

Understanding Different Types of Areas in East Boston: How to Use this DIY Workshop

PLAN: East Boston is gathering feedback how members of the East Boston community envision the future of the neighborhood. Three types of areas make up East Boston: Neighborhood Residential areas, Mixed-use Nodes and Corridors, and Waterfront and Economic Development Areas.

This toolkit provides an overview of these types of areas, what shapes buildings, and what shapes our public spaces and streets.

Materials included:

- » ___ workbooks (the workbooks can be kept by the participants or reused)
- » ___ feedback sheets (there should be one feedback sheet per person)
- » Envelope to turn in the feedback sheets to the BPDA

What Else You Will Need:

- » Pens or pencils
- » Participants!

Instructions:

- » Please read through the workbook.
- » Throughout, there are prompts that ask questions about the information presented. **Question prompts are highlighted in yellow throughout this workbook.**
- » Use the feedback sheet to share your responses to the questions.

Please return the feedback sheets in the envelope provided by **February 29, 2020** to:

Jason Ruggiero
Boston Planning & Development Agency
1 City Hall Square, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02201
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(617) 918-4383



**boston planning &
development agency**

PLAN: East Boston

Understanding Different Types of Areas in East Boston: A DIY Workshop

December 2019

Introduction

How to Use this DIY Workshop

PLAN: East Boston is gathering feedback on how members of the East Boston community envision the future of the neighborhood.

Three types of areas make up East Boston: Neighborhood Residential Areas, Mixed-use Nodes and Corridors, and Waterfront and Economic Development Areas.

The BPDA hosted 3 workshops on these topics in the Fall of 2019. This DIY workshop is a tool for community members to gather more ideas from their neighbors through the winter.

This toolkit provides an overview of these types of areas, what shapes buildings, how we move and what shapes our public spaces and streets.

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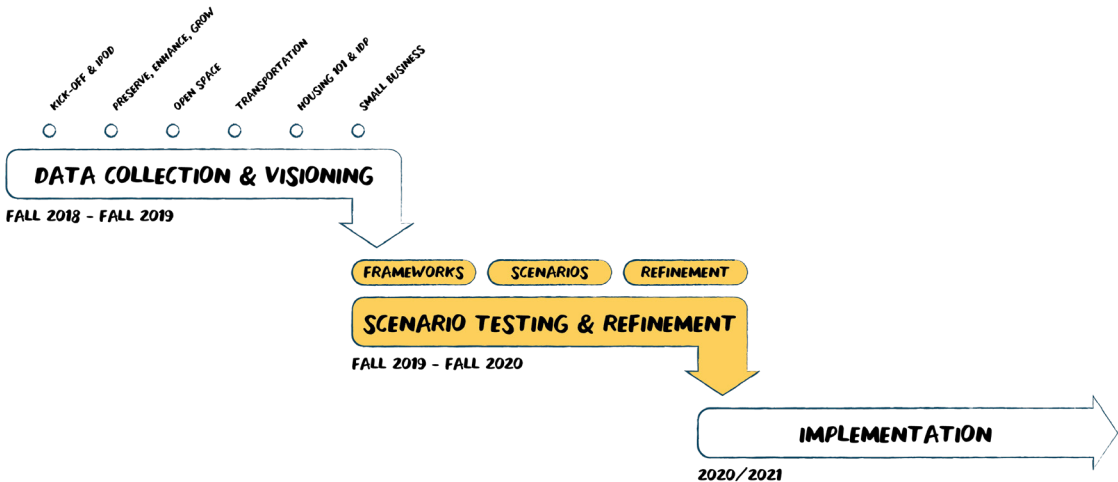
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Introduction

PLAN: East Boston

PLAN: East Boston is a community-driven, neighborhood-wide planning initiative in East Boston. Guided by Boston’s citywide plan, Imagine Boston 2030, and several other citywide strategic plans, PLAN: East Boston will produce a framework to **predictably shape the future** of East Boston.



Where we've been

Since the planning process launched in late 2018, PLAN: East Boston has sought to learn from residents about the current conditions in East Boston. Discussions and workshops have centered on topics such as housing, open space and climate resilience, mobility, and small businesses and jobs. In addition, the BPDA organized six neighborhood walking tours (led by members of neighborhood or civic organizations) and six “Chat with a Planner” sessions.

