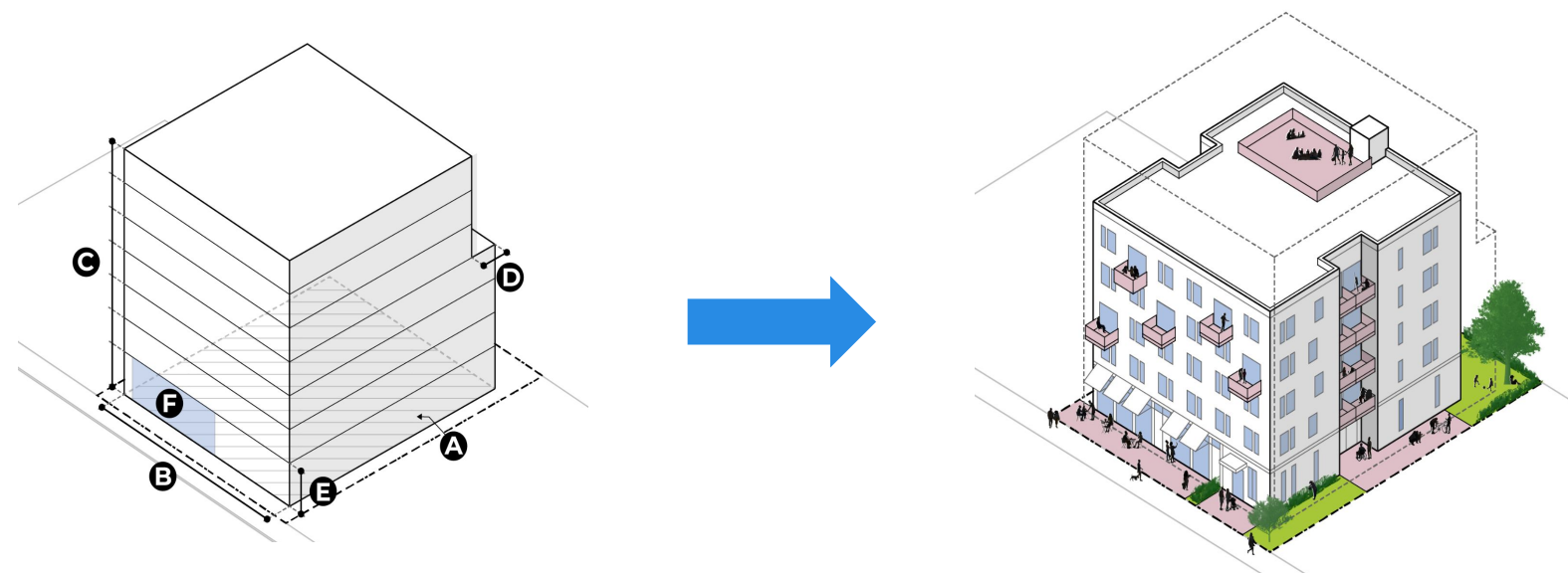
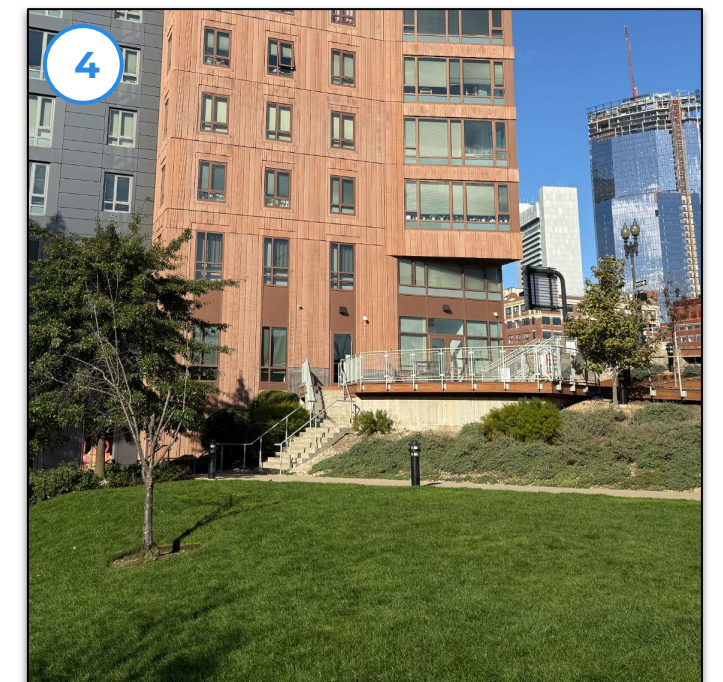
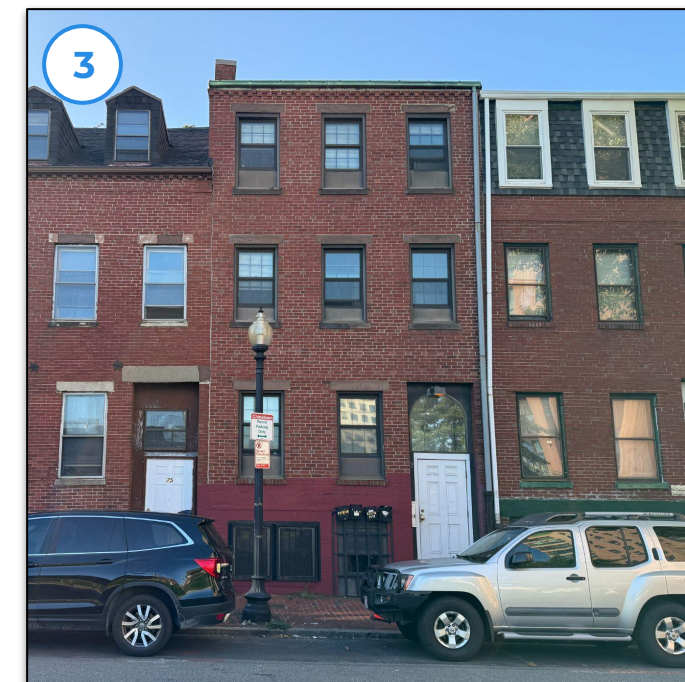
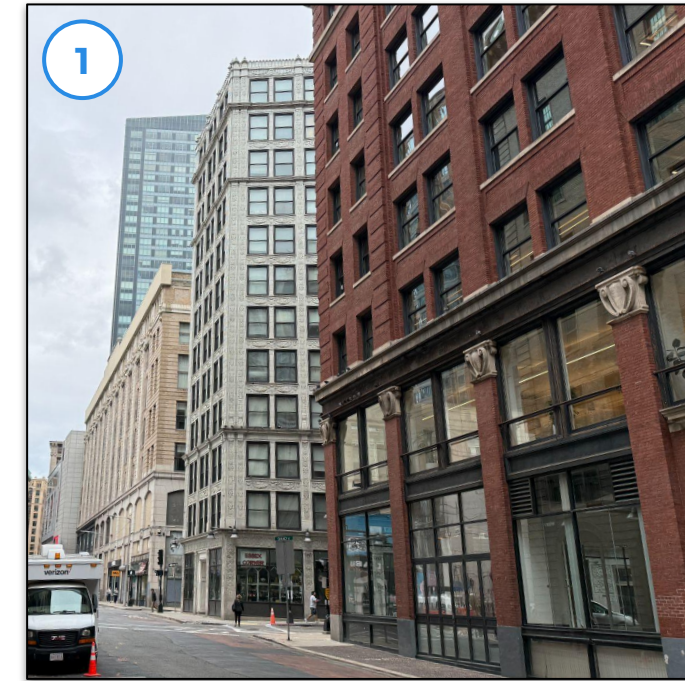
...and many more

