

DESIGN GUIDELINES APPENDIX:

Together, MassDOT Parcels 25 and 26 (“South Bay Kneeland Street Parcels”) comprise 5.5 acres in a location immediately adjacent to South Station, the largest of Boston’s three major transit hubs. Parcel 27A comprises an additional area of approximately 3 acres. Opportunities for a high-density, mixed-use and multi-block redevelopment in the heart of downtown are rare, and after multiple planning studies and community conversations, several key design considerations have emerged as priorities within the context of an economically viable redevelopment.

Generally, the urban design of any redevelopment scheme should recognize the significance of Parcels 25 and 26 as a critical point of transition between Chinatown (west), the Leather District (north), and South Station (east). Furthermore, the site is uniquely visible from points south (most notably entering the city by car on I-93 and by train into South Station), and will therefore serve as a “gateway” into Boston. The 5.5 acre site, though already comprised of several sub-parcels, should be broken into smaller parcels and streets to better relate to the adjacent neighborhoods. Careful attention should be given to the orientation of any building(s) and shadow impacts to each of these neighborhoods, while still considering the relationship of individual buildings within the site to one another.

Conversely, the perception of any building *from* each of the neighborhoods should be carefully considered. Development should serve not only to mitigate the visual and environmental impacts of the tunnel ramps on these parcels, but also to bridge the different scales of buildings in adjacent neighborhoods, to help to screen the associated highway infrastructure, and to ameliorate any negative effects to the air quality observed on the site.

HEIGHT

Given the site’s proximity to Downtown and South Station, there is an opportunity for significant height and density on the parcels. Previous studies, as well as recent conversations with the community, have reinforced a stepped approach to height; future buildings located along Kneeland Street should step down in height to a scale that comfortably relates to the existing Leather District buildings. However, significantly taller buildings may be developed at the southern portion of the site. The regulatory guidelines currently in place reinforce this stepped approach, permitting a 125’ height limit within 50 feet of Kneeland Street, but allowing up to 300’ beyond this edge zone.

Height should be considered in combination with other design and use factors such as shadow and wind. Greater density on the site can and should provide for more generous allocation of open space, high-quality pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, a mix of affordable and market rate housing opportunities, a gateway building(s) or other impactful contribution to Boston’s skyline, and as a mechanism to balance areas of the larger site where lower, more contextual development is appropriate.

- Do not exceed 125’ in height within 50’ of Kneeland Street.
- Do not exceed 300’ in height in southern portion of parcels per FAA guidelines.
- Locate greater height and density along southern edge of parcels, but stepping down to Kneeland Street (Leather District) to a scale which creates a welcoming streetscape environment.

GATEWAY DESIGN

Gateway design has been a consistent feature of past planning and redevelopment strategies for these parcels, particularly in the southern portion of Parcels 26a and 26b. While the 2004 study emphasized visibility from the highway and transit lines entering South Station, recent community conversations have broadened the design understanding of a gateway to reflect an operational sensitivity responsive to the adjacent neighborhoods. Thus, gateway design should be considered at two scales: 1) the scale of the city, and 2) the scale of the neighborhood(s). At the scale of the city, iconic architectural expression should relate to the site's position at the southern threshold into Downtown Boston. Conversely, gateway design at the street level can be understood not as a single building or iconic structure, but more as a design approach facilitating a sense of arrival from multiple directions. Formal strategies at this scale should be high quality and privilege the pedestrian. The corner of Kneeland Street and Atlantic Avenue can be considered in this context, relating to the side entrance of South Station and entry into the bus station from one direction, but also as a gateway into Chinatown the Leather District from the other. Likewise, Kneeland Street and Surface Road is another key corner where design may relate to the historic Chinatown Gate at Mary Soo Hoo Park, which has a direct sight line and spatial relationship that could be reinforced.