Where we are

The planning process is now moving from neighborhood-wide planning topics to understanding how these topics and issues impact different types of areas in the neighborhood and what residents envision for the future of their neighborhood. The planning process has identified three different types of areas within East Boston: Neighborhood Residential, Mixed-use Nodes & Corridors, and Waterfront & Economic Development Areas. For each of these types of areas, PLAN: East Boston seeks to identify opportunities and challenges.

Why we are asking for feedback

Your feedback on these types of areas will help shape future discussions and recommendations for the Zoning Recommendations & Urban Design Guidelines and Transportation Action Plan. Community input will inform these documents and what is realized in the neighborhood.

Final Recommendations and Implementation Tools of PLAN: East Boston



Types of Areas

East Boston

Three types of areas make up East Boston: Neighborhood Residential Areas, Mixed-use Nodes and Corridors, and Waterfront and Economic Development Areas. The built environment of these areas share similar features including physical characteristics as well as the types of uses that occur there.



Neighborhood Residential Areas

Neighborhood residential areas refer to areas in the neighborhood that are primarily, though not exclusively, developed for housing.



Mixed-use Nodes and Corridors

Mixed-use nodes and corridors refer to areas in East Boston suited for active ground-floor uses and the density required to support them. Nodes can be thought of as collection points or places of gathering, and corridors can be thought of as the connections between them.



Waterfront and Economic Development Areas

Waterfront and economic development areas refer to areas set aside to support primarily large-scale commercial and industrial uses. These areas participate in local and regional economies.

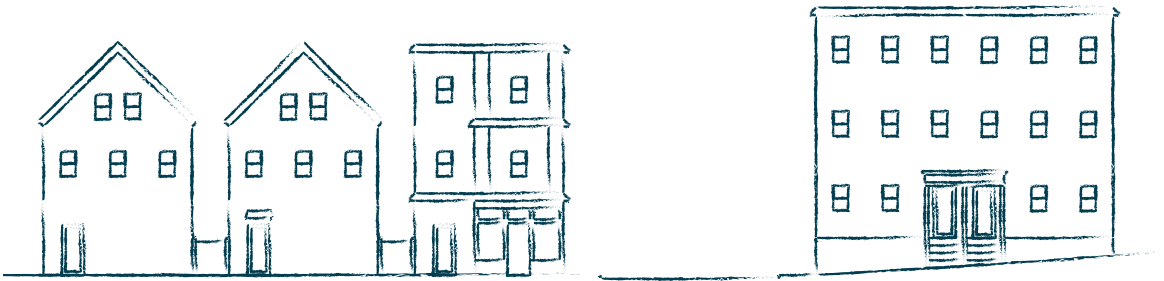


Much of East Boston was built before either zoning or Boston Complete Streets guidelines were adopted, which means there are many examples of buildings that do not comply with East Boston's neighborhood zoning article, Article 53, and streets that do not comply with Boston Complete Streets guidelines.

Types of Areas

Neighborhood Residential Areas

Neighborhood residential areas refer to areas in the neighborhood that are primarily, though not exclusively, developed for housing.



We Want to Hear From You

We often talk about “preserving the essential character” of neighborhood residential areas. What are some of the features of the built environment that define the “essential character” of East Boston’s neighborhood residential areas?



Community Engagement

Walking tours and neighborhood and civic association meetings represent important opportunities for the planning team to gather feedback related to neighborhood residential areas. The BPDA hosted six neighborhood walking tours including Gove Street, Jeffries Point, Maverick Central, Eagle Hill, Harbor View, and Orient Heights.