# Chinatown Design Guidelines

“..it is unclear to us when the design guidelines come into play and how they interact with zoning guidelines.”

Design guidelines, enforced through Article 80 project review, help ensure projects enhance and respect Chinatown’s historic streets, buildings, and character.

1. Find mixed-use growth and adaptive reuse opportunities.
2. Maintain vibrancy and scale of storefronts.
3. Maintain scale and character of row houses.
4. Opportunities for residential growth along with new green spaces.
5. Integrate public art in site and building design reflecting culture of Chinatown.



Zoning Envelope

Resulting Built Project



# Engagement Summary

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# Key Project Phases



## PLAN: DOWNTOWN

- 2018-2023

## CHINATOWN ZONING BRAINSTORMING

- February - April 2024
- 2 public meetings
- 3 workshops
- 170 survey responses

## CHINATOWN ZONING DRAFT

- October 2024 - February 2025
- 5 public meetings (not including today)
- 17 Office Hours (6 in-person, 11 virtual)
- 350+ Individuals
- 700+ points of feedback
- 400+ postcards mailed

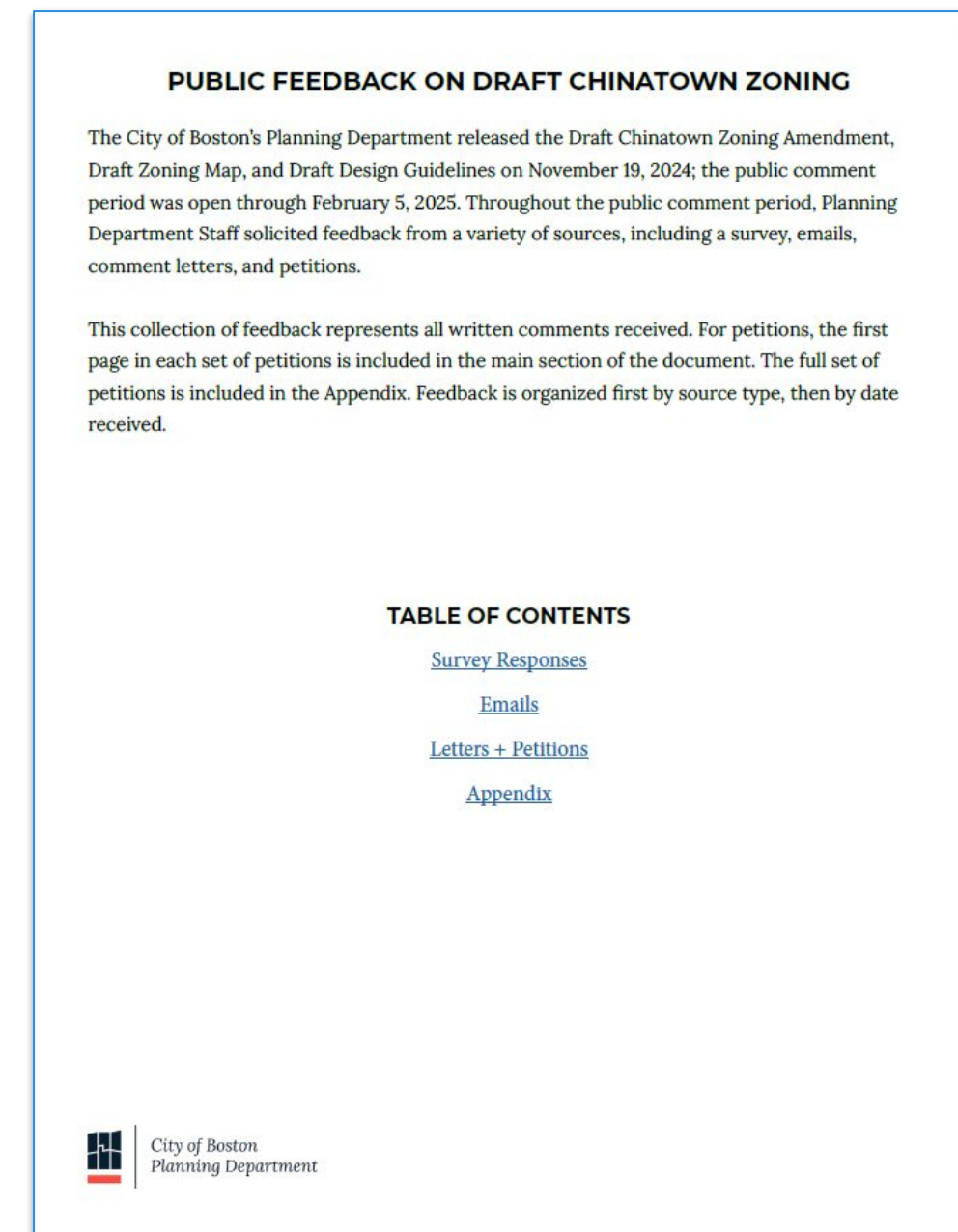
# Written Feedback



The **Public Comment Period** was open from **November 19, 2024 through February 5, 2025**. Feedback was submitted through a survey, emails, letters, and petitions.

- Survey Responses: 28
- Emails: 10
- Petitions: 692
- Written Letters: 12
  - ACDC, AICUM, CBA, CCBA, CCLT, CPA, Longwood Collective, Mass General Brigham, Massport, NAIOP, Tufts Medicine, Tufts University

*All Feedback is translated and posted online.*





# Updated Draft Zoning

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# Zoning Overview



“Zoning subdistricts are important because there are different scales, needs, and issues for different blocks.”



**COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL (CC)**  
Right-size dimensions to match existing context and promote small-scale commercial activity.

