

Designing for a Diverse Boston

BOSTON *Design Vision*

REPORT

FALL 2024





OCTOBER 20, 2023 • CITY HALL CIVIC PAVILION • GOVERNMENT CENTER
Boston residents engage in Design Vision open house activities.

OCTOBER 30, 2024

Dear Friends,

Design impacts every aspect of our lives—from the unique style and character of our neighborhoods, to how we get where we’re going, and what we do when we get there. How we experience a space, how we interact with one another, and how we make sense of our surroundings are all influenced by design.

Design can be the difference between feeling unwelcome and feeling like we belong. Which is why I am excited to introduce the Boston Design Vision report. This report explores the ways design shapes our city’s look and feel, and raises a set of design standards to illuminate the path ahead.

In efforts big and small, design is the work of many hands. It is mixed and molded by community members, development professionals, engineers, planners, designers, regulators, and elected officials working together to blend form with function. As we chart a course for Boston’s future, it is essential that we do so in a way that is transparent, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all our residents.

These values drove our efforts to establish the Boston Planning Department earlier this year, restoring urban planning and design as a core function of city government for the first time in 70 years. And these values remain front and center in this report.

The Boston Design Vision is the product of a community-driven, design-focused conversation with residents across every neighborhood, led by the Urban Design Division of the City of Boston’s Planning Department. Our hope is that the principles, priorities, and approach laid out in the pages that follow feel familiar—that the ideas make sense, and resonate with your own experiences and aspirations for our city. After all, your perspective brought this vision to life.

Thank you for joining us in the movement to make Boston a more resilient, more equitable, and more welcoming city, by design.



Michelle Wu
Mayor of Boston



AUGUST 9, 2023 • BREMEN STREET COMMUNITY PARK • EAST BOSTON
Community Advisory Board member supporting engagement.

OCTOBER 30, 2024

Dear Neighbor,

We are delighted to share the first “Design Vision” for Boston. We launched a public engagement effort in the summer of 2023 and heard from hundreds of Boston residents about what they love most about their communities. These unique and diverse perspectives directly shaped the ideas contained in this document. The report includes a statement of the principles we commit to uphold as design professionals working on behalf of every Bostonian, examples of how we uphold these principles in our work, and a preview of what’s to come.

Urban design is the art of making places for people and it influences your experience of our city. Quality design and diversity of textures and materials enhance the look and feel of these places, anchoring a sense of belonging and identity, while uplifting communities. We believe in the transformative power of design, planning and development in shaping our city for better community outcomes and that starts with placing our people and their lived experiences first.

Ambitious reform efforts like Squares + Streets and Article 80 Modernization demonstrate our commitment to establishing clear rules with more predictable outcomes that confront the city’s most significant challenges. However, as we work to standardize regulations and address citywide needs, it is also important that what is unique about each part of Boston is retained or centered in our design process. The principles that guide us in our work to shape Boston’s built environment start from the belief that heterogeneity, meaning those features that make people and places unique, should be celebrated, amplified, and built into the foundation of our planning and development work.

We take pride in the inherent diversity of Boston, celebrating the diverse physical character and history is essential to the growth and innovation of our city. Design has a responsibility to make room for people and for differences in Boston’s built fabric, as an essential part of what makes a thriving democracy and city.



Diana Fernandez Bibeau
Deputy Chief of Urban Design



WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

Urban design refers to the design of the built environment. Good design improves our quality of life and uplifts communities.

As part of the City of Boston's Planning Department, the Urban Design Division works with other Planning Department Divisions and across City cabinets to improve design outcomes for projects of all types and sizes.

The Urban Design Division is staffed by an interdisciplinary team of architects, landscape architects, urban designers, planners, and engineers who advocate for good design in every neighborhood of Boston every day.

We are trained professionals with a variety of professional experiences, but more importantly, we are residents of Boston with diverse lived experiences.

We are all deeply committed to making Boston a place for everyone.

CORE PLANNING DEPARTMENT TEAM

Kairos Shen
Chief of Planning

Breeze Outlaw
Senior Urban Designer

Diana Fernandez Bibeau
Deputy Chief of Urban Design

Luci Alice
Senior Urban Designer

Meera Deean
Deputy Director of Design

Adam Johnson
Urban Designer

Special thanks to James Arthur Jemison, former Chief of Planning, for believing in this work and putting it into action.



PROJECT TEAM

CONSULTANT TEAM

Agency Landscape + Planning

Gina Ford
Co-Founder, Principal, &
Landscape Architect

Brie Hensold
Co-Founder, Principal, &
Urban Planner

Allen Penniman
Senior Urban Planner

DREAM Collaborative

Diana Marsh
Director of Urban Design and
Planning

Rosa Herrero
Senior Urban Planner

Isidor Studio LLC

Mel Isidor
Founder & Designer

Consult LeLa

Shavel'le Olivier
Co-Principal & Founder

Chavella Lee-Pacheco
Co-Principal & Founder

OJ Slaughter

Creative Director &
Photographer

DESIGN VISION STEERING COMMITTEE

Tiffany Chu
Mayor's Office

Christopher Osgood
Mayor's Office

Oliver Sellers-Garcia
Mayor's Office

Sheila A. Dillon
Mayor's Office of Housing

Kara Elliott-Ortega
Mayor's Office of Arts and
Culture

Amira Madison
Mayor's Office of New Urban
Mechanics

Kristin McSwain
Mayor's Office of Early
Childhood

Brianna Millor
Mayor's Office of Community
Engagement

John Romano
Mayor's Office of Community
Engagement

Jascha Franklin-Hodge
Streets Cabinet

Vineet Gupta
Boston Transportation
Department

Mariangely Solis Cervera
Equity and Inclusion Cabinet

Monique Tu Nguyen
Mayor's Office of Immigrant
Advancement

Kristen McCosh
Disabilities Commission

Liza Meyer
Boston Parks and Recreation
Department

Dorothy Clark
Boston Landmarks

Joe Cornish
Boston Landmarks

COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

Johane Alexis-Phanor
Mattapan Food Fitness
Coalition

Eryn-Ashlei Bailey
Evergreen-Kenney
Neighborhood Association

Nia Beverly
District 7 Advisory Council

Alice Brown
Boston Harbor Now

Jason Brown
West Roxbury Main Streets

James Cordero
Reclaim Roxbury

Mariellen S. Dalton
Eagle Hill Civic Association

Alison Frazee
Boston Preservation Alliance

Niara Hightower
Boston Art Review

Ted Landmark
BPDA Board

Allentza Michel
Greater Mattapan
Neighborhood Council

Jules Pieri
Navy Yard Garden & Art

Whitney Sands
Allston Brighton Community
Development Cooperative

Hakim Sutherland
Alternatives for Community
& Environment



HOW WE GOT HERE

The Design Vision was shaped by the voices and perspectives of Bostonians engaged in our community outreach efforts and by a Community Advisory Board (CAB).

Community engagement efforts launched in summer 2023, included surveys, pop-up events, and a three-day open house. The team collected hundreds of postcards, annotated maps, and mad-lib and survey responses from those who participated.

The CAB was a key partner in shaping an inclusive Design Vision. Representing neighborhoods throughout Boston with a range of backgrounds, expertise, and experience engaging in planning efforts, the CAB helped ground community-supported values and objectives in the Design Vision and implementation as well as helping to shape the engagement outreach.



- ▲ AUGUST 19, 2023 • CCBA 53RD ANNUAL MOON FESTIVAL • CHINATOWN
- JULY 14, 2023 • OPEN STREETS ROXBURY • ROXBURY

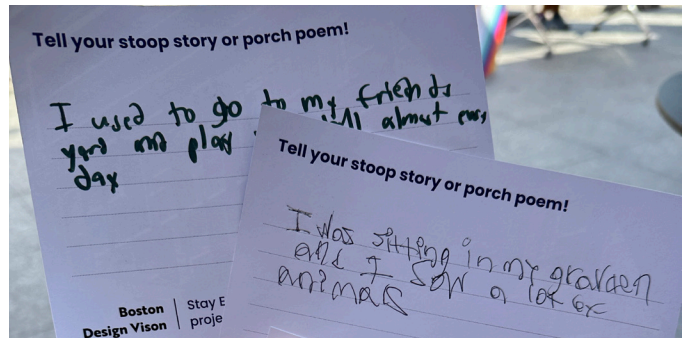
Boston residents engage in Design Vision pop-up activities.



- JUNE 25, 2023 • 3RD ANNUAL STROLL OF THE DISTRICT • MATTAPAN

Boston residents engage in Design Vision pop-up activities.





**OCTOBER 20 & 23,
2023 • CITY HALL
CIVIC PAVILION •
GOVERNMENT CENTER**
Boston residents engage
in Design Vision open
house activities.





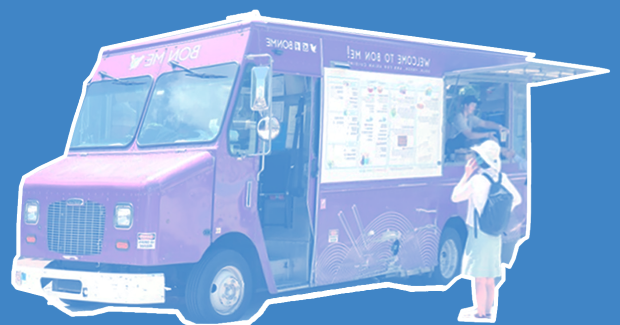
Hello! Boston Design Vision



JUNE 25, 2023 • 3RD ANNUAL STROLL OF THE DISTRICT • MATTAPAN
Design Vision pop-up mapping activity.

CONTENTS

A DESIGN VISION FOR BOSTON	16
Our Design Principles	18
Principle One: Design from Understanding	20
Principle Two: Design for the Future	22
Principle Three: Design Beyond the Boundary	24
Principle Four: Design the Details	26
PRINCIPLES AT WORK	28
DESIGN VISION IDEAS	42
Spaces Between Buildings	46
Housing	50
Neighborhood Main Streets	54
WHAT'S NEXT	56
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	62



A DESIGN VISION FOR BOSTON



A DESIGN VISION FOR BOSTON

The Design Vision is a statement of the principles we commit to uphold as design professionals working on behalf of every Bostonian to elevate the quality of design in our city.

Urban design is all around us. At its core, urban design is the art of making places for people. It is a mix of memorable, symbolic moments and meaningful, everyday experiences.

Neighborhoods in Boston do not have equal access to good urban design. We are committed to expanding design quality across our city in a fair, transparent, and inclusive way.

We aim to shape public and private projects that will:

- relate to their unique context and reflect the diversity of Boston's communities,
- ensure the sustainability and resiliency of our communities, and
- contribute positively to the world around them.

OUR DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The places and spaces we design are a reflection of our values.

The design principles are a set of values that guide good design outcomes for the built environment of Boston's neighborhoods.

They aim to anchor elements of the built environment that support culture, place, and identity, focusing on the ways spaces look, feel, and empower people to move through them with agency and choice.



