Agenda

Advisory Group Meeting #2 Agenda – Existing Conditions and Character Areas

1. Advisory Group Schedule Update (45 minutes for #1–5)
2. Community Engagement Update
3. Advisory Group Meeting #2 Goals
4. Commonly Understood “Character Areas”
5. Analysis of Existing Characteristics
   - Historic Context
   - Urban Grain
   - Public Realm
   - Land Use
6. Character Area Group Discussion (45 minutes)
Advisory Group Overview

Preliminary Advisory Group Schedule—Subject to Change

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<td>March/April 2020</td>
<td>Draft PLAN: Downtown</td>
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<td>May—July 2020</td>
<td>Meet as needed. PLAN: Downtown must be substantially complete by July 2020.</td>
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Meeting dates and subjects are tentative and subject to change. Extra meetings may be scheduled and will be discussed in advance with the Advisory Group. Advisory Group members will be provided with schedule updates as the project progresses.
Community Engagement
Efforts to Date

- **Open House**
  - December 3, 2018

- **Stakeholder Roundtables**
  - Downtown Boston BID: February 2, 2019
  - Preservation & Conservation: February 19 & March 7, 2019
  - Institutions: February 19 & March 19, 2019
  - Landowners & Developers: February 20 & March 20, 2019
  - Business Owners: March 20, 2019

- **Advisory Group Meeting #1**
  - March 7, 2019
Community Engagement

Upcoming Engagement Activities

- **Visioning Workshop**, April 30, 2019
- **Public meetings** for entire study area and subdistricts (Summer & Fall 2019)
- **Tactical outreach** such as pop-up events, temporary interactive signage, and “wikimapping” (Summer & Fall 2019)
Building on past studies, the primary goal of the study is to develop a new framework for the preservation, enhancement, and growth of the Downtown area of the City of Boston, while balancing the importance of **livability**, **daylight**, **walkability**, **climate change**, access to **open space**, **affordability**, and a dynamic **mix of uses**, among others.
Timeline Zoom-In

Today’s Conversation Goals

Existing Conditions Analysis & Vision, Goals, & Principles

- Vision
  - Defines Scenarios
- Existing Conditions Analysis
  - Informs Recommendations
- Character Areas
  - Geographically Specific

Planning Scenarios & Development Options

District-wide Recommendations

Geographically Specific Recommendations

Scenario Refinement & Impact Analysis
What qualities are important to define distinct “urban or neighborhood characters?”
What Defines “Character”?

A “character area” is identifiable by its cultural, spatial, social, and economic qualities, including long-held associations with a “place”

**Historic Context** – Designated and pending historic assets, landmarks, building age

**Urban Grain** – Building footprints, block size

**Public Realm** – Public space, streetscape, street role (typologies)

**Land Uses** – Mix of existing uses
Questions to Consider

Preliminary Character Areas

• What other factors should we consider when defining the Character Areas? Did we miss a Character Area?

• How do you experience each Character Area? What are the unique qualities and/or features of each Character Area? What should be enhanced or called out in each Character Area?

• Do the “preliminary boundaries” align with your definition of each district? Is there value to having more fluid or ambiguous character area edges?
Commonly Understood Character Areas of Downtown
Preliminary Character Areas

Downtown Crossing
Chinatown
Financial District
Theater District & Park Plaza
Wharf District
Downtown Crossing

Preliminary Character Area

- Major regional **shopping district**
- **Crossroads** for Greater Boston
- **Vibrant public life** adjacent to the pedestrian zone
- High concentration of **notable historic landmarks**
- Neighborhood supporting a mix of **uses**, including residential
Chinatown

Preliminary Character Area

- District representing specific, cherished cultural heritage for the region
- Fine-grained neighborhood with a wide range of building types
- Vibrant street life comprised of many small businesses
- Major residential neighborhood in Downtown
Mary Soo Hoo Park, Chinatown
77 Harrison Avenue, Chinatown
Beach Street @ Chinatown Gate, Chinatown
Chin Park, Chinatown
Washington Street @ Tufts, Chinatown
One Greenway Park, Chinatown
Financial District