**RESIDENTIAL-1 (R-1)**  
Downzone to maintain row houses and allow contextual infill development.



# R-1 Residential

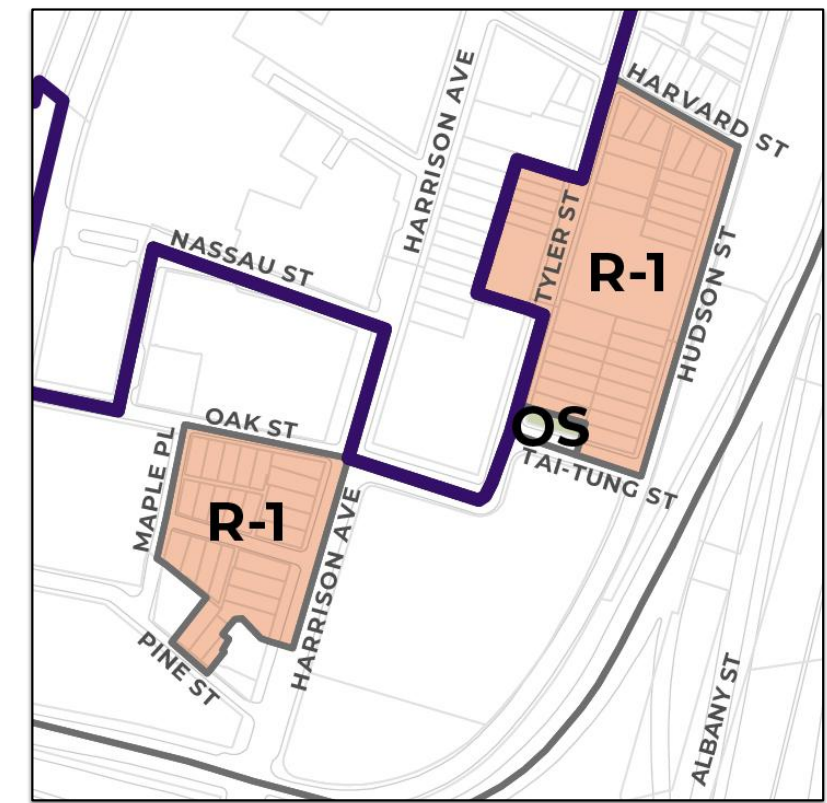
## Zoning Overview

- Downzoning (45' building height) and setting dimensional regulations to maintain row houses and small commercial spaces serving the neighborhood.
- Primarily residential, and forbids large commercial uses

## Proposed Updates

- Conditionally allowing more uses like museums, social clubs, and small offices

“Why should upstairs small office or social club uses be forbidden? ... If an association decided to have a heritage center or similar exhibit space in their building, would that be a forbidden “museum” use?”





# CC Floorplate Change



Increase maximum building floor plate from 2,000 sf to 2,500 sf to better allow for renovations and contextual redevelopment opportunities.



8-8A Hudson St Proposal ~2,400 sf floor plate  
(combination of 2 typical small lots)



67 Beach St ~1,500 sf floor plate  
(typical small lot size)

# Zoning Violation Examples (R-1 and CC)



## 78 Tyler Street (R-1 Subdistrict)

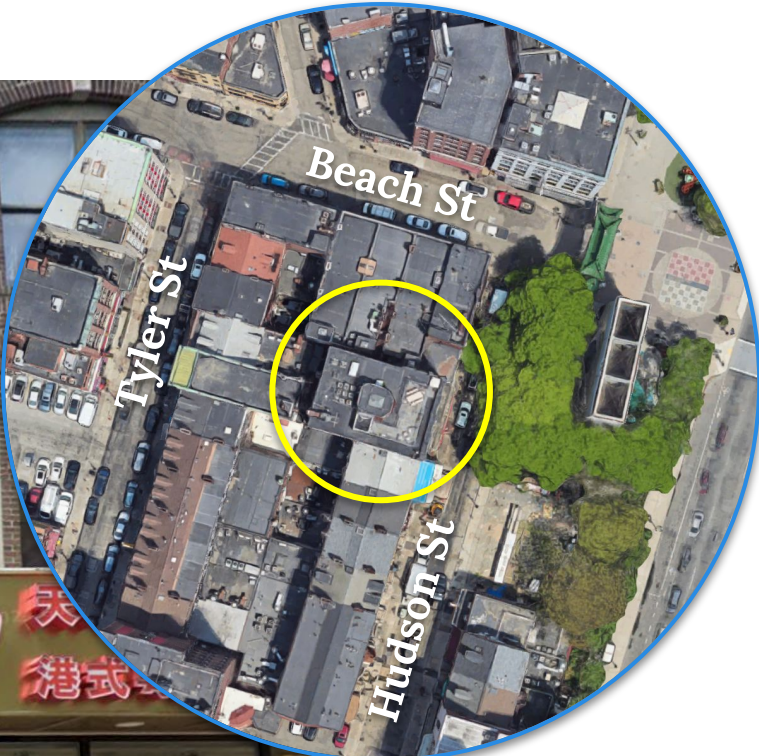
Converting convent to 8 apartments; not providing required parking (4 spaces).



*New zoning would not require parking (but parking can still be built)*

## 7 Hudson Street (CC Subdistrict)

Added take-out to existing restaurant. Restaurants with take-out is a conditional use today.



*New zoning would allow take-out restaurants*

# Zoning Overview



## SKY-LOW-CT

Set dimensions to support building reuse, and acknowledge historic and cultural significance.



## RESIDENTIAL-10 (R-10)

Right-size dimensions to allow height of some existing apartment buildings and allow for ground floor community-serving uses.