“We are thinking big about how to build a more resilient, healthy, and fair Boston.”

They are meant to help us build what we value, center people, and uplift diverse lived experiences in Boston.

Michelle Wu
Mayor of Boston

PRINCIPLE ONE
DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

PRINCIPLE TWO
DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

PRINCIPLE THREE
DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

PRINCIPLE FOUR
DESIGN THE DETAILS





PRINCIPLE ONE

DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

Understanding a place is more than just observing its physical characteristics.

It requires connecting with the community to understand its unique context, the lived experiences of the community, and its values.

We strive to design from understanding people and place, using tools like engagement and observation. For example, the Neighborhood Character Analysis—coming soon for developers, architects, designers, and residents—was developed through this project.

When we explore this principle, key questions include:

- *Who and what is here?*
- *Who and what was here before?*
- *What is valued or beloved here?*

COLLABORATIVE

People are the experts of their own lived experiences, and we value that expertise. Design is a collaborative process, and we put the community at the heart of what we do. We aim to meet people where they are and share information in a way that's easy to understand.

We acknowledge that community participation takes time, and involvement can be emotionally challenging. We are committed to explaining why we ask for feedback and how we'll use it in our design decisions. It's also important to us to consider who might not be represented in our community efforts.

DYNAMIC

Boston's irregular streets and diverse buildings reflect a city that has evolved for more than 400 years. Even before the city was built, native Indigenous communities were connected to this land and still are today. Boston's mix of old and new defines its character, and we celebrate that diversity.

Key character features like the size and layout of streets, buildings, and open spaces, as well as how and with what they were built, all come together to create a unique identity for the city.



“Everybody’s comfort levels are different—we spend so much time trying to make everything the same and that might not benefit everyone.”

Alexa Vaughn
Deaf Landscape Designer &
Accessibility Specialist





PRINCIPLE TWO

DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

The things we build today and tomorrow should ensure Boston and our communities thrive long into the future.

Green building designs focus on the use of renewable resources, cut carbon emissions and reduce environmental impacts, support people's health, and prepare our built environment for future climate challenges like extreme heat, heavy rain, and rising sea-levels.

Key questions of this principle are:

- *What might be here tomorrow?*
- *How can our open spaces and buildings prepare us for tomorrow?*
- *What design changes provide the most benefit today and lasting benefit for tomorrow?*

RESILIENT

Climate change means the environment that buildings and open spaces respond to today will be different tomorrow, with higher temperatures, more precipitation, and increased flood risks. By adapting our streets, buildings, and open spaces for future conditions, we reduce risks from extreme weather, strengthen social resilience, and create opportunities to support community well-being.

SUSTAINABLE

Buildings contribute significantly to our community's carbon emissions, and new construction offers the greatest opportunity to reduce them. Using recycled or locally sourced materials, energy-efficient systems, and stormwater management can help reduce resource consumption and environmental impact. Boston's Carbon Neutral 2050 goal aims to eliminate these emissions, with today's green buildings achieving net-zero carbon and even generating more energy through solar and renewable sources.

DURABLE

Buildings and open spaces should be both adaptable and durable, using high-quality and low-carbon materials that extend their lifespan and reduce environmental impact. Durable practices not only create a resilient built environment but also minimize upfront embodied carbon emissions, which can equal years of operational emissions.



ADAPTIVE

Needs in our city, neighborhoods, and homes change over time due to economic shifts and evolving family structures. Our designs for both new and existing spaces should accommodate these future needs.

By repurposing elements of the built environment, we reduce waste, minimize carbon emissions, and preserve the character and history of our communities.





PRINCIPLE THREE

DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Every project impacts and in turn, is impacted by the world around it.

We "zoom out" to understand how a project contributes to its broader context. It is important that in any design solution, we understand how sidewalks, open spaces, and streets are impacted.

We design for more than just a building.

One key question of this principle is:

- *How can the project support the broader context of place?*

CONNECTED

Good design prioritizes connecting people and moving them from place to place through multi-modal connections that are accessible. We focus on making it easy for pedestrians and vehicles to move through a space. Well-planned pathways and streets help everyone get where they need to go safely and comfortably.

CLEAR

Clear signage and wayfinding make it easy for people to navigate places. When signs are simple and easy to read, they help visitors and residents find their way, creating a more welcoming environment. When signs are unique to the neighborhood, they contribute to a sense of place.

ACTIVE

Active sidewalks and the public realm bring life to our streets. When buildings have shops and cafes at the ground level, they invite people to walk and explore. This activity supports local businesses and creates a lively sense of place.

SAFE

Safety is key in our designs. Well-lit pathways and clear sight-lines help people feel secure. Features like curb cuts and secure entrances make streets safer, while familiar surroundings build a sense of safety and comfort for everyone.

BIODIVERSE

Creating biodiverse spaces connects people to nature. From parks to window boxes, using a variety of native plants help support local ecosystems. These green elements not only beautify the area but also strengthen the bond between people and the environment.



COMFORTABLE

Maximizing natural light and reducing heat create comfortable spaces. By designing areas that consider urban heat, we create cooler environments that people enjoy spending time in.

“People usually look at Chinatown—the architecture is so eclectic. What's worth preserving are the very small scale streets and small family businesses.”

Lydia Lowe
Director of Boston's Chinatown
Community Trust





PRINCIPLE FOUR

DESIGN THE DETAILS

Good design works to center culture and identity to inform design outcomes that anchor a sense of belonging.

Design elements provide the greatest value to residents when they relate to their everyday experiences. Details such as color, pattern, texture, and materials should be used to respond to the culture of a place.

One key question of this principle is:

- *How might the culture and identity inform detailed elements of the built environment?*

ACCESSIBLE

Good design considers people of all ages and abilities. Universal design features make spaces easier for everyone to use, improving quality of life and bringing people together. By making places accessible, we create a stronger, more inclusive community.

WELCOMING

A welcoming design invites people in and makes them feel at home. It should create an affirming atmosphere that is friendly and inviting, standing in contrast to defensive or hostile spaces. A warm environment encourages social interaction and community connection.

CONTEXTUAL

Contextual design pays attention to the small details that reflect a place's character. Features like window trim, colors, and pavement patterns create a sense of connection to the local environment. These thoughtful choices help make spaces feel unique and familiar.

BEAUTIFUL

Beauty is not one-size-fits-all; it means different things to different people. Embracing this diversity in design allows us to create spaces that reflect the community's values and tastes, making the environment more enjoyable for everyone.



HUMAN-SCALED

Human-scaled design focuses on the experience of people at the street level. Using quality materials and textures, along with elements like stoops and inviting entrances, creates a comfortable and engaging atmosphere. This thoughtful rhythm along the street encourages people to connect with their surroundings.





PRINCIPLES AT WORK



PRINCIPLES AT WORK

Change in a city is rarely simple, and Boston is no exception. As our city evolves, it's essential to balance growth with respect for history, community, and culture.

Boston's neighborhoods and architecture reflect a wide range of identities, each contributing to the city's character.

Even as familiar places transform, they retain meaning and connect us to a shared past. The diverse urban fabric and cycles of change in Boston remind us that no single identity defines our city or its residents. This evolution, rooted in democracy, requires care and compromise to honor both the past and the future.

The following projects reflect the diversity of Boston's built environment and uphold the design values and principles identified through the Design Vision. These projects vary in scale, type, neighborhood, and program, showcasing the applicability of the principles at work that are shaping our city today



“Cities or spaces that support continual variety and follows the frame of the multitude—working as a whole where different kinds of components are integral into the place or the work.”

Justin Garrett Moore
Program Director for Humanities in Place
at Mellon Foundation





BOSTON CITY HALL PLAZA RENOVATION

The transformation of City Hall's front yard into a welcoming and intergenerational civic landscape has resulted in the creation of a public space that better serves current and future generations of Bostonians and visitors alike. The new plaza provides Bostonians with much-needed flexible open space that accommodates all scales of events in all seasons. The renovation modernized the historic plaza by improving accessibility,

and implementing sustainable strategies while honoring its original intention as Boston's place to gather, celebrate, and make residents' voices heard. Prominent features include a civic pavilion for indoor community programming, a pavilion roof terrace that overlooks Hanover Street, and a new playscape that includes an interactive water feature and an adventure play area.

**GOVERNMENT
CENTER**

**PUBLICLY
OWNED OPEN
SPACE**

2022

PROJECT TEAM

Boston Public
Facilities
Department
(Client)

Sasaki (Designer)

Skanska (Owner's
Project Manager)



DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

A flexible, civic plaza informed by diverse stakeholders and design principles that invite people to stay and enjoy the space.



DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

Green infrastructure systems handle over 60% of the plaza's rainwater and reuses it for the 250 trees and thousands of shrubs and perennials.

*Images Courtesy of
Sasaki*



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

The plaza renovation replaced numerous inaccessible steps with wide, universally accessible pathways for all to use.



DESIGN THE DETAILS

A new playscape in the plaza welcomes children to the plaza to play across an array of different play elements.

NUBIAN SQUARE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

This right-of-way project introduced various green infrastructure features to Nubian Square to address stormwater and heat challenges. The site experiences local flooding and some of the hottest temperatures in the city. A series of linear rain gardens along Dudley Street interrupts the gray, urban hardscape with lush native plants, infiltrating stormwater and cooling temperatures.

The Office of Green Infrastructure is collaborating with a community organization in Nubian Square to bring additional plants into the rain gardens, including species that are meaningful to the surrounding community.

ROXBURY

PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE

2022

PROJECT TEAM

Office of Green Infrastructure

Boston Water & Sewer Commission

Public Works Dept.

Boston Transportation Dept.

Hatch

WSP

Images Courtesy of The Office of Green Infrastructure



DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

Flooding and heat island effects impact the quality of life for those living in and moving through Nubian Square.



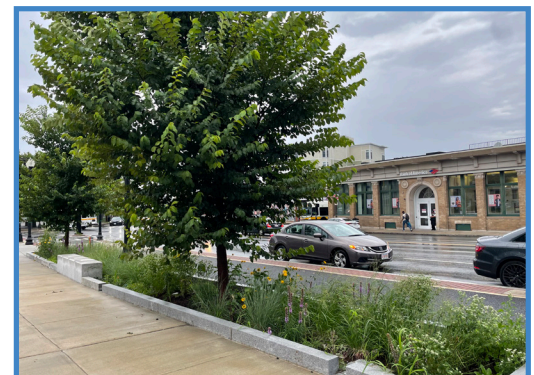
DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

A green corridor mitigates environmental impacts from increasing impervious surfaces by treating stormwater runoff through rain gardens, porous hardscapes, and infiltration trenches



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Natural materials and biodiverse rain gardens enhance seating areas, while elm trees provide shade to the adjacent sidewalk and an elevated, protected bike lane, making it a comfortable space for rest and socializing.



DESIGN THE DETAILS

Located near a major transportation hub and local library branch, the space fosters a sense of place that is human-scaled and welcoming.