- Gateway design has multiple meanings: a dramatic, iconic formal expression marking the entry into the city from points south, but also design relating to the neighborhood context, facilitating a sense of arrival.
- Gateway design on the neighborhood side should be scaled relative to the existing buildings, but height at the back (south) side of the site is appropriate and encouraged (up to 300' per FAA regulations).
- Street level gateway design should enhance visibility and entry into the surrounding neighborhoods in manner primarily for pedestrians.
- Sensitivity to the adjacent neighborhood buildings, parks, and pedestrian desire lines are paramount design considerations.

PUBLIC REALM and NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIVITY

The most important features of a high-quality public realm for the South Bay Kneeland Street parcels include an improved configuration of streets and block sizes to promote neighborhood connectivity, preservation and enhancement of existing and/or new view corridors, streetscape design that reflects Boston's Complete Streets Guidelines, active ground floor uses where appropriate, and the (re)development of community open space and civic amenities. Chinatown and the Leather District/Downtown have both experienced growth spurts in the past decade, and public realm strategies on this site should seek to enhance the vitality of these neighboring communities. The redevelopment scheme should include novel design strategies, as this represents a significant public realm opportunity in a desirable location, but must facilitate pedestrian cross-connections and the vibrancy of adjacent areas.

In particular, Kneeland Street is the critical link between the South Bay Kneeland Street parcels and the immediate context. This street is an important east-west link, and should employ design strategies that help direct and facilitate multimodal movement to and from South Station. The street must also operate in the north-south direction, helping transition from the Leather District to future development south. Ground floor retail should be located primarily along Kneeland Street, while also providing for wider sidewalks, bicycle accommodations, possible curbside parking, landscaping and street furniture.

At existing or proposed side street crossings, curb bulb-outs, neck-downs, and other street / sidewalk configurations should be designed as necessary to improve the quality, functionality and safety of the pedestrian experience.

Throughout the larger site, enhanced streetscapes should be considered integral to the design, including street trees with tree grates, rain gardens, planting beds, bike racks, and ornamental fencing. In addition to beautifying the streetscape, landscaping and street furniture should be designed to mitigate the adverse noise and proximity impacts of transportation infrastructure and air quality issues.

OPEN SPACE and ENVIRONMENTAL

Proposed open space should serve a variety of stakeholders including elderly and youth residents of both Chinatown and the Leather District, and the residents, employees, and visitors of the larger MassDOT site. Reggie Wong Park is an important community park with recreational uses beloved by the community in Chinatown and throughout Greater Boston, and must be retained as part of the redevelopment. However, the park may be reconfigured on an alternate location on site, provided that the overall square footage of open space be maintained or enlarged. Recent conversations with the community have indicated a desire for an expanded programming strategy with both active and passive recreational uses to better serve the spectrum of possible users, including young families and the elderly community. Playground and “playscape” features, accessible paths and seating, and natural elements and shade trees are desirable. Continued accommodation for active uses such as volleyball and basketball courts should be maintained.

Recent air quality studies have raised concerns about air quality, and therefore any redevelopment must include air quality mitigation strategies. These must include decking and covering the existing I-93 ramp on Parcel 25. Though decking may create limitations for development of buildings or open space, creative solutions that use alternative materials other than conventional landscaping are encouraged. In addition, development should implement measures to protect the indoor air quality of buildings through locating ventilation intakes as far away from high-traffic roadways as possible and including filtration devices on all intakes.

- Retain of Reggie Wong Park or replace on site and convenient to Chinatown and the Leather District.
- Provide necessary environmental mitigation.
- Provide cover of the I-93 ramp on Parcel 25 in conjunction with development.
- Given the limitations created by infrastructure decking, creative solutions to open space programming that might use alternative materials other than conventional landscaping are encouraged.
- Open space design must consider programming for the elderly and youth communities, including both recreation and passive that can co-exist.
- Open space design must serve a broad spectrum of users.
- Address indoor air quality of building through appropriate ventilation and filtration systems.

Future Design Review

These guidelines are meant to be guiding principles for purposes of the Invitation to Bid (ITB) and reflect recent community input, but the selected developer will be required to undergo continued design review conversations with the Boston Redevelopment Authority as part of the Planned Development Area (PDA) and Article 80 process.