Preliminary Character Area

- A business center that conveys the city’s history as an **important regional hub of commerce**
- Larger blocks and parcels, with a **limited mix of uses**
- Significantly **quieter at night** than during the day and weekends
- District **balances** the **grand scale** with the **human scale**
Theater District & Park Plaza

Preliminary Character Area

- The **performing arts center** of Downtown and the entire region
- Home to many **cultural, institutional, and educational uses**
- More **lively on nights and weekends** than many other places Downtown
- **Established college student population**
- Contains multiple **major thoroughfares**
Wharf District

Preliminary Character Area

- Key link to the Greenway and the Waterfront
- Home to some of the oldest and most traditional built form in the Downtown
- Quieter than many other areas Downtown, in spite of a diverse set of users
- Neighborhood supports living, working and playing
Analysis of Existing Characteristics
Historic Context
Historic Assets

Historic Context

- Historical Landmarks are distributed somewhat evenly - most are along corridors; there are very few in Chinatown

Source: City of Boston
Historic Context

- National Register-listed buildings are most common in the Theater District and Downtown Crossing
Historic Context

- **Zoning Protection Areas** – intended to protect cherished open spaces and culturally significant districts – can be found across Downtown, in **Downtown Crossing**, the **Theater District** and **Park Plaza**, **Chinatown**, and the **Wharf District**.

Source: City of Boston
The largest National Register Districts are located in the Theater District and in the Wharf District.

Historical Landmarks are distributed somewhat evenly - most are along corridors; there are very few in Chinatown.

Landmarks are often not adjacent to open spaces – which may make them difficult to appreciate.
Historic Context

- About 10% of the study area would be vulnerable to flooding by the year 2050.
- The Wharf District will be the most susceptible area.
- Chinatown is the second most susceptible to flooding.

Source: City of Boston
There are concentrations of new buildings along Washington St

The oldest buildings are in the Wharf District

Newer buildings tend to have larger footprints than older buildings

The highest concentration of 20th century buildings is in the Financial District

Source: City of Boston
Historic Assets

- Freedom Trail
- National Register District/Multiple Resource Area
- Boston Zoning Protection Area Subdistricts
- National Register Historic Building
- City of Boston Landmark
- Pending Boston Landmark Approval

Year Built

- 1801 - 1900
- 1901 - 1945
- 1946 - 2000
- 2001 - 2018
- No Data

Source: City of Boston
There are few designated historic assets in Chinatown.

Designated historic assets have smaller footprints than surrounding buildings.

The largest concentration of older buildings is in Downtown Crossing.

Generally, there is an intermingling of new and old buildings across Downtown.

Character Areas

Historic Context — Conclusions
Urban Grain
Some larger blocks have small alleys or interior passages that are not immediately obvious.

Smaller blocks tend to be clustered in the Wharf District.

Larger blocks tend to be adjacent to large open spaces or associated with institutional uses.

Chinatown and Downtown Crossing both have some of the largest blocks, often disrupting a smaller grain.
Urban Grain
Parcel Size

Chapman Place, Downtown Crossing
Music Hall Place, Downtown Crossing
State Street @ Congress Street, Financial District
33 Broad Street, Wharf District
Burnham Building, Downtown Crossing
• More permeable blocks in Chinatown and in the Ladder District

• Larger gaps between buildings in Chinatown

• Larger buildings frame Post Office Square in the Financial District

• Smallest footprints in Downtown Crossing and Chinatown

Source: City of Boston
Composite

Urban Grain

Block Size

- **Small** (0 sf - 25,000 sf)
- **Medium** (25,000 sf - 75,000 sf)
- **Large** (75,000 sf - 150,000 sf)
- **Extra Large** (> 150,000 sf)

Unbuilt Area

Source: City of Boston
The Financial District has some of the largest building footprints and least permeable blocks.

Downtown Crossing has a wide range of building and block sizes, but a high concentration of finer grain – small building footprints.