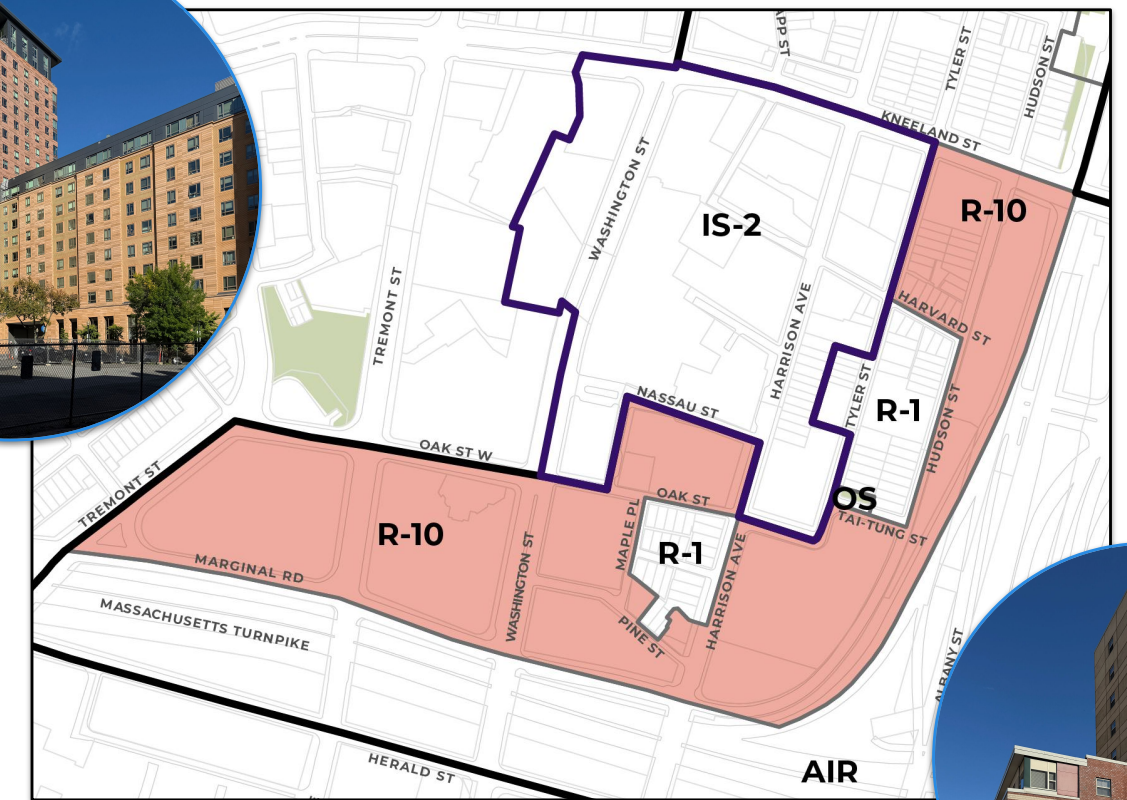


# R-10 Residential



## Zoning Overview

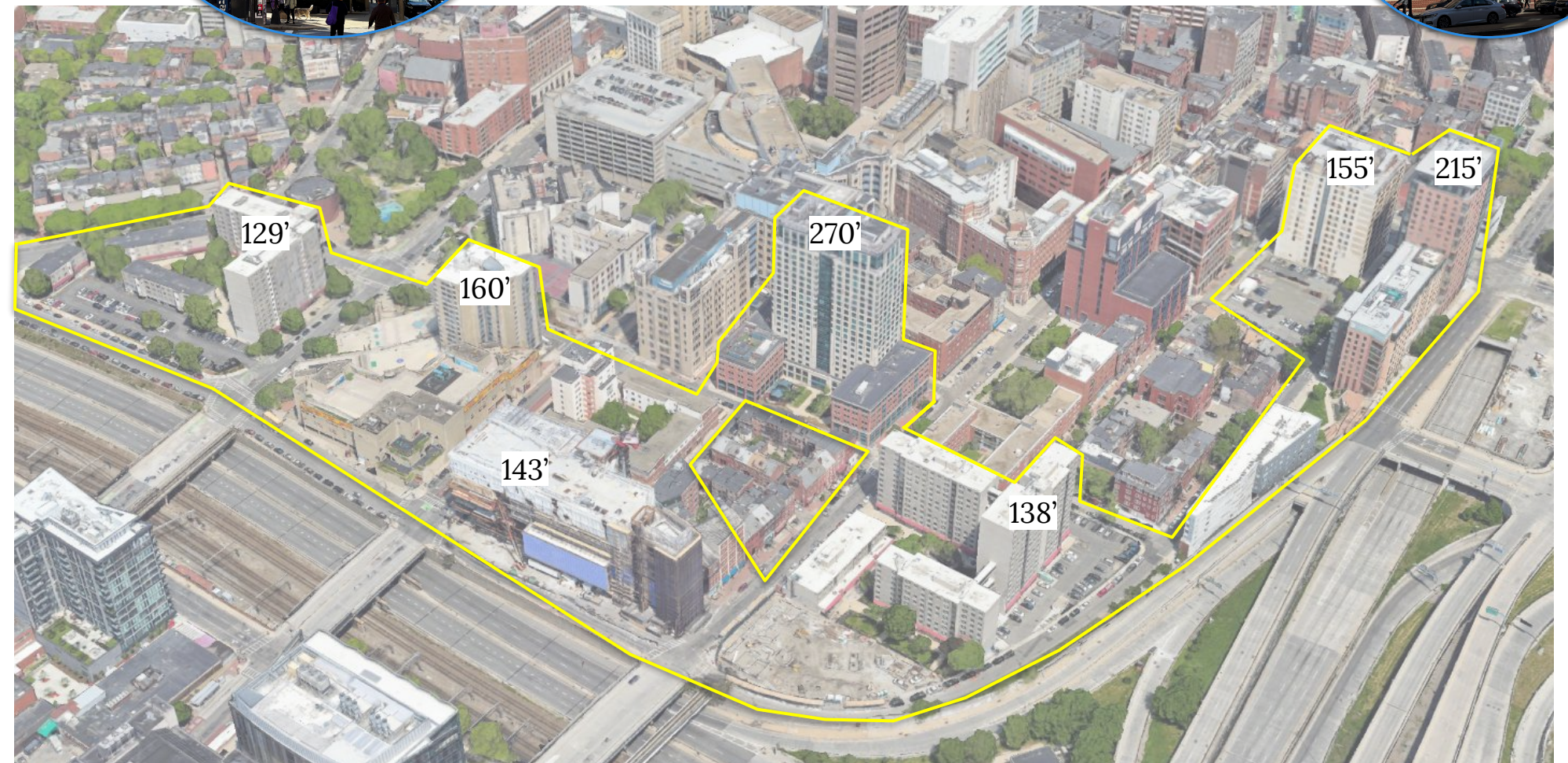
- Set maximum height of 155' to align better than existing zoning (100' today)
- Create regulations to improve residents' and visitors' experience by requiring amenity space and permeable space
- Allow for more community-serving land uses on the ground floor



## Proposed Updates

- Remove the previously-proposed Affordable Housing Overlay, so all projects now have a maximum height of 155'

“Upzoning this subdistrict to 150' is a reasonable approach given the current conditions of a number of affordable housing developments at that scale.”