Types of Areas

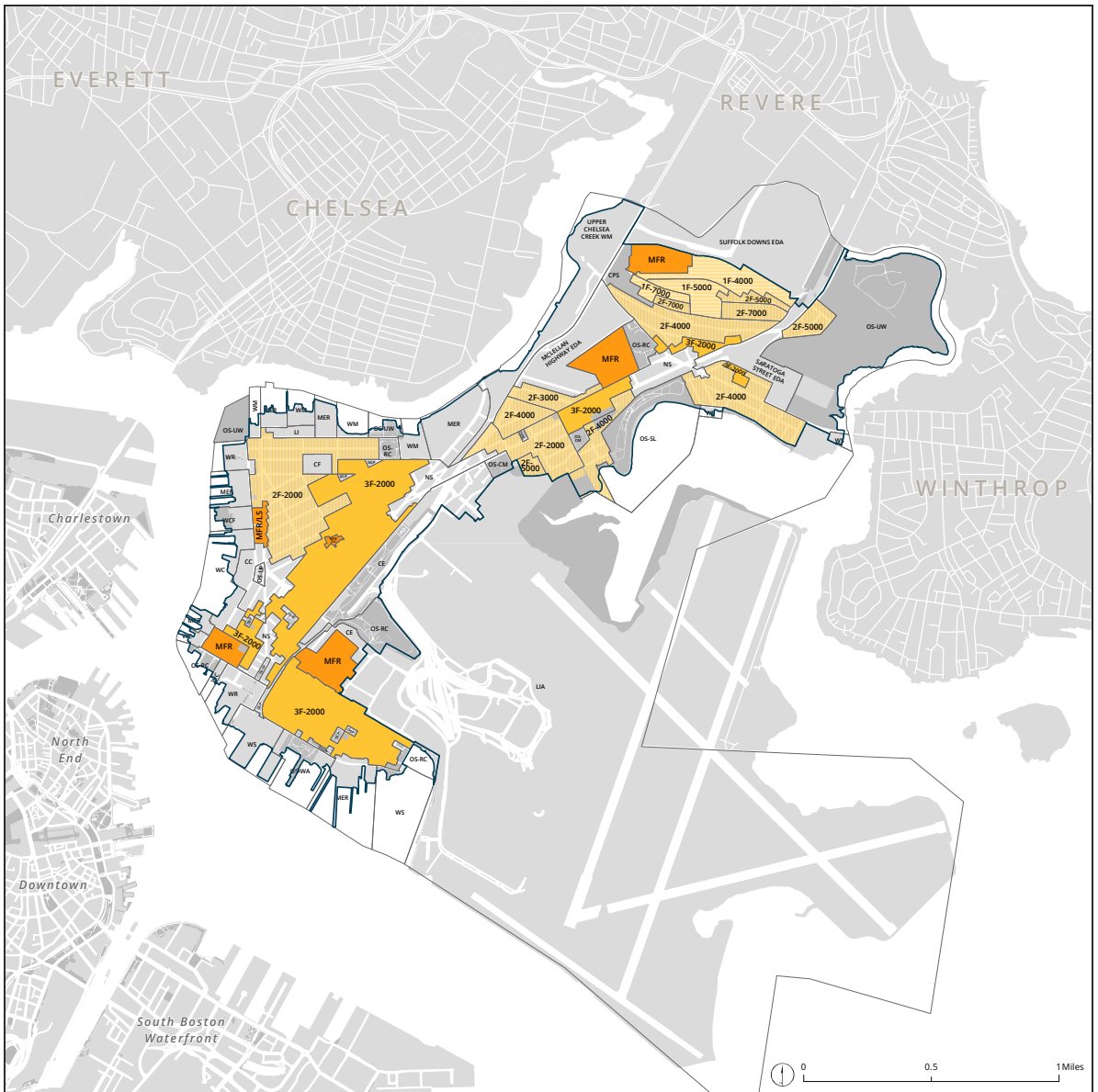
Neighborhood Residential Areas

Challenges and opportunities associated with neighborhood residential areas in East Boston include:

- » **Affordability** - Rising property values across the neighborhood pushes development pressure into neighborhood residential areas, threatening “naturally occurring” affordable housing.
- » **Building dimensions** - Many existing buildings do not comply with zoning and are considered “non-conforming.” That means that if those buildings were proposed today, they would require variances, and would not be “as-of-right.”
- » **Uses** - Uses like corner stores, coffee shops, dry cleaners, and other small businesses provide desirable neighborhood amenities.
- » **Resilience** - More than half of East Boston’s land area will be vulnerable to flooding in 2070. Retrofitting existing housing to prepare for that risk presents unique design challenges.
- » **Neighborhood Design Overlay Districts** - East Boston’s Neighborhood Design Overlay Districts (NDOD) were established based on a landmarks survey overseen by the Boston Landmarks Commission. There are not clear guidelines for development within these districts.
- » **Parking Requirements** - Parking needs might vary based on proximity to transit. Required parking ratios are defined by zoning and could consider proximity to transit or other factors.
- » **Public Realm** - Narrow sidewalks limit the space available for street trees and street furniture.

