BOSTON BY THE NUMBERS
LAND AREA AND USE

Land Area and Use

— With a land area of 48.4 square miles Boston comprises 0.6% of the 7,824 square miles that make up the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

— Boston is the second smallest major U.S. city in terms of land area after San Francisco that has 47 square miles.

— The city has grown to 40 times its original size through landfill and annexation from its 783 acres since its settlement in 1630. Originally, Boston occupied just 2½% of the modern city’s area.

— Boston has a population density of 19.94 persons per acre (less dense than San Francisco at 26.78 persons/acre and slightly greater than Chicago at 18.55 persons/acre).

— More than 50% of the land in the city is tax-exempt:
  • 26% state property;
  • 14% city property;
  • 2% higher education & medical;
  • 8% other exempts.

— 16% of the land in Boston is dedicated to public open space.

— Boston’s overall land use distribution is:
  • 51% tax exempt;
  • 36% residential;
  • 9% commercial;
  • 4% industrial.

— 77% of the parcels in the city are classed as residential, 4% commercial and 0.3% industrial.

— Boston has 272,481 housing units with 37% owner-occupied that is 29% lower than the national owner-occupancy rate of 66%. (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009).

— The number of 1, 2, 3-family properties is 62,174 (not counting condominiums). They contain 107,962 dwelling units, 40% of the city’s housing stock.

— More than 20% of Boston’s housing stock is affordable which makes up for more than 22% of the State’s affordable units even though Boston has just 9.7% of the State’s 2.8 million housing units.

Source: US Census Bureau; Boston Redevelopment Authority analysis.
— The 8.2% growth in Boston's housing stock between 2000 and 2010 is the strongest in more than half a century.

— Housing growth between 2000 and 2010 has led to the largest housing stock in Boston's history.