RESIDENCES AT 566 COLUMBUS AVENUE

Located at Massachusetts and Columbus Avenues, 566 Columbus Avenue was once home to the Harriet Tubman House, a vital space for Boston’s Black community. For decades, it provided social services, education, and a place for organizing. Its legacy is tied to the broader history of resilience, advocacy, and mutual aid in the South End—one of Boston’s most historically diverse neighborhoods.

Its redevelopment into a six-story residential building includes ground-floor retail, nonprofit space, and income-restricted artist housing. A restored mural honors the site’s history, reflecting the ongoing conversation about balancing growth with community preservation and affordability.

SOUTH END

SOUTH END LANDMARK DISTRICT

RESIDENTIAL MIXED-USE REDEVELOPMENT

2023



PROJECT TEAM

JGE Architecture
+ Design (Building
Design)

Bargmann Hendrie
+ Archetype, Inc.
(Technical)

Arcadis IBI Group
(Landscape Design)

New Boston
Ventures
(Developer)

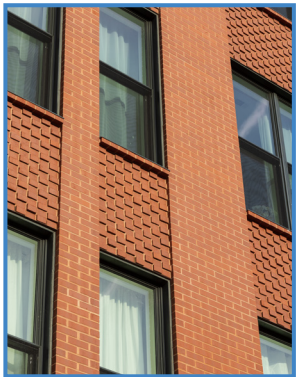
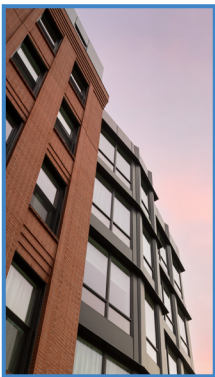
Images by Ed
Wonsek Artworks
Inc., Courtesy of JGE
Architecture + Design

DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

An in-depth analysis of the neighborhood’s history and character informed the project’s scale and massing within the South End Landmark District.

DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

Built to LEED Silver, the efficient design reduces building carbon emissions. A stormwater management feature captures, stores, and recharges rainwater from the building’s roof.



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

The public realm streetscape is activated by the social enterprise cafe with outdoor seating, while a pocket garden lines the edge of the site along the residential streetscape, providing a year-round visual amenity.

DESIGN THE DETAILS

The contemporary facade, with brick pattern and dark metal materials, complements the existing and historic design expressions of the neighborhood.

J.J. CARROLL HOUSE

With senior households projected to increase by 53% between 2010 and 2030, there is a strong commitment to reducing isolation and loneliness among older adults. The project's mission is to empower seniors to "live longer, better" by providing a model of housing that supports community living.

This 142-unit affordable housing community includes a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) Center, private resident gardens with raised beds, common space distributed throughout all floors including ground-floor with access to neighborhood retail, and an intergenerational play area.

BRIGHTON
RESIDENTIAL MIXED-USE REDEVELOPMENT
SENIOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING
2024

PROJECT TEAM

MASS Design Group (Architect Designer)

Stantec (Landscape Designer)

2Life Communities (Developer)

Boston Housing Authority

Images Courtesy of MASS Design Group



DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

The design and development team collaborated with residents to create a model for high-density housing that prioritizes connections and communal activities tailored to aging in community.



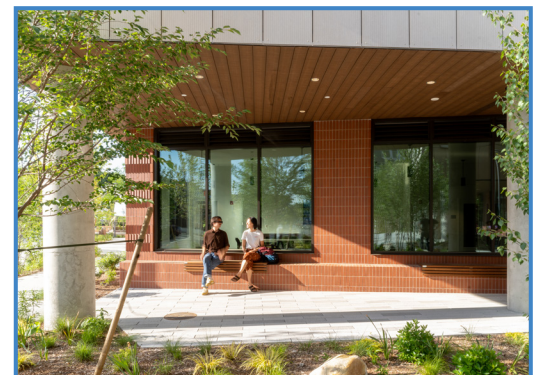
DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

Future Passive House certified, the building features well-insulated and airtight construction, efficient electric heating & cooling, and solar renewable energy to reduce carbon emissions and support Boston's Carbon Neutral 2050 commitment.



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

The building is set back from the main street, allows a new 17,000 square foot community-accessible open space, and includes an intergenerational play area design for residents and the community.



DESIGN THE DETAILS

Fiber cement siding, terracotta tiles, and decorative brickwork are utilized along the facade of the building, creating a strong, warm, and welcoming color palette.

BREMEN 282

This four to five-story multifamily residential building, featuring ground-floor retail space, is located across from Bremen Street Park and integrates seamlessly into the corner and street wall of Bremen and Brooks. The new construction includes family-sized market-rate and affordable units, along with thirteen affordable artist live-work spaces equipped with dedicated work areas.

The existing neighborhood context primarily consists of three-family residences, interspersed with various building types, including single-family homes, multifamily residences, and commercial spaces. Conceptually, the architecture of the project aims to weave these opposing conditions together by responding thoughtfully to its adjacent context.

EAST BOSTON

RESIDENTIAL MIXED-USE REDEVELOPMENT

2024

PROJECT TEAM

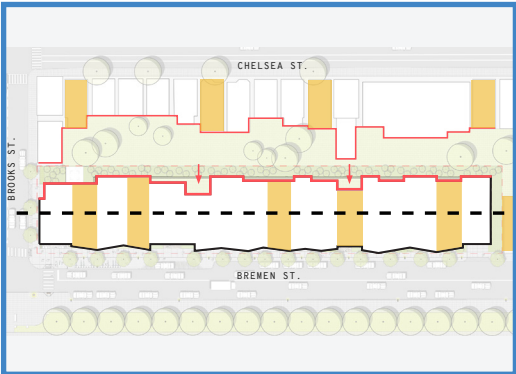
RODE Architects
(Building Designer)

OJB Landscape
Architecture
(Landscape
Designer)

Transom Real
Estate, LLC
(Developer)

282 Bremen
Development, LLC
(Developer)

Images Courtesy of
RODE Architects



DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

The building's scale is designed to break horizontally, aligning with East Boston's residential width and creating pedestrian-friendly relief along Bremen and Brooks.



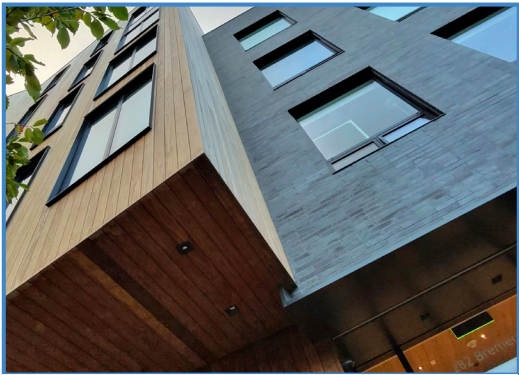
DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

Thoughtfully integrated sloped walkways, steps, and ramps elevate the first floor above the FEMA 100-year flood elevation, ensuring resilience against future storms and rising sea levels.



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

An accessible pedestrian connection and mirrored tree-lines create a cohesive and activated streetscape experience between the park and the site.



DESIGN THE DETAILS

Vertical wood plank cladding materials offer a natural texture and color, grounding the built form and linking it to the natural landscape and materials of the park across the street.

156 HIGHLAND STREET

Located in the historic Highland Park neighborhood, the building design reflects the surrounding residential architecture while quietly demonstrating next-generation green building practices. The long-vacant site was selected by the Highland Park community for redevelopment in the City's E+ Green Building Demonstration Program (environment, energy, equity positive, that's E+).

The four residential units (3 market / 1 affordable) take the form of a "Main House" with a "Carriage House" at the rear. Certified LEED Platinum, green building features include site restoration, storm-water infiltration, and healthy indoor environments. Annually, the roof-mounted solar PV arrays generate more electricity than needed and surplus electricity to the grid.

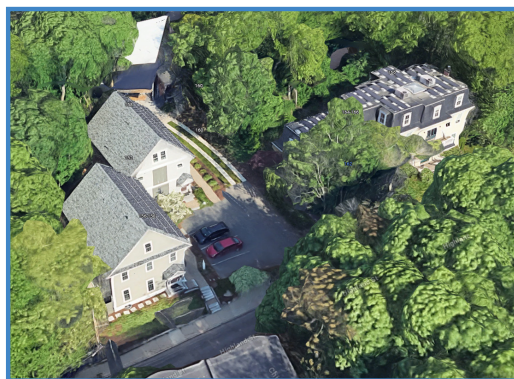
ROXBURY

HIGHLAND PARK ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT

E+ GREEN BUILDING

ZONING BOARD OF APPEAL

2020



DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

In partnership with the Highland Park community and the City, the project quietly reflects the surrounding historic residential character and fulfills the community's vision for deep green affordable housing.



DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

The LEED Platinum, highly efficient, all-electric buildings include solar PV arrays to achieve energy-positive performance and electric vehicle charging stations to eliminate vehicle carbon emissions

PROJECT TEAM

EPLUS Solutions LLC (Developer)

Sage Builders (Developer)

Nickerson Design Services (Designer)

Transformations Inc. (Landscape Designer)



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

The project proves deep green energy positive affordable homes can be built throughout Boston's neighborhoods and across the Commonwealth.



DESIGN THE DETAILS

The building's simple form, design, and durable materials deliver high-performance healthy homes without the complexity and cost usually associated with high-quality homes and buildings.

Images Courtesy of Sage Builders & Boston Planning Department

425 MEDFORD MASTER PLAN

The 25.5-acre former Domino Sugar Refinery site in Charlestown will be transformed to reconnect the neighborhood with the Mystic River waterfront, accessible for the first time since the 1950s. The plan includes residential buildings, a hotel, and lab/office space, all designed to preserve views and reflect the riverbank's natural slope.

Key community benefits include 13-acres of pedestrianized open space, a 5-acre waterfront park, resilient coastal features, year-round programming, and accessible pathways. The site offers diverse recreational spaces, integrated flood protection, and underground parking to create a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment.

CHARLESTOWN

MIXED-USE REDEVELOPMENT

UNBUILT

PROJECT TEAM

Flatley Company
(Developer)

KPF (Building
Designer)

Field Operations
(Landscape
Designer)

Images Courtesy of
Flatley Company &
Field Operations



DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

Mystic River waterfront will become accessible for the first time since the 1950s.



DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

A 5-acre resilient waterfront and 22-foot flood barrier protect over 320-acres from sea-level rise, adhering to 2070 flood-proof standards.



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

The project includes public waterfront access, a harbor walk, recreational areas, and buildings preserving waterfront views.



DESIGN THE DETAILS

The waterfront's industrial character reflects the Charlestown idiom, using various scales, brick, and dark metal, while contemporary craftsmanship is showcased in the high-performance envelope's facade depth.

Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park

PARCELS O & P

The Life Science Campus is made up of two parcels within Boston's marine park, emphasizes resilience and sustainability while integrating with the surrounding mix of industrial and traditional marine uses. Parcel O includes a new state-of-the-art, nine-story LEED Gold Certified life science and R&D building. State-of-the-art hybrid heat pump space and water heating systems deeply reduce carbon emissions.