Chinatown has small buildings but within large blocks.
Public Realm
Green Spaces & Tree Canopy

Public Realm

- Few public spaces cater to **year-round** or **multigenerational** use
- **Post Office Square**, represents a **significant public space** in the Financial District
- **Smaller public spaces** are rare, with higher provision in **Chinatown**
- **Street tree canopy** is not consistent across Downtown

Source: City of Boston
• Large pedestrianized areas in Downtown Crossing and Chinatown (Chin Park & Mary Soo Hoo Park)

• Limited temporary interventions to date

• Essex, Franklin, Summer, and State connect to the most pedestrian hardscape/plazas and temporary interventions

Source: City of Boston
Tontine Crescent Tactical Plaza, Downtown Crossing

Boston Common

One Greenway Park, Chinatown

Eliot Norton Park, Theater District

Mary Soo Hoo Park, Chinatown

Post Office Square, Financial District
Increasingly lobbies are being opened to the public, especially in the Financial District.

- Interior routes and spaces are usually poorly indicated.
- There are generally few publicly accessible spaces.
Lighting is poor along some streets that host key landmarks – e.g. Milk, Hawley, Batterymarch, Devonshire Streets

- The Financial and Wharf Districts are the most poorly lit
- Under-used public spaces include traffic islands & privately owned plazas

Source: City of Boston
Corridors: Major thoroughfares (ped/vehicular) through the study area, high multi-modal activity

Busy Local Streets: Significant flows within study area, small-scale retail, high pedestrian comfort

Quiet Local Streets: Lower flows, limited retail/activity

Active Alleys: Unwelcoming to vehicles, accessible to pedestrians, hyperlocal connections, some retail

Service Streets: Building operations, parking, loading
Composite

Public Realm

- **Ped-Priority Hardscape**
- **Temporary Intervention**
- **Interior Publicly Accessible Space**
- **Plan Downtown Study Area Boundary**

*Source: City of Boston*
Each Character Area is defined by a different type of open space, from pocket parks to central parks to ped-zones.

There are unwelcoming conditions in some of the most historic or single-use areas.

There is generally a lack of green infrastructure - enormous swaths of Downtown do not have any tree canopy.
Land Use
Residential

Predominant Land Use

- **Some residential is scattered throughout** most of Downtown
- **Chinatown** has the highest concentration of residential
- The **Park Plaza** area also has a relatively high concentration of residential

Residential includes: single family, multi-family, two/three family, apartment, condominium

Source: City of Boston Assessor's Data
Commercial

Predominant Land Use

- Commercial uses in Downtown Crossing tend to be predominantly retail and F&B
- The Financial District has the highest concentration of office use
- There are limited office uses scattered throughout the study area

Commercial includes: office, retail, restaurant

Source: City of Boston Assessor's Data
Educational uses are mostly represented by 3 major institutions: Suffolk, Emerson, Tufts.

Institutions primarily clustered around the southeast corner of the Common in the Theater District.

The largest institutional use (Tufts Medical Ctr.) is surrounded largely by the residential of Chinatown.

Institutional includes: higher education, hospital/medical

Source: City of Boston Assessor’s Data
Theaters, museums and community uses are clustered in the Theater District, around the Common and in Chinatown.

There are very few primary cultural or community uses east of Chauncy/Harrison.

Public art tends to take the form of standalone sculptures.

Downtown’s only public school is in Chinatown (and a temporary library).

Source: City of Boston Assessor’s Data
Predominant Land Use

Source: City of Boston Assessor's Data
Character Areas

**Predominant Land Use—Conclusions**

- **The Financial District** is overwhelmingly an **office district**
- **Downtown Crossing** has a broad **mix of uses**
- **Chinatown** contains the highest concentrations of **residential**
- **The Theater District** is home to most **cultural uses associated with performing arts**
- **The Wharf District** has a **mix** of uses, but is trending toward **residential**
Timeline Zoom-In

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Vision

District-wide Recommendations

Geographically Specific Recommendations

Existing Conditions Analysis

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Wharf District