# SKY-LOW-CT Subdistrict

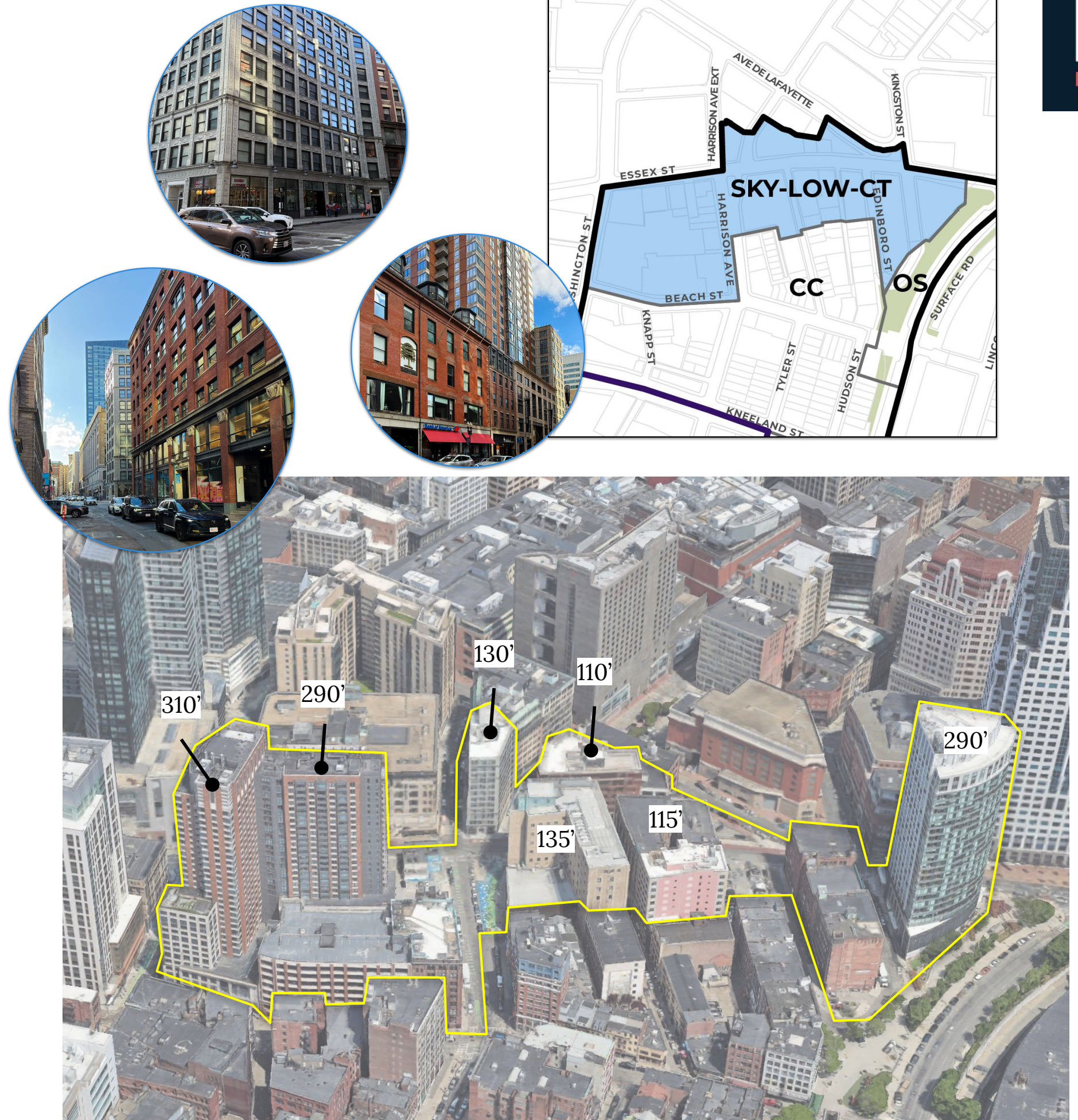
## Zoning Overview

- Set maximum height of 155'
- Maximizes opportunities for conversion, adaptation, and expansion of existing buildings
- Allow for a range of land uses, including residential, that can benefit the Chinatown neighborhood, like large grocery stores, entertainment/events

## Proposed Updates

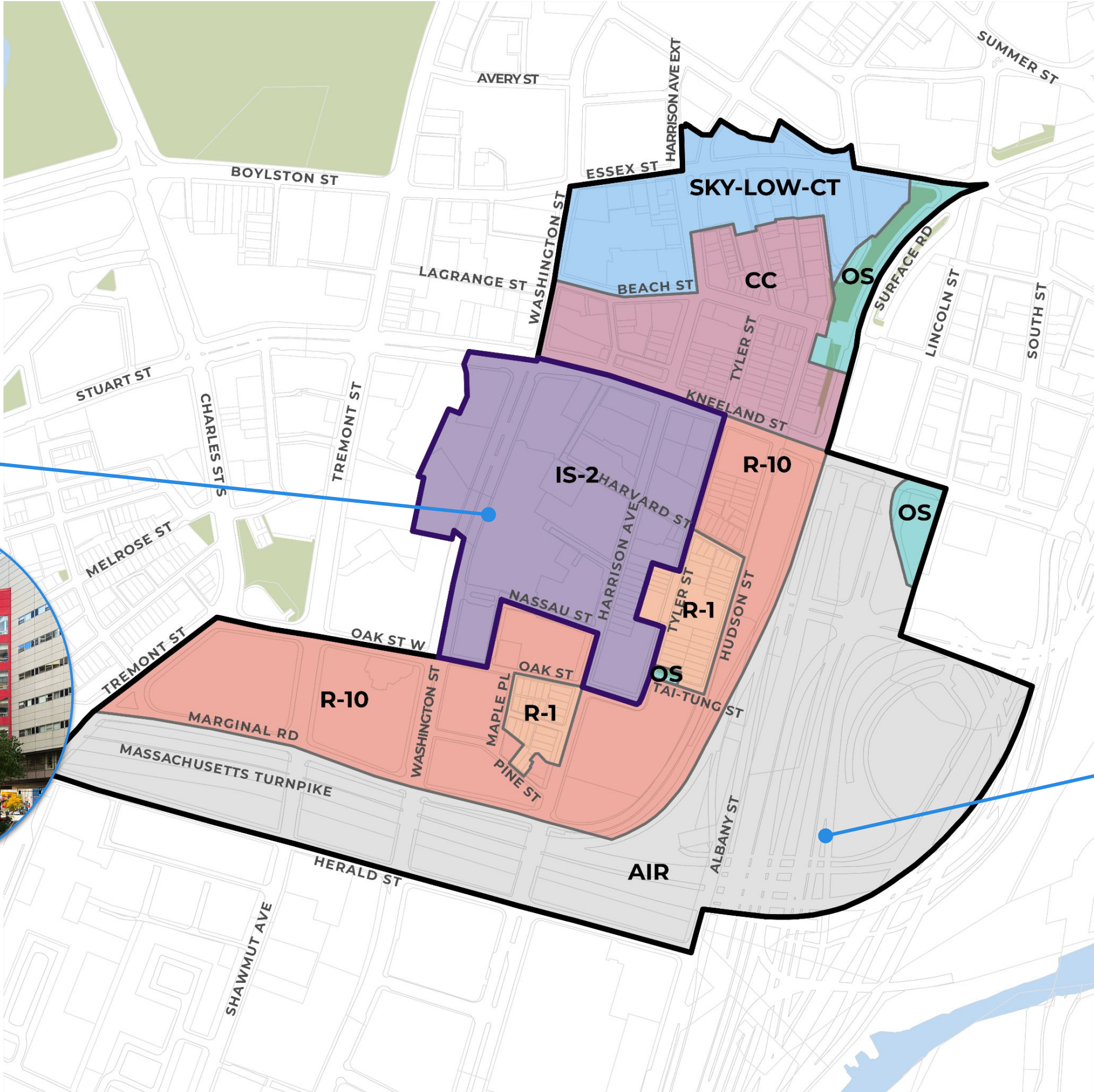
- Remove the previously-proposed Affordable Housing Overlay, so all projects now have a maximum height of 155'
- Replaces formerly proposed MU-10 subdistrict, with nearly identical land uses and dimensions
- Large hotels conditional instead of allowed

“MU-10 zoning should also not allow hotels and should only grandfather in pre-existing hotels already in operation.”