We Want to Hear From You

What are other challenges or opportunities in East Boston’s neighborhood residential areas?

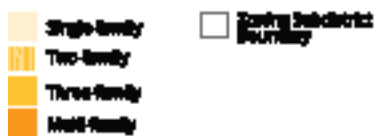


Did you know?

Within the zoning code, neighborhood residential areas are governed by One-Family (1F), Two-Family (2F), Three-Family (3F) and Multifamily (MFR) zoning. These zoning subdistricts make up 45% of the land area within the study boundary.

Map of Zoning Subdistricts in Article 53

Source: Article 53 of the Boston Zoning Code



Types of Areas

Mixed-use Nodes and Corridors

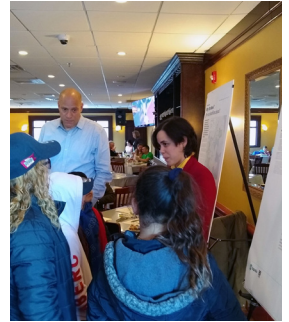
Mixed-use nodes and corridors refer to areas in East Boston suited for active ground-floor uses and the density required to support them.

Nodes can be thought of as collection points or places of gathering, and corridors can be thought of as the connections between them.



We Want to Hear From You

We often talk about “enhancing” vibrant mixed-use districts in neighborhood nodes and corridors. What are some of the features that make East Boston’s squares vibrant, mixed-use destinations?



Community Engagement

Both the Small Business roundtable discussion and the “Chat With a Planner” series were important opportunities for the planning team to gather feedback related to the specific challenges and opportunities facing East Boston’s mixed-use nodes and corridors. The BPDA hosted six “Chat With a Planner” events in locations across the neighborhood.

Types of Areas

Mixed-use Nodes and Corridors

Challenges and opportunities associated with mixed-use nodes and corridors in East Boston include:

- » **Retail Uses and Density** - Active ground-floor uses require density nearby to support them.
- » **Connections Between Squares** - Zoning for commercial use is concentrated within East Boston's Main Streets district and in limited areas around squares. Over time, ground-floor retail has extended along corridors connecting those areas.
- » **On-Street Parking Regulations** - Street parking regulations are inconsistent and often do not effectively serve the needs of surrounding uses.
- » **Public Realm** - Many of East Boston's squares are dominated by cars, limiting space available for outdoor seating, open space, and other public realm features.
- » **Resilience** - Much of East Boston's Main Streets District is within the FEMA Flood Zone. Properties within the flood zone are ineligible to receive funding from federal programs.
- » **Supporting Small Businesses** - As is the case citywide, small local businesses are vulnerable to displacement by larger chain businesses.
- » **Grocery Stores** - East Boston is currently served by a single grocery store. Food access is supplemented by convenience stores that vary in level of service.

We Want to Hear From You

What are other challenges or opportunities in East Boston's nodes and corridors?



Did you know?

Within the zoning code, mixed-use nodes and corridors are governed by Neighborhood Shopping (NS), Community Commercial (CC), and Corridor Enhancement (CE). These zoning subdistricts make up about 10% of the land area within the study boundary.

Map of Zoning Subdistricts in Article 53

Source: Article 53 of the Boston Zoning Code



Types of Areas

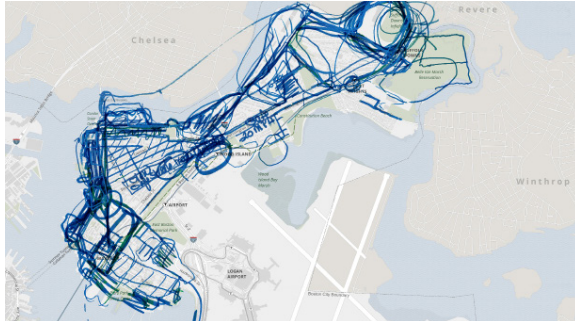
Waterfront and Economic Development Areas

Waterfront and Economic Development Areas refer to areas set aside to support primarily large-scale commercial and industrial uses. These areas participate in local and regional economies.