Parcel P repurposes a former steel manufacturing warehouse into an amenity building that is all electric and Net Zero Energy! The new pedestrian-friendly streetscape adds vitality to the area and enhances the area's industrial vernacular.

SOUTH BOSTON WATERFRONT

LIFE SCIENCE CAMPUS

2024

PROJECT TEAM

Marcus Partners,
LLC (Developer)

SGA (Designers)

DREAM
Collaborative
(Designer)

Copley Wolff
Design Group
(Landscape
Designer)

Images Courtesy of
Marcus Partners,
LLC



DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

Recognizing the emerging cluster in the marine park, the design relates to the scale of current and future plans.



DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

Features adaptive reuse of a steel building at Parcel P, LEED Gold Certification, green infrastructure with native landscaping, and sea-level rise resilient design.



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Enhances public spaces with transparency, public art, a plaza for programming, a weather-protected pedestrian refuge, and improved streetscape that prioritize pedestrians and maintain waterfront access.



DESIGN THE DETAILS

Modernizes the industrial vernacular through adaptive reuse, showcasing art that blends marine and biological themes on the facade, roof, and pavement.



THE GREEN AT 401 PARK DRIVE

As the new "front yard" of the former Art Deco Sears Roebuck & Co. Building, the Green overlooks a recently restored section of Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace. The Green implements the main public benefits of a multi-phase development plan. The open area grew to nearly 25% of the property. Some 100 trees were planted.

New leisure and active recreation opportunities support the building's community-oriented, inclusive uses: a sidewalk-level food hall with office spaces above, all fostering a welcoming, dynamic urban environment. Replacing the sunken parking that separated the building from Park Drive, the Green was raised nearly four feet, resulting in unimpeded sightlines that borrow views of the park beyond.

FENWAY

**PRIVATELY OWNED
PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE
OPEN SPACE (POPS)**

**MIXED-USE
REDEVELOPMENT**

**BOSTON
LANDMARK**

2021



DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

The Green replaces obsolete parking and supports larger site development to address the need for more programmable, publicly accessible open space in the growing Fenway neighborhood.



DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

The stormwater management systems—perimeter bioswale, recharge system beneath the permeable surfaces—ensure that runoff infiltrates and replenishes groundwater.

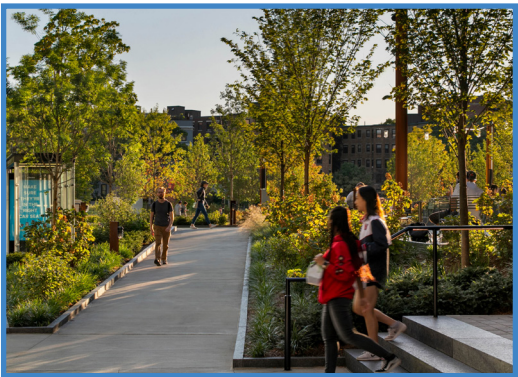
PROJECT TEAM

LeBlanc Jones
Landscape
Architects
(Landscape
Designer)

Elkus Manfredi
Architects (Building
Designer)

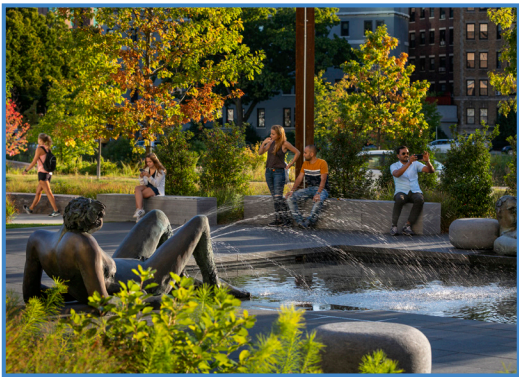
Samuels &
Associates
Development, LLC
(Developer)

*Images Courtesy
of LeBlanc Jones
Landscape Architects*



DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

The promenade anchors pedestrian routes that rationalize circulation within and across the site with key walkways connecting to the transit station and seamless accessibility.



DESIGN THE DETAILS

Native, specimen trees, underplanting, and monolithic granite blocks contribute to the character of the space along with views toward an interactive water public art installation for respite.

BOSTON FOOD FORESTS

The Boston Food Forest Coalition and community members assert that community resilience is essential for climate resilience. They advocate for protecting vacant parcels in underserved neighborhoods to enhance quality of life and promote Green Space Equity.

Stewarded by volunteers within the coalition's community land trust, these spaces increase resilience against rising temperatures, offer programming and events, build community capacity, and enhance food autonomy through gardening and ecosystem education, while diversifying climate leadership.

CITYWIDE

OPEN SPACE

PROJECT TEAM

Boston Food Forest Coalition

Images Courtesy of
Boston Food Forest
Coalition



Ellington Street Community Food Forest, Dorchester

DESIGN FROM UNDERSTANDING

Acknowledges the cultural connection to food and self-reliance, addressing issues of vacant parcel development, inequitable development, and limited access to open space.



Edgewater Food Forest, Mattapan

DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

Incorporates biodiverse planting and permeable surfaces to reduce carbon footprints and mitigate heat island effects, enhancing resilience against heat and climate impacts.



Hope Garden, Fields Corner Dorchester

DESIGN BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Activates parcel edges with edible plantings and welcoming signage year-round to encourage the community to enter and continue harvesting or enjoying other features.



Hope Garden, Fields Corner Dorchester

DESIGN THE DETAILS

Food forests are designed and tailored to site-specific conditions that allow residents to engage in maintenance responsibilities.



DESIGN IDEAS



DESIGN IDEAS

The Design Vision affirms the diverse character of buildings and outdoor spaces in Boston.

It builds on the existing work of the various departments currently planning and designing for the future of Boston, from the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) Guidebook to tactical street and public realm interventions to the Squares + Streets initiatives.

Through character analysis of Boston's neighborhoods, and engaging with community residents, City staff and leadership, and professional developers and designers in design dialogue, we identified place-specific opportunities in which the Design Vision principles can contribute to good design outcomes.

As precursors, these ideas will inform future design guidelines for housing, retail signage, and more. For now, they serve as inspiration for how we can reimagine our neighborhoods.

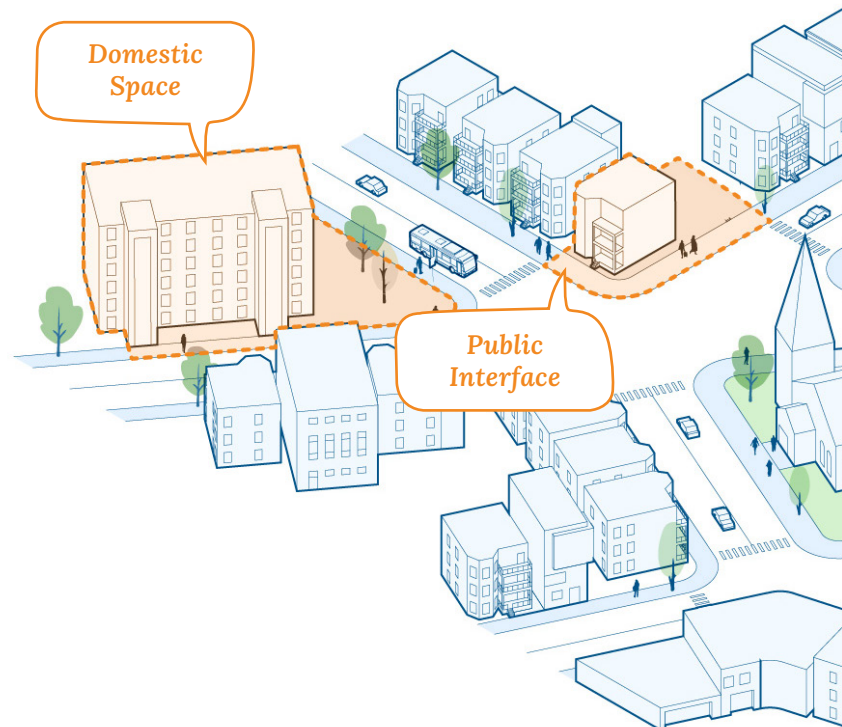
DOMESTIC SPACE

What are the housing types and community structures that support Boston's diverse cultures and families?

PUBLIC INTERFACE

What building elements enhance the social fabric of neighborhoods?

HOUSING



HUMAN-SCALED STREET WALL & RHYTHM

How might care in detailing the ground floors of buildings convey variety and interests?

RETAIL DIVERSITY

How might diverse spaces or retail models support community resources and enable the preservation of legacy businesses?

NEIGHBORHOOD MAIN STREETS



SPACES BETWEEN BUILDINGS

STREETS FOR PEOPLE

How might the way people use streets as places for gathering expand how we think of streets and programming?

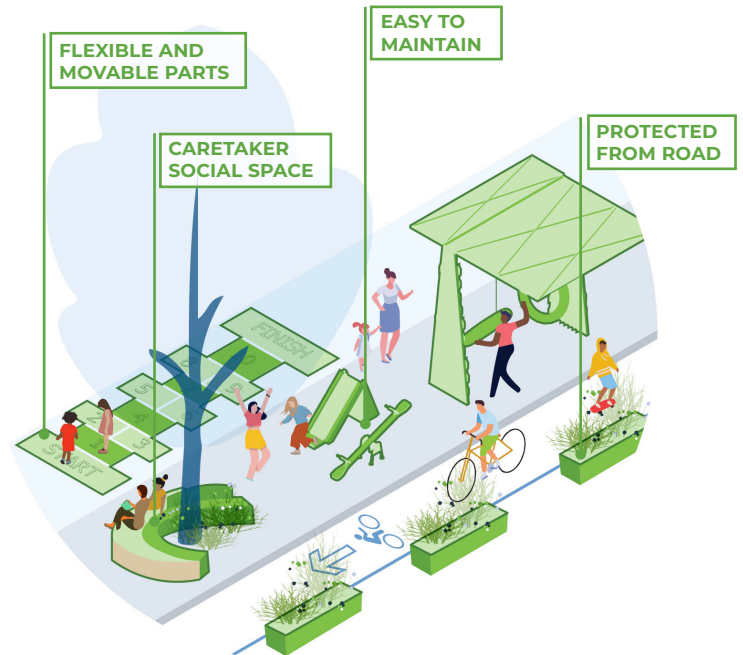
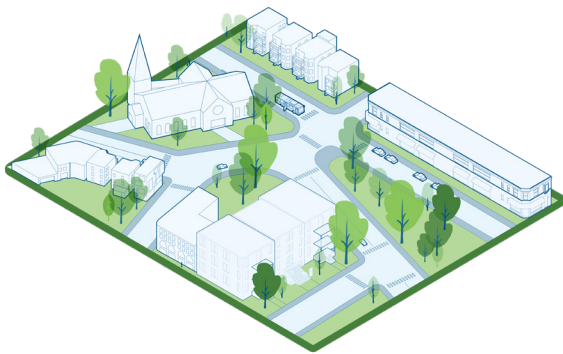
PARKS FOR ALL

How might culture inform park programming to be more welcoming and accessible?