Building Heights in SKY-LOW-CT

# Zoning Overview



**INSTITUTIONAL-2 (IS-2)**  
Set regulations to better match institutional uses and existing buildings.



**AIR RIGHTS SUBDISTRICT (AIR)**  
Allow PDA projects and use regulations to stitch together both sides of the highway.

# Institutional Districts



**New: Changes to the proposed Article 34 - Institutional Districts clarify the role of Institutional Master Plans (IMPs), adjust land use allowances, and change dimensional requirements for IS-2.**

Updates to the proposed Institutional Zoning Districts are based on feedback and conversations with institutions within and outside of Chinatown:

1. Updates to purpose statement.
2. IS-1 and IS-2 are no longer distinguished between education vs. medical.
3. Additional language clarifying that IMPs supersede these zoning regulations.
4. Explicitly stating that PDAs are allowed.
5. Removing 1,000 sf design review provision.
6. *Adjustments to land use allowances.*
7. *Introducing height and building floor plate maximums for IS-2.*

“It was helpful to have it clarified in conversations that IMPs will always supersede and override Article 34...”



Tufts Medical



Tufts University

# Institutional District Land Uses

**New: Updated land use allowances in IS-1 and IS-2 better capture supportive land uses that complement institutions and provide more flexibility for non-IMP development.**

<i>This list is not comprehensive; a full list is available in the updated Draft Zoning Amendment.</i>	IS-1	IS-2
Artists' Live-Work	C → C*	F → C*
Household Living	F → C*	F → C*
Bank	F → A	F → A
Entertainment/Events - Extra Small to Medium	C	F → A
Hotel - Small	C → A	C → A
Indoor Recreation	F → A	F → A
Office - Small to Medium	C → A	C → A
Office - Large	C → A	C → A
Research Laboratory	C → A*	C → A*
Retail - Medium	C → A	C → A
Retail - Large	F → C	F → A
Hospital Use	F → A	A
Nursing Home Use	F → A	A

← Residential uses allowed, provided they go through the Article 80 process

← Allowed if the building includes at least 60% GFA of another allowed use

“While recognizing that this area is primarily institutional, why should residential uses be forbidden?”

“We request that artists’ live-work, small hotels, and indoor recreation be allowed uses in both the IS-1 and IS-2 districts.”

# IS-2 Dimensions

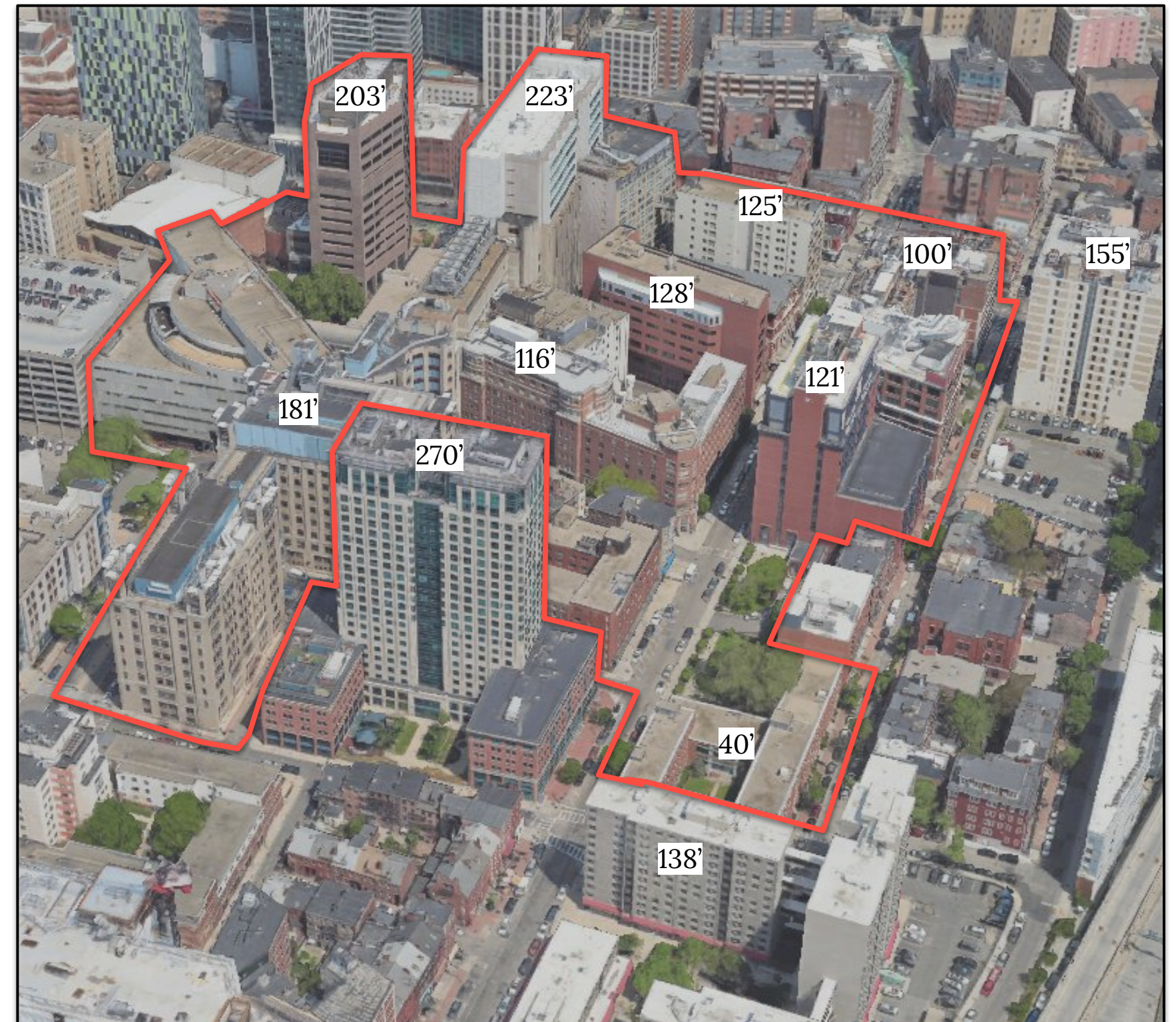


**New:** Dimensional regulations for IS-2 are better suited for denser urban environments, and better aligned to existing scale of buildings.