We Want to Hear From You

We often talk about the need to “grow,” and the waterfront and economic development areas present an opportunity to grow. What are some of the features that would make these areas vibrant and address some of the challenges the neighborhood faces?



Community Engagement

Community workshops addressed several important high-level planning topics, but the “Preserve, Enhance, Grow” workshop was an important opportunity for the planning team to gather feedback related to the specific challenges and opportunities facing East Boston’s waterfront and economic development areas.

Types of Areas

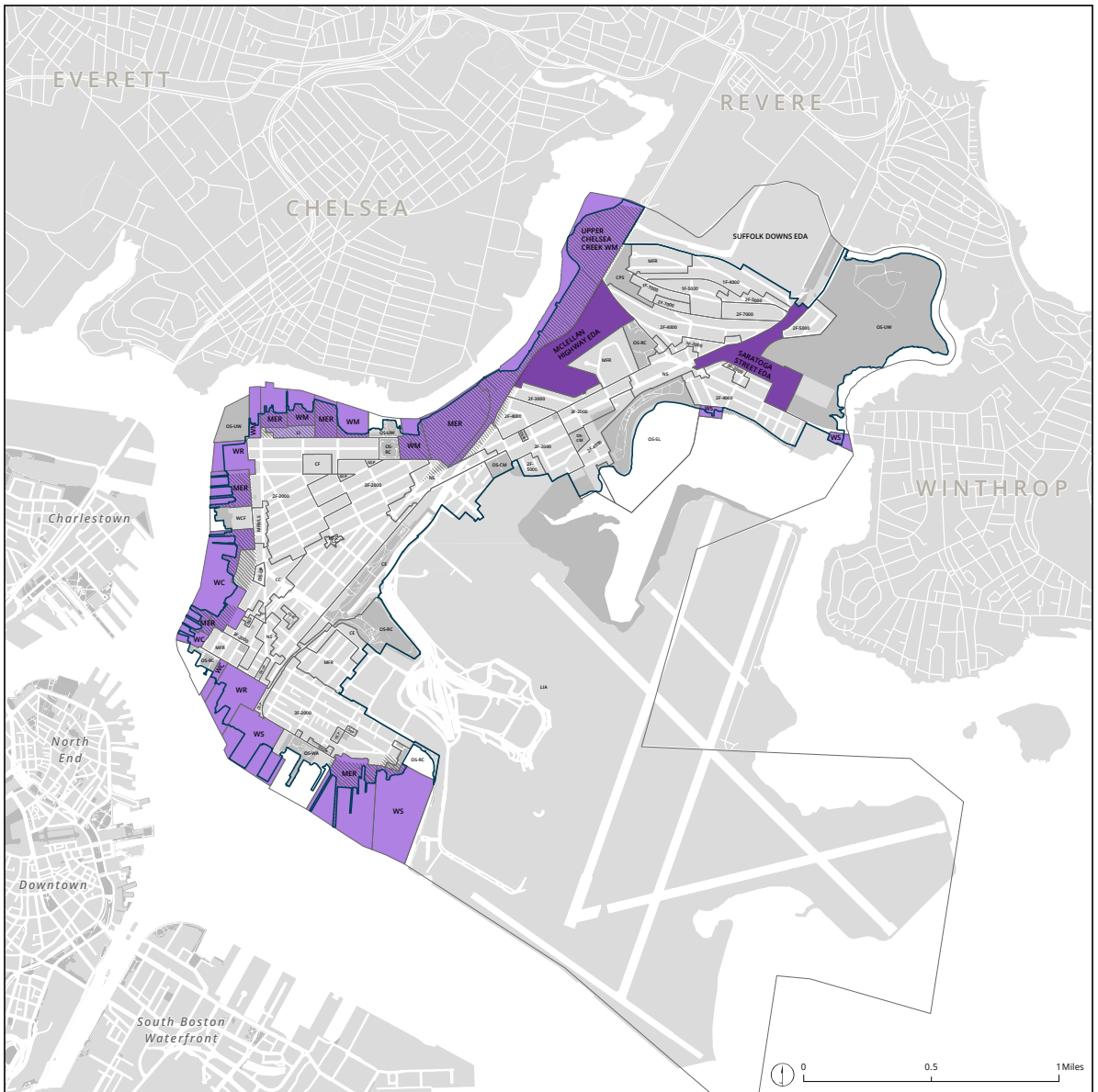
Waterfront and Economic Development Areas