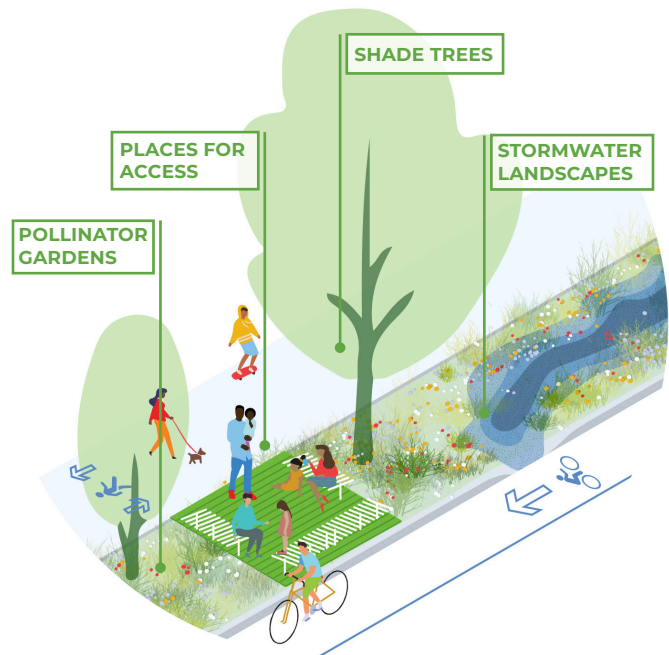
STREETS FOR PEOPLE

Our streets and public spaces play a critical role in shaping the community, offering unique and needed everyday infrastructure and serving as an opportunity to promote environmental and physical health.



PLAY STREET

Expand youth and family-friendly programming. Create opportunities to reimagine streets for play, care-giving, and joy.

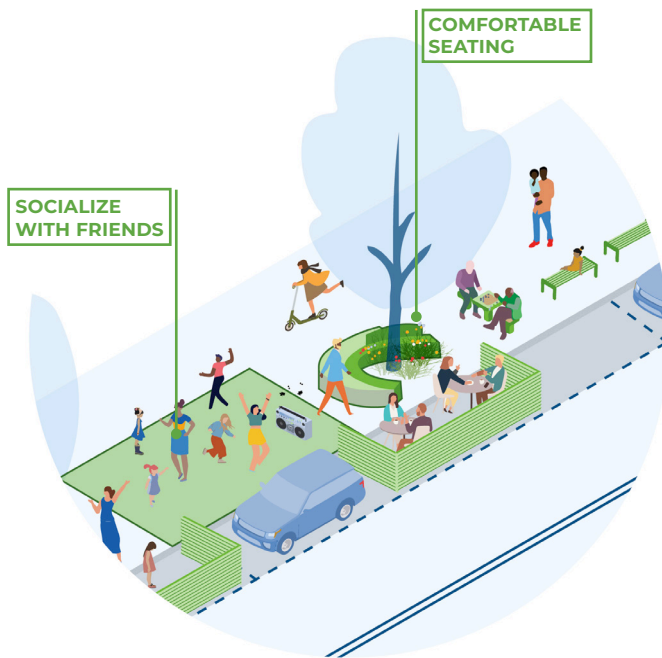


GREEN STREET

Keep streets cool and comfortable with biodiverse planting and green infrastructure. Incorporating trees and perennials to shape the ecological function of our streets.

“What makes a street welcoming—textured transitions, shoulder zones, degrees of enclosure, night lighting, flexible seating, wider pathways, rhythm, visual cues.”

Alexa Vaughn
Deaf Landscape Designer &
Accessibility Specialist



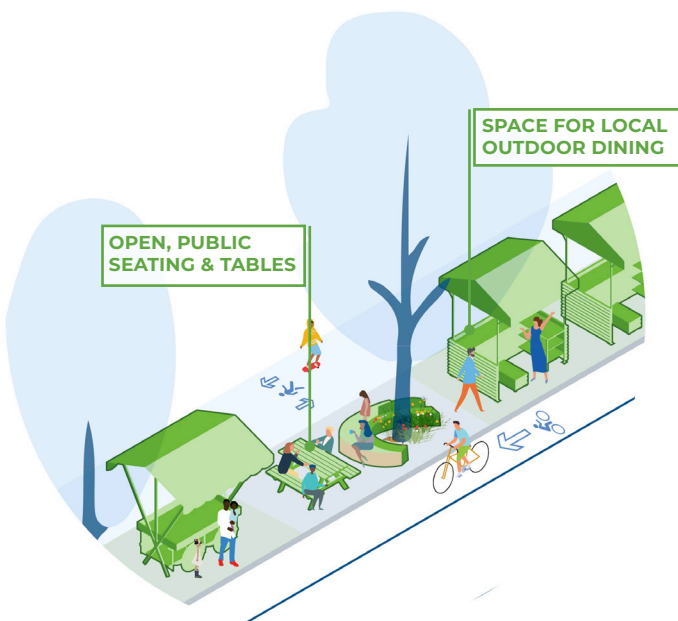
CHILL STREET

Create welcoming places where one lingers. This is an opportunity to imagine our streets as an extension of our social spaces, where neighbors come together and share ideas.



HEALTHY STREET

Enable our streets to serve double-duty functions, by providing more opportunities for health and wellness.



COMMERCE STREET

Allow street markets and ground floor retail to spill out beyond brick-and-mortar. Commerce streets imagines more infrastructure that enables flexible activation and seating areas that support retail and commerce.



OPEN STREET

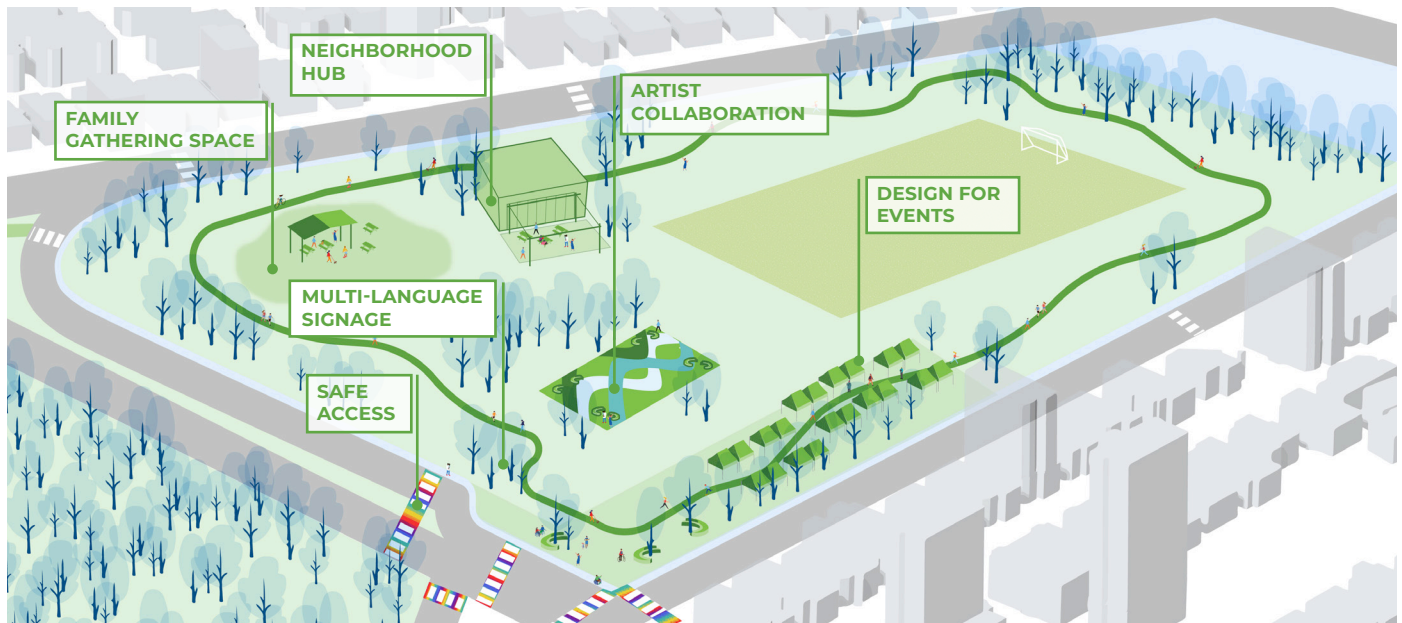
Build on the success of the Open Streets Program, expanding temporary street closures to help generate new appreciation for places that are often seen as places for cars.



PARKS FOR ALL

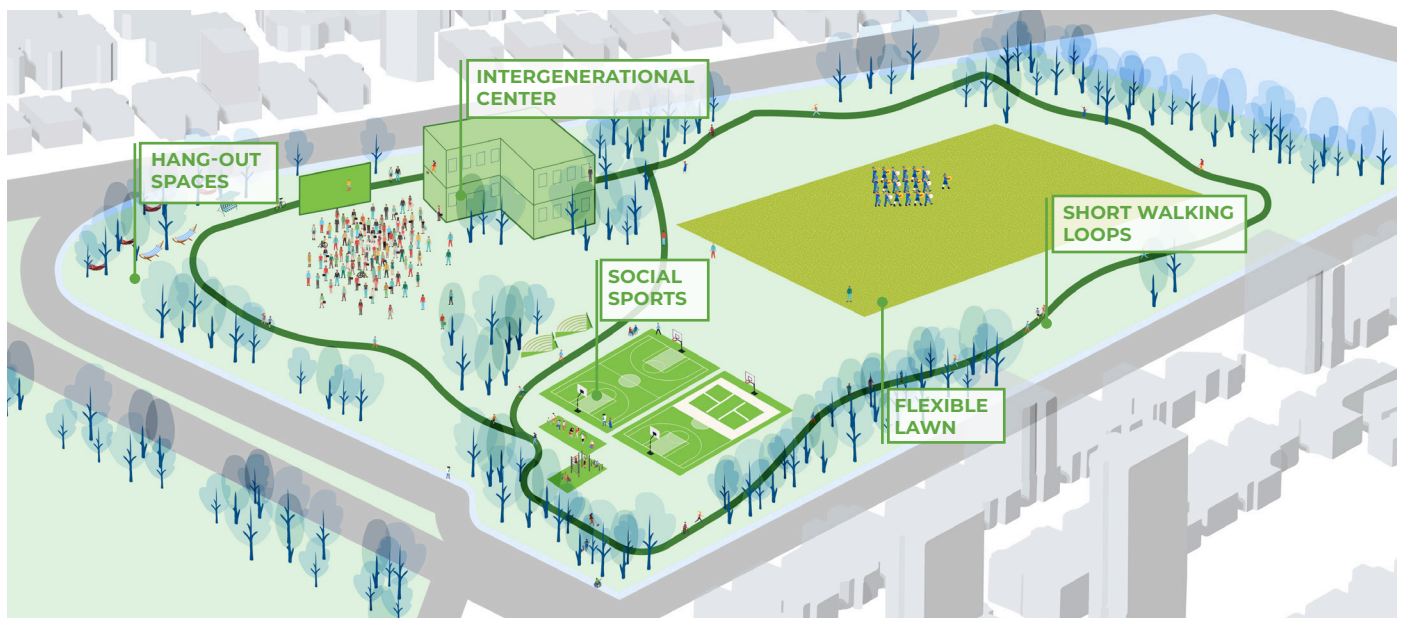
WELCOMING, SAFE, AND INCLUSIVE

Make parks and open spaces more accessible and welcoming to everyone through design that removes barriers, reflects community, and expands access.