<b>Building Lot Standards</b>	
Building Lot Coverage (max)	
Lot area ≤ 25,000 sf	95%
Lot area > 25,000 sf	90%

<b>Building Form Standards</b>	
Building Height in Feet (max)	300'
Building Floor Plate (max)	25,000 sf
<del>Floor Area Ratio (max)</del>	<del>8</del>
Multiple Buildings Allowed Per Lot	Yes



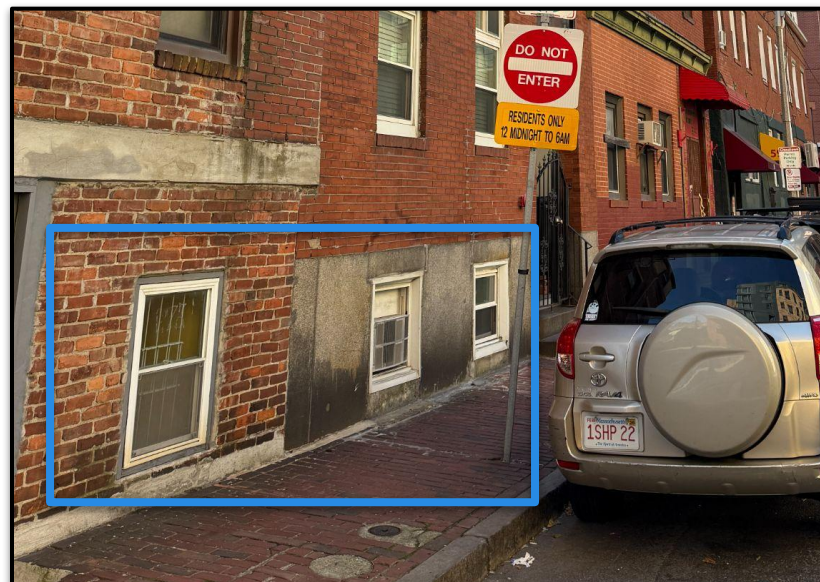
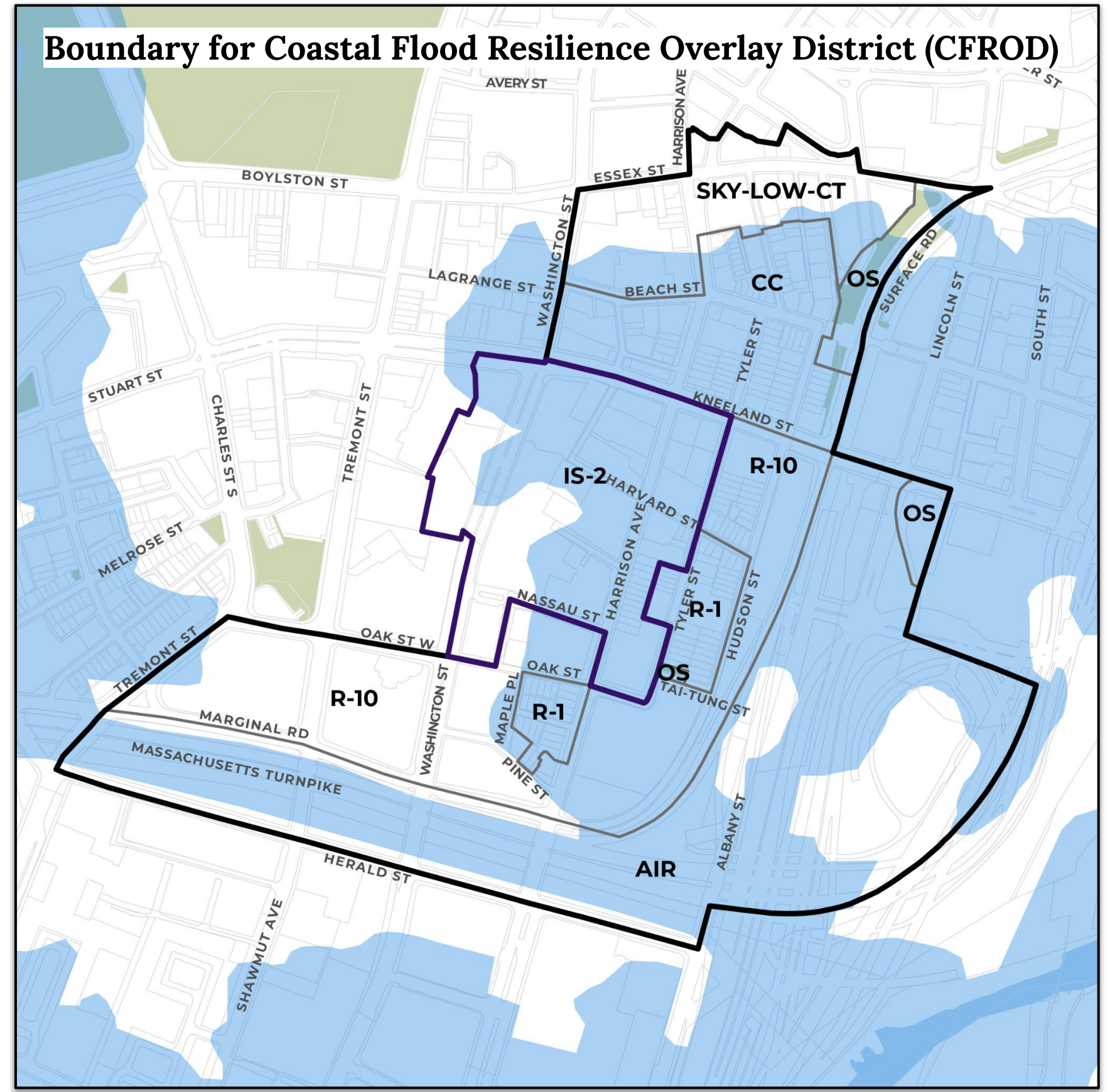
“We are also concerned about the proposed reduction of the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) in the IS-2 zone from 8 to 4.”

# Flood Resilience



**New:** New residential uses are not allowed to be built below future flood elevations.

- Prevents future flood damage to new residential units.
- Already applies for new projects with 15+ residential units or over 20,000 square feet.
- Now, applies for *all* new residential uses.
- Basements can't be converted to residential units, but can still be used for parking and storage.



Existing units can stay, and be renovated, but not expanded.