Challenges and opportunities associated with waterfront and economic development areas in East Boston include:

- » **Resilience** - Because of their location at the edges of the neighborhood, these areas are often at the front lines of East Boston's coastal resilience challenges. Addressing resilience also presents the opportunity to reconnect parts of East Boston to the harbor.
- » **Designated Port Areas (DPA)** - Some of the parcels located in this area are further restricted by their designation as a DPA. Because they are designed to prioritize marine industrial uses, DPAs restrict public access.
- » **Scale** - Where adjacent to neighborhood residential areas, waterfront industrial and economic development areas create potentially challenging transitions in building use and scale.
- » **Residential Uses** - Intense demand for housing has put pressure on these areas.
- » **Commercial or industrial uses** - Lack of demand from commercial uses and industrial uses have meant many of these areas are dormant or underused.
- » **Infrastructure** - Several parcels in these areas are very large and lack the infrastructure needed to support development. Introducing infrastructure such as roads to these areas could increase connectivity for the neighborhood.

We Want to Hear From You

What are other challenges or opportunities in East Boston's waterfront and economic development areas?

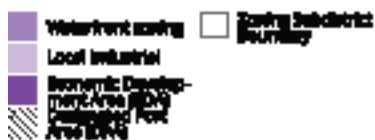


Did you know?

Waterfront and economic development areas make up about 22% of the land area within the study boundary. This map also indicates Designated Port Area (DPA) boundary line and Chapter 91 (Ch. 91) jurisdiction.

Map of Zoning Subdistricts in Article 53

Source: Article 53 of the Boston Zoning Code



Further Study

Transportation Focus Areas

Transportation analysis will be focused on specific areas of East Boston. These areas are opportunities to advance the priorities of the City's comprehensive transportation plan, Go Boston 2030, or promote "Complete Networks" in East Boston.

Safety analysis shows:

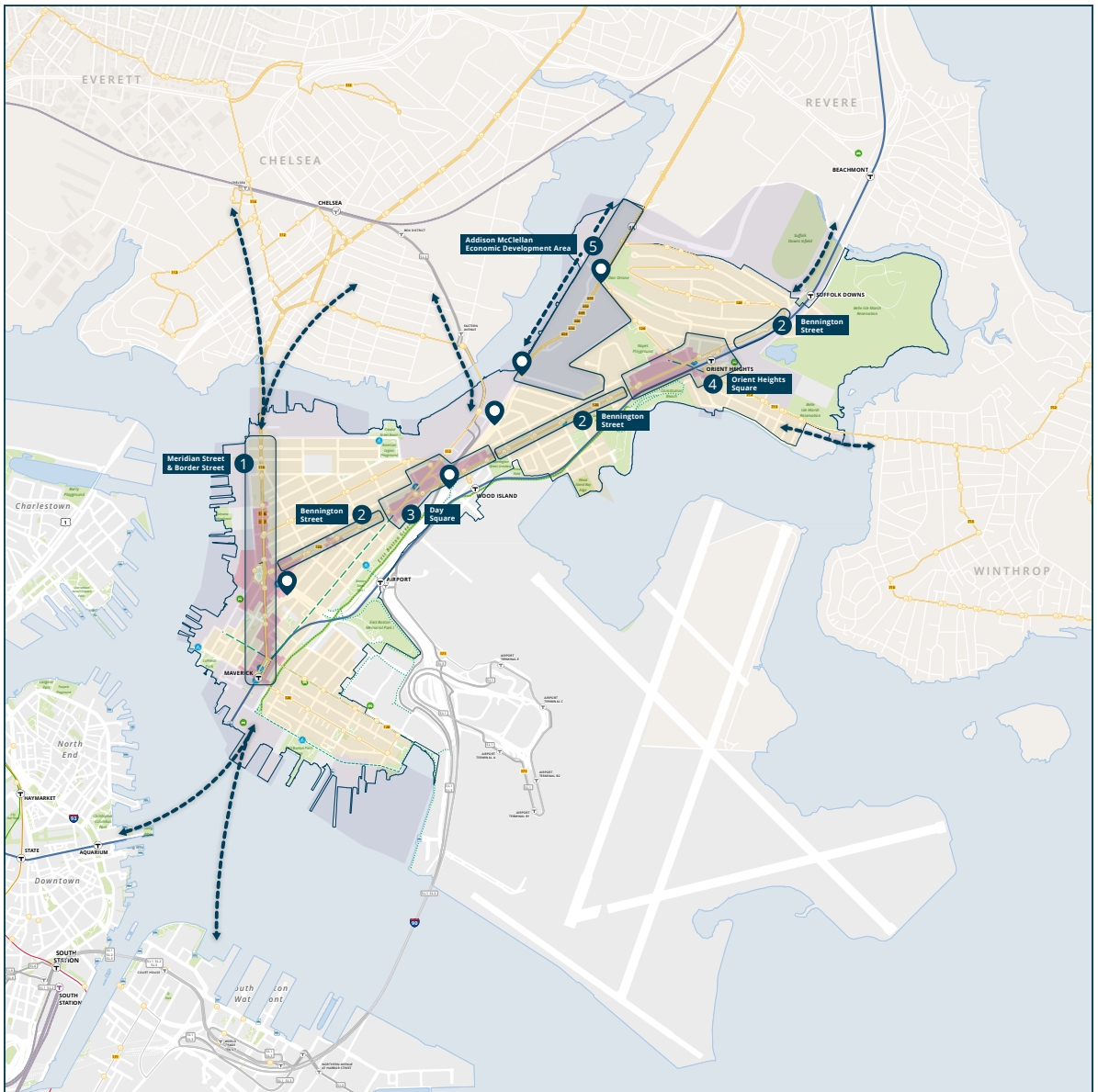
- » Three-quarters of fatal crashes that occurred in East Boston between 2016 and 2018 happened where multiple other injury crashes also occurred.
- » One in ten crashes between 2016 and 2018 occurred near a T stop.
- » One in five crashes involving a pedestrian occurred near a T stop.
- » Nearly one-fifth of all comments on the City's Vision Zero Public Concern Map are related to speeding.

Access analysis shows:

- » More than one-third of households in East Boston do not have access to a car. However, in some areas of East Boston, nearly two-thirds of households do not have access to a car.
- » One-third of East Bostonians need to walk more than 15 minutes to access a supermarket. Nearly 80 percent of East Boston residents need to travel more than 15 minutes on transit to reach a supermarket.
- » The average commute from East Boston is 31 minutes. In that time, East Bostonians can reach 38,000 jobs by walking, 190,000 jobs by biking, 372,000 jobs by transit, or more than 1 million jobs by driving.

Reliability analysis shows:

- » During morning and evening peak travel periods, bus travel times can vary significantly along Meridian Street.
- » During the evening peak period, Route 120 buses are mostly full in both directions of Bennington Street.
- » The Chelsea Street Bridge closes to traffic five times per day on average, and sometimes remains closed for as long as 20 minutes. The McArdle Bridge (Meridian Street) closes to traffic more frequently, however, and each lift duration ranges from 9 to 13 minutes.



We Want to Hear From You

How do you experience these Transportation Focus Areas? How would you change one or more of these Focus Areas? In addition to these Focus Areas, should we be looking somewhere else in East Boston?

Map of Transportation Focus Areas

1. Meridian Street & Border Street
2. Bennington Street
3. Day Square
4. Orient Heights Square
5. Addison McClellan Economic Development Area

Appendix

Zoning Overview

A brief history of Boston's zoning

Fifteen of the Boston's twenty-six neighborhoods were once separate towns (or neighborhoods of separate towns). As the years passed, these neighborhoods were slowly annexed by the City of Boston. To this day, many of these neighborhoods remain unique in their look and feel compared to the rest of the City. The most recent edition of the Boston Zoning Code, enacted in 1964, has evolved and adapted to accommodate the unique character of these places and it includes many separate maps and amendments. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a comprehensive rezoning process that led to the rewriting of the zoning for many neighborhoods.