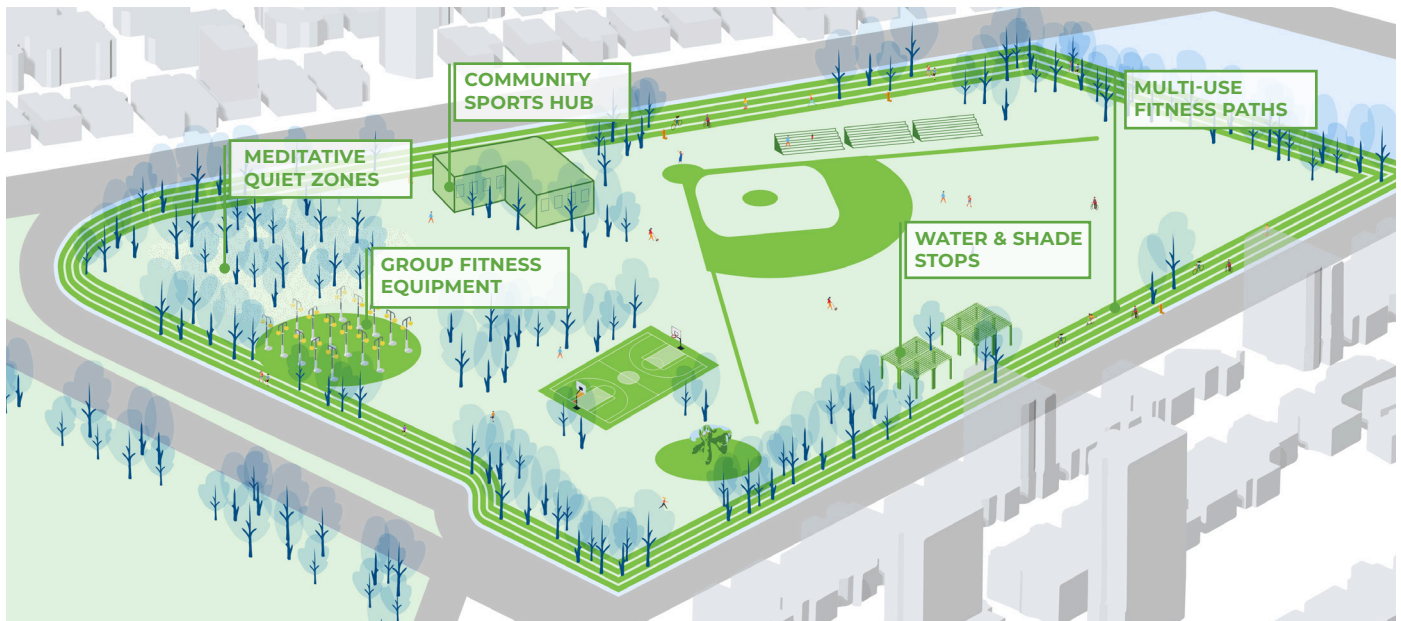
YOUNG TO OLD

Provide messaging, programming, and amenities that support play of all ages and abilities. Co-locate facilities that enable cross-pollination of ideas and make space for vulnerable populations.



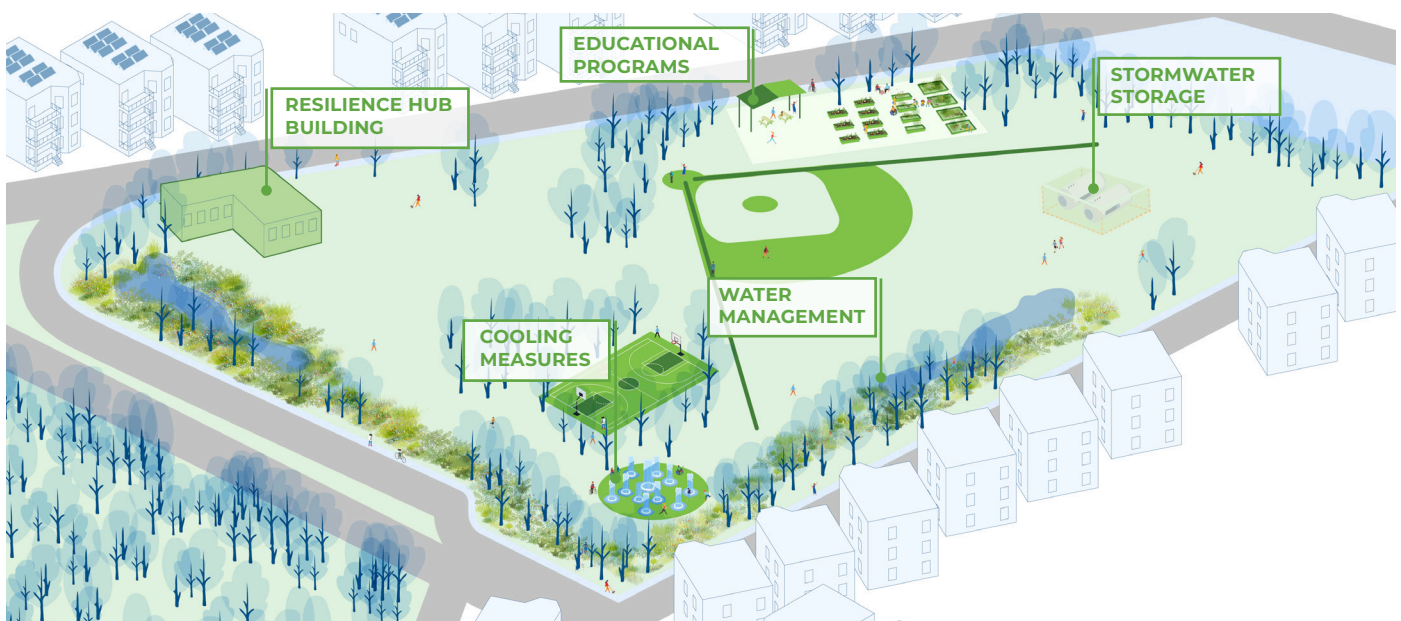
HEALTH & WELLNESS

Grow the health and wellness benefits of parks and open spaces with a particular emphasis on mental health.



CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Diversify and adapt Boston's parks and open spaces to the city's changing climate by including coastal flooding and heat resilience strategies.

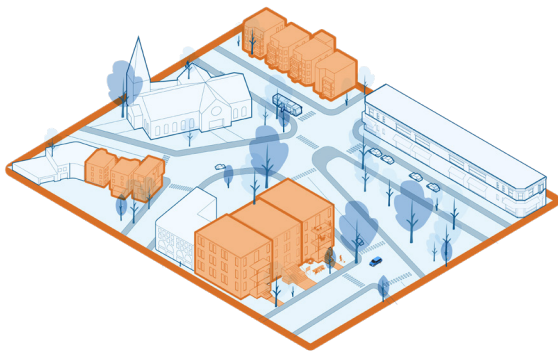




DOMESTIC SPACE

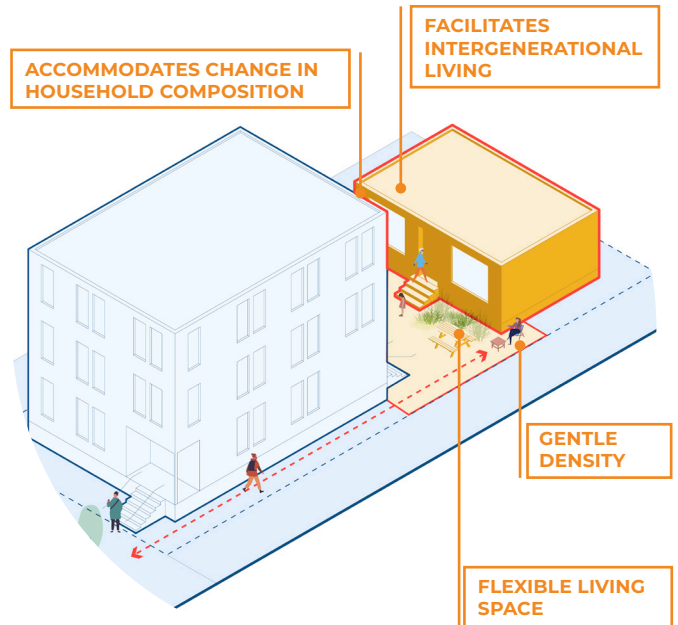
The city is currently in a housing crisis. The opportunity to innovate and create equitable, accessible, place-specific, and human-centric domestic spaces is now.

Across Boston, home is as much about the cultural practices of gathering, family, wellbeing, and joy as it is about the physical qualities of a place. An inclusive Design Vision starts with an understanding of how diverse Bostonians use domestic space.



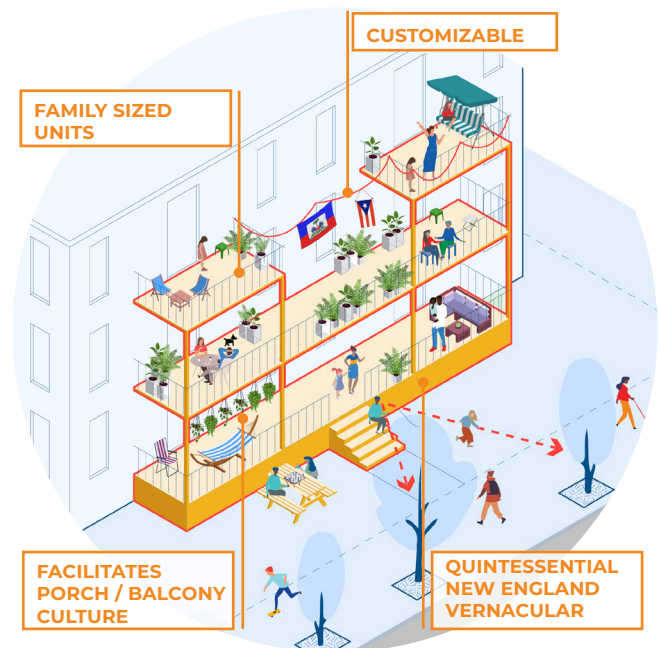
“Glass in a cityscape lacks personality and warmth. History has to be taken into consideration—materials make places accessible to certain people or not.”