Non-residential can still be built under flood elevation.

# Addition to Design Guidelines

**New: Additional historic context of Family, Village, and Merchant Associations, highlighting their significant historic, current, and future role in the community.**

- Zoning regulations cannot make reference to specific property owners by name.

“Recognize family associations as vital community anchors, economic drivers, and providers of affordable housing and social services.”

“Include support mechanisms in rezoning to help family associations remain and grow.”

PLAN: Downtown DRAFT Design Guidelines

Design Guidelines  
Historic Context | Role of Family, Village, & Merchant Associations in Chinatown

**Chinese Family, Village, and Merchant Associations have played an integral role in the history and development of Boston's Chinatown since its beginnings in the late 1800s.**

Chinese Family, Village, and Merchant Associations have played an integral role in the history and development of Boston's Chinatown since its beginnings in the late 1800s. They formed largely as a result of anti-Chinese hate, and grew as more immigrants moved into Boston through the 1900s. A notable association, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), was first established in 1890, and became fully incorporated in 1923. CCBAs were also established in major cities across the country, and served as a unifying force for the many emerging family, village, and merchant associations. These associations provide a social and financial support system, rooted in stabilizing both new immigrants and longtime residents and businesses.

Boston's Chinese Associations also have ties to other cities across the United States. Associations that are established in multiple cities will occasionally meet at regional or national conferences, sharing ideas and experiences from their respective Chinatowns. Associations participate and contribute to the Chinatown community through scholarships for students, mutual aid, social gatherings, and providing residential units and commercial spaces. They also hold philanthropic relationships with community organizations, schools, and nursing homes.



10 Tyler Street, 1997 (source: MACRIS)



77 Harrison Avenue, 1979 (source: MACRIS)

These associations own one or more properties within Chinatown, often to have space for meetings and events, but also as a source of income through renting out generally low cost housing units and commercial space. Owning their own properties means associations are able to keep their roots in Chinatown, directly serve their members, and provide services to the broader Chinese community in perpetuity. These properties are spread throughout the neighborhood, but most prominent in the commercial core of Chinatown, around Beach Street, Harrison Avenue, Tyler Street, and Hudson Street. The buildings are most commonly four or five stories, sometimes with a small commercial space on the ground floor

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# Additional Feedback

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# 15-25 Harrison Ave Project

The most recent filing for the hotel project at 15-25 Harrison Avenue does not comply with the proposed SKY-LOW-CT regulations.

- The maximum height in SKY-LOW-CT for a hotel project would be 155'
- Large hotels in SKY-LOW-CT would be a conditional use

“Concerns about the hotel development proposal on Harrison ave, strongly against it for the sake of my friends and family residing in the area.”

“In regards to the 15-25 Harrison hotel, I believe the building should be housing but is necessary to redevelop as it has been vacant for over a decade now.”



# Environmental Concerns



“Chinatown is an extreme heat zone and we need some green open space, including Phillips Square.”

“Increasing tree cover, vegetation, and permeable area will improve public health and environmental resilience in Chinatown.”

Zoning can help address environmental concerns, but so can public capital projects and private development.

## ZONING

- Minimum Permeable Area of Lot in R-10
- Outdoor Amenity Space Requirements in R-10 and SKY-LOW-CT



## PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT

- Chinatown Design Guidelines re: additional open space
- Site-specific improvements for tree plantings, green roofs, landscaping, etc.



## PUBLIC PROJECTS

- Phillips Square Design
- Office of Green Infrastructure
  - Contract looking at siting larger tree plantings in Chinatown
  - Seeking grant for funding small green roofs and food propagation
  - Citywide flood survey resulting in targeted interventions

# Parking

**The draft zoning does not require parking, but projects can have parking if they comply with the Downtown Boston Parking Freeze.**

## Parking + Draft Chinatown Zoning

- Parking often takes the space of permeable surfaces or greenery.
- Downtown Boston Parking Freeze limits the creation of general parking garages not associated with a specific property.
- Affordable housing today does not require parking.
- Residential buildings can still build parking, but this can make the housing units more expensive.
- New “Shared Parking” land use explicitly allows multiple properties and land uses share a parking facility.

“Can you release more information about how the zoning changes will impact parking in Chinatown for Chinatown residents with parking permits?”

“I do think more should be done to discourage the creation of parking in Chinatown as it is a wonderful place to walk and hurt more by the cars in the area.”

*Standalone parking garages can be built in SKY-LOW-CT, provided they have an active ground floor.*



# Adult Entertainment + Cannabis

**Adult Entertainment and Cannabis Establishments are both tied to regulations outside of the City of Boston.**

## Adult Entertainment

- The Adult Entertainment District has been moved out of Chinatown.
- State rules require this use be allowed in the city, so it is still mapped in parts of Downtown where the two remaining uses exist.

## Cannabis Establishments

- In Boston, Cannabis Establishments are conditional in commercial subdistricts.
- New Cannabis Establishments must receive zoning relief from the Zoning Board of Appeal and licensure by the Boston Cannabis Board.
- Processes for creating Cannabis Establishments include public testimony and are consistent with state requirements.

“We appreciate the removal of the adult entertainment district from Chinatown... Are there plans to remove the adult entertainment designation through PLAN: Downtown? And if not, why?”

“Given the overwhelming resident opposition to cannabis dispensaries, we recommend that cannabis dispensaries be a Forbidden use in [CC], which includes many residential buildings as well as commercial.”



# Next Steps

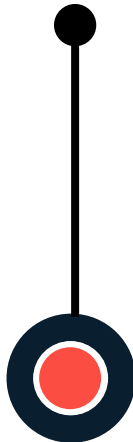
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# Timeline + Zoning Adoption

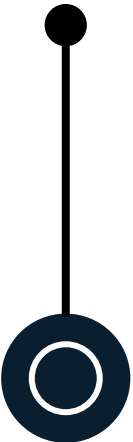


**APRIL 28, 2026**  
In-Person Updated  
Draft Zoning Meeting



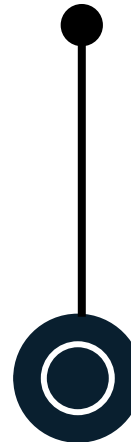
**WE ARE HERE**

**MAY 14, 2026**  
BPDA Board  
Meeting



No public testimony, but any additional comments received will be given to board members.

**JUNE 10, 2025**  
Boston Zoning  
Commission



Public testimony opportunity at the zoning commission.

**JUNE/JULY 2026**  
Zoning signed by the Mayor, into effect immediately.

# THANK YOU

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## HAVE QUESTIONS?

JACK HALVERSON [Jack.Halverson@boston.gov](mailto:Jack.Halverson@boston.gov)

OR VISIT:

[bosplans.org/ChinatownRezoning](https://bosplans.org/ChinatownRezoning)