East Boston's zoning code, known as Article 53, was last updated in 1993.

How Zoning Works

Different City agencies, departments, and boards and commissions play important, but separate, roles in zoning.

- The Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) writes zoning.
- The Boston Zoning Commission (BZC) adopts zoning.
- The Inspectional Services Department (ISD) interprets and applies zoning.
- The Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA) determines eligibility for exceptions from zoning.

When the public comes in contact with zoning issues, it does so most often through the BPDA or ISD.

A property owner must apply to ISD for a building permit or a change in use or occupancy permit. If the permit is denied because the proposed project violates the Zoning Code, the applicant may appeal the decision to the ZBA within ISD.

The BPDA makes recommendations concerning the case after its planning staff:

- Evaluates zoning applications
- Reviews the proposal

The BPDA makes its recommendations to the Board of Appeal on requests for variances and conditional uses and to the Zoning Commission in cases concerning Zoning Code amendments.

Members of the public and elected officials can also weigh in on requests for variances.

The BPDA makes no final rulings. Final decisions are made by the Board of Appeal and the Zoning Commission.

Zoning Terms

Accessory use - a land use which is related to and on the same lot as the principal land use.

Allowed use - a land use which is permitted as a matter of right. Board of Appeal approval is not required.

Appeal - a request made to the Board of Appeal for relief from zoning code regulations.

As-of-right-use - those uses that are automatically allowed by the zoning code.

Article 80 - Adopted in 1996 by the BPDA to provide clear guidelines for the development review process relating to large projects (adding/constructing more than 50,000 square feet), small projects (adding/constructing more than 20,000 square feet and/or 15+ net new residential units), Planned Development Areas (PDAs) (new overlay zoning districts for project areas larger than 1 acre), and Institutional Master Plans (IMPs) (projects relating to academic and medical campuses). The Article 80 process may include, but is not limited to, review of a project's impacts on transportation, public realm, the environment, and historic resources. BPDA Project Managers assist developers in navigating the Article 80 process. Public input is encouraged throughout a project's review timeline.

Chapter 91, The Massachusetts Public Waterfront Act - The Commonwealth's primary tool for protection and promotion of public use of its tidelands and other waterways. The oldest program of its kind in the nation, Chapter 91 regulates activities on both coastal and inland waterways, including construction, dredging and filling in tidelands, great ponds and certain rivers and streams.

Conditional Use - a land use permitted by the Zoning Code provided that it is found by the Board of Appeal to comply with certain conditions set out in the Code.

Forbidden use - A use that is not permitted in a particular district because of harmful impacts on other allowed uses (e.g., noise or pollution.)

Height - height is measured from the average grade of a parcel.

Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) - Established in 2000 to promote the production of affordable housing in Boston. Under IDP, developers may include affordable units within their developments (on-site), create affordable housing in an off-site location, or make a cash contribution towards the creation or preservation of affordable housing.

Inspectional Services Department (ISD) - A City of Boston department which administers the Boston Zoning Code and the State Building Code and issues all building, use, and occupancy permits. If a project requires development review under Article 80, ISD will not issue a permit until the BPDA and the Zoning Commission (if necessary) have completed the required review and the BPDA has certified that the project described in the permit application is consistent with the project approved through development review.

Lot, lot area - the area of a parcel of land in single ownership and not divided by a street.

Nonconforming use - A use or activity that was lawful prior to the adoption or amendment of the Zoning Code, but which does not, because of such adoption or amendment, conform to the present requirements of the Zoning Code.

Variance - Permission to deviate from a specific requirement of the Zoning Code.

Zoning Commission - The Zoning Commission is responsible for adopting all new zoning and zoning amendments, for establishing PDAs and approving PDA Development Plans, and for approving Institutional Master Plans. The Zoning Commission is located within the City of Boston's administration, not the BPDA.

Contact

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Project Website

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**boston planning &
development agency**

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