Imari Paris Jeffries
President & CEO of Embrace Boston



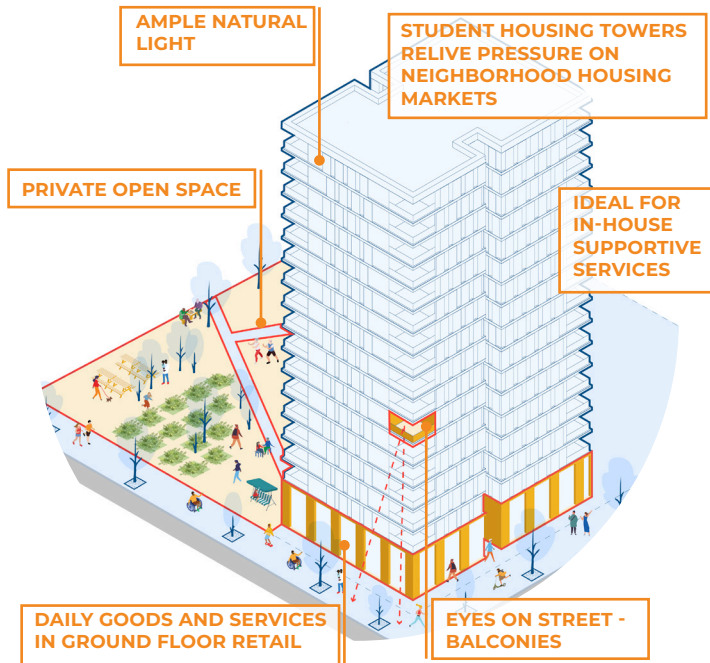
ACCESSORY DWELLINGS UNITS (ADUs)

Flexible housing type that supports intergenerational living, wealth building opportunities, and affordable housing options that strengthen community diversity and connections across all kinds of households.



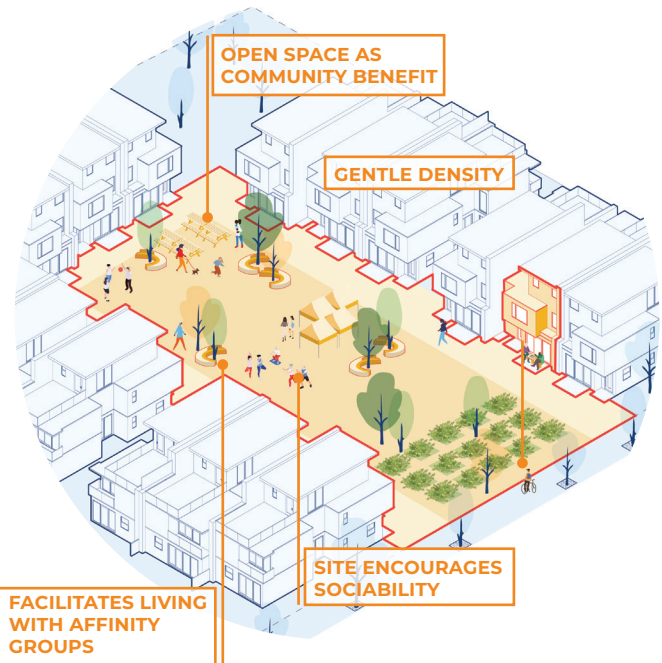
PLEX HOUSING

Duplex to triple-decker to quadplex, offers more space for larger households and elements that facilitate porch culture and self-expression.



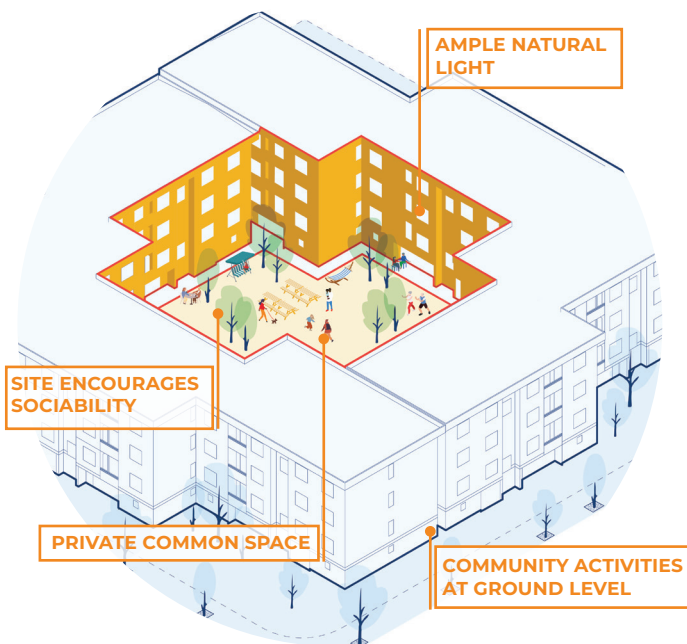
HIGH-DENSITY HOUSING

High-density housing can support a large number of units with shared facilities. This model tends to support supportive housing and senior living.



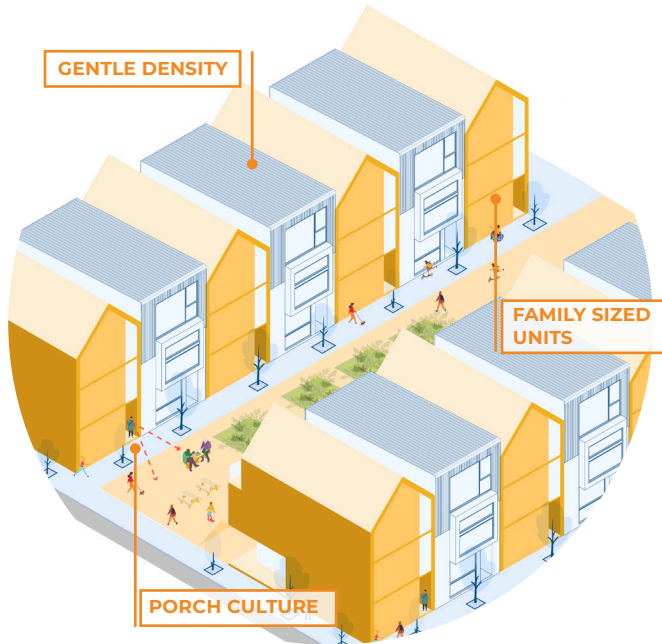
GARDEN COURT

Semi-private open space that facilitates social connection between residents.



COURTYARD BLOCK

Private common spaces that facilitate community activities and social connections among residents.



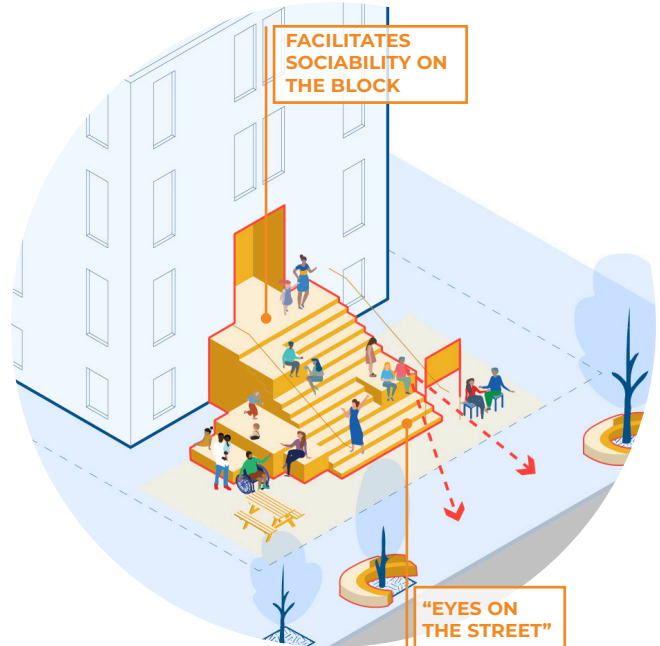
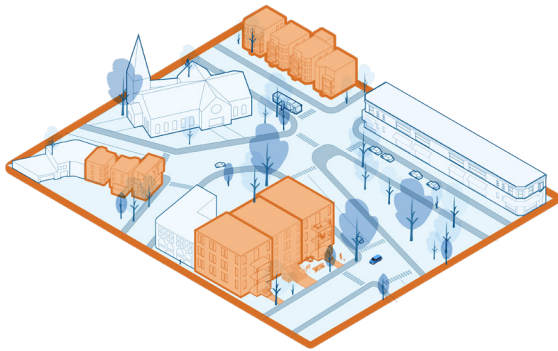
ROW HOUSE MEWS

Gentle density that provides more housing while respecting the scale of the neighborhood.



PUBLIC INTERFACE

The home does not end at its walls. Exterior spaces are also critical to domestic life, and so too are the spaces where private life interfaces with the public realm.



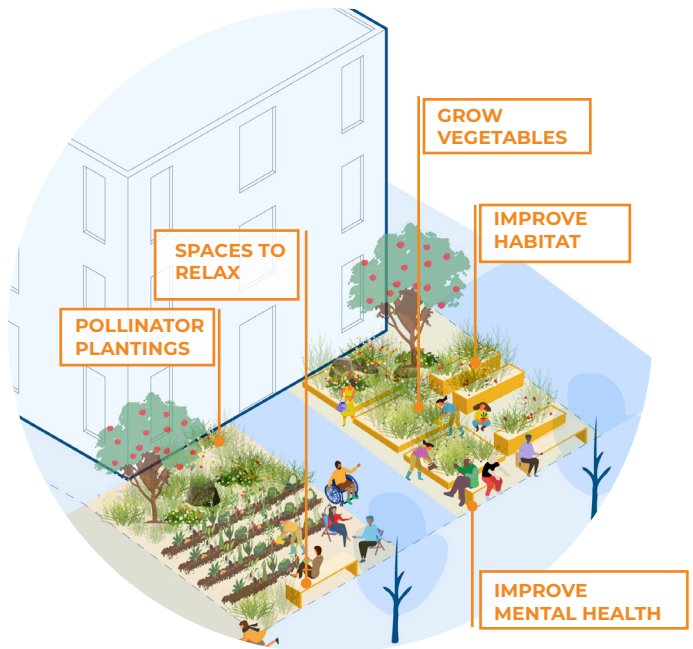
STOOPS AND PORCHES

Facilitate porch culture and people-watch with accessible stoops and porches.



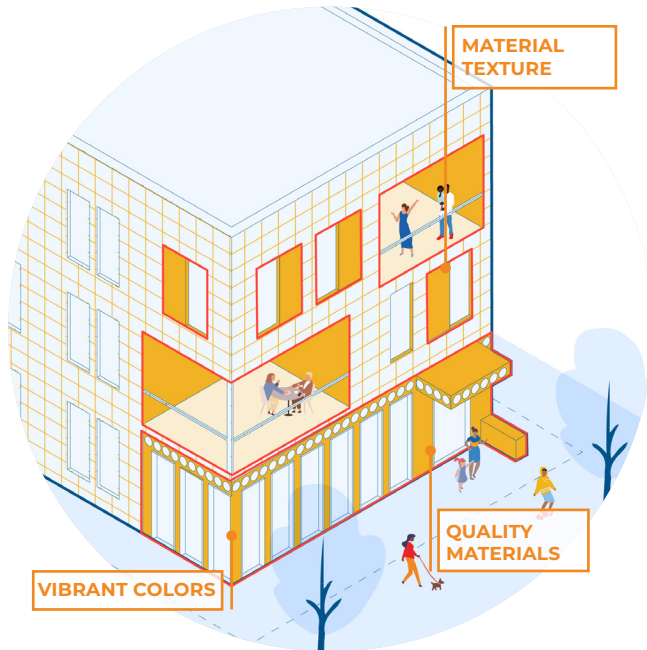
BALCONIES

Extend living spaces outdoors to encourage self-expression.



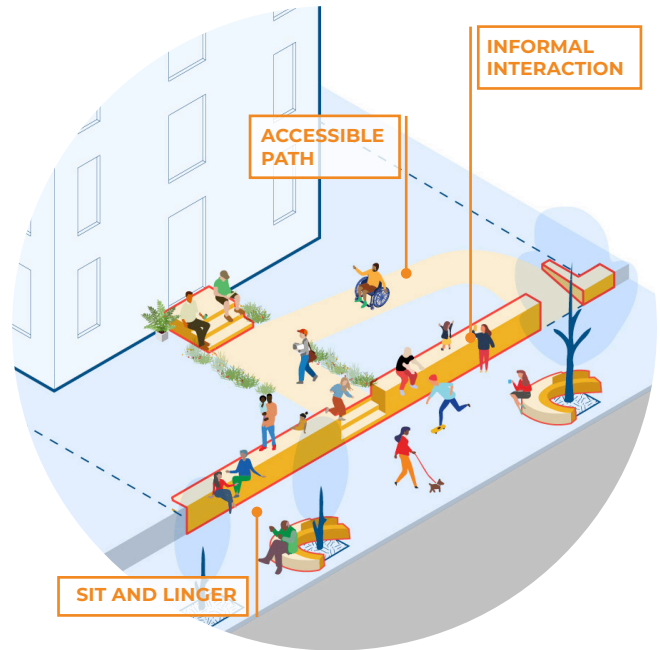
GARDENS

Grow culturally significant produce and improve mental health with community and victory gardens. Gardens also support local ecosystems through biodiversity.



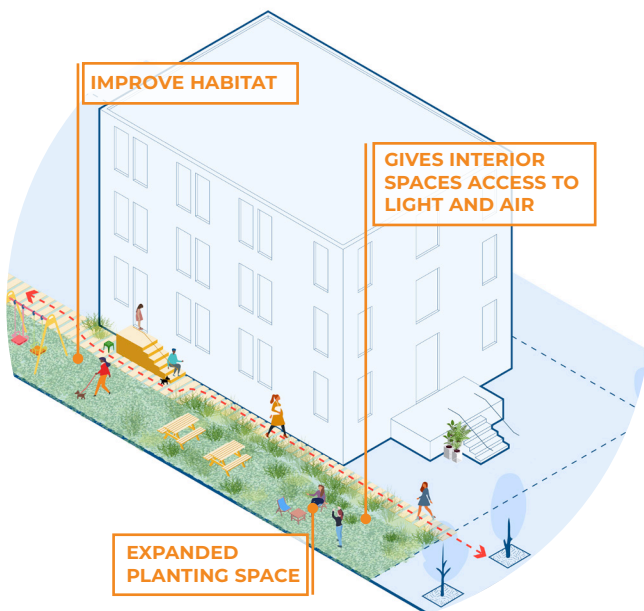
COLOR AND MOTIF

Use materials, colors, textures, or patterns as an expression of identity and connection to place, emphasizing durable materials, especially at the moments where people interface.



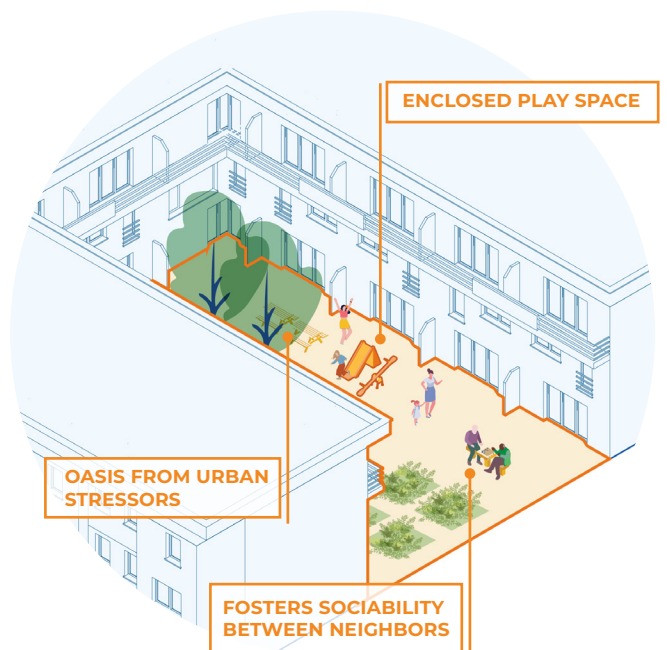
LEDGES

Places to sit or rest are a common part of Boston's design, often built into changes in the ground level.



SIDE YARD

Shared open space and neighborhood cut-throughs are important for moving through the neighborhood.



PRIVATE COMMON SPACES

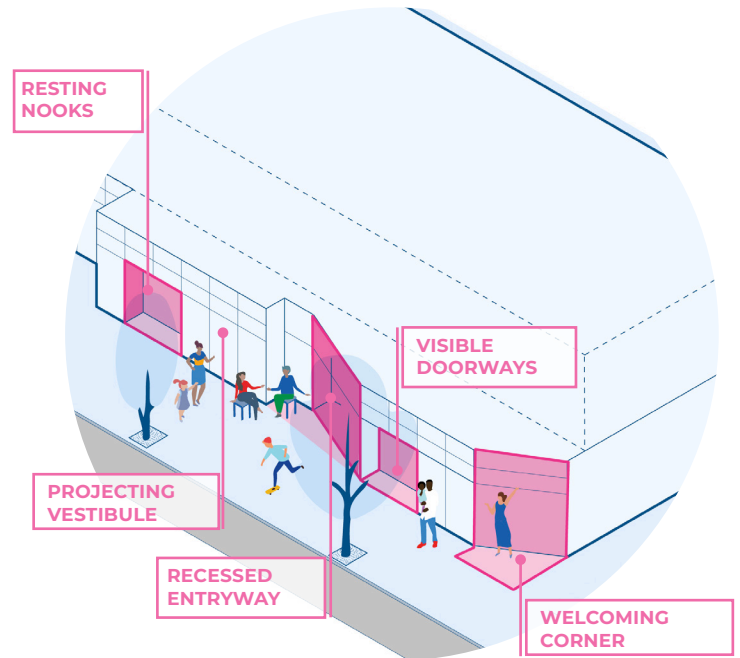
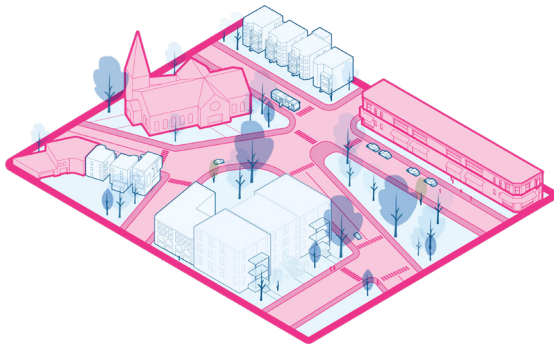
Creating a shared sense of place among neighbors and building community with neighbors.



HUMAN-SCALED STREET WALL & RHYTHM AND RETAIL DIVERSITY

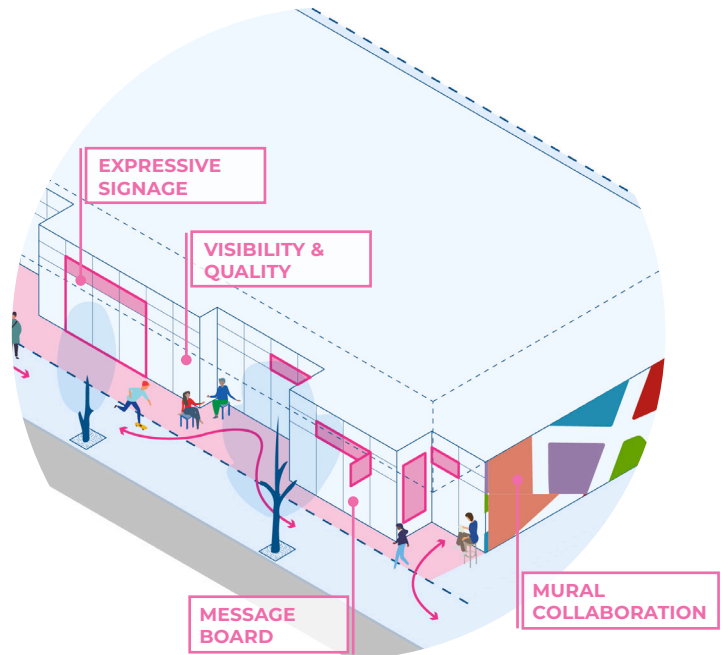
Boston's squares and main streets are historic centers of commerce that have a hold on Bostonians' hearts.

Understanding the historical layering of the place, the scale, the diversity of businesses, and the vibe of these places are key to their long-term sustainability.



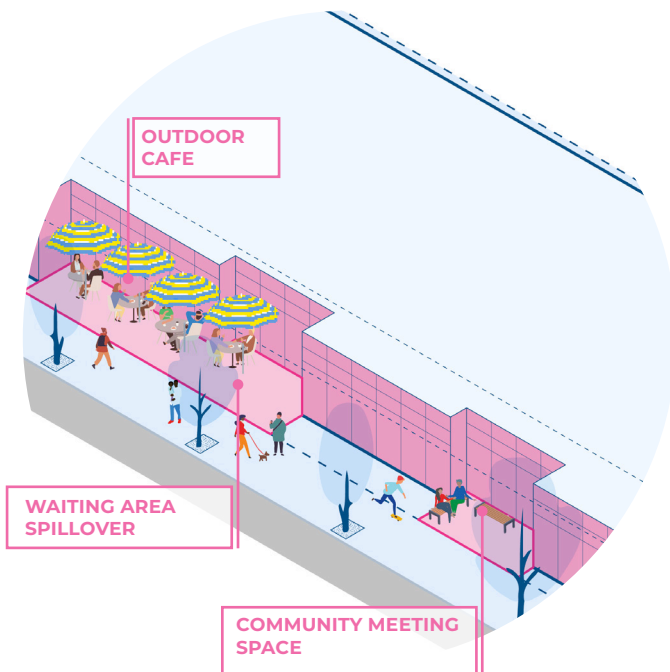
FINE-GRAINED STOREFRONTS

Design building facades to convey a sense of variety and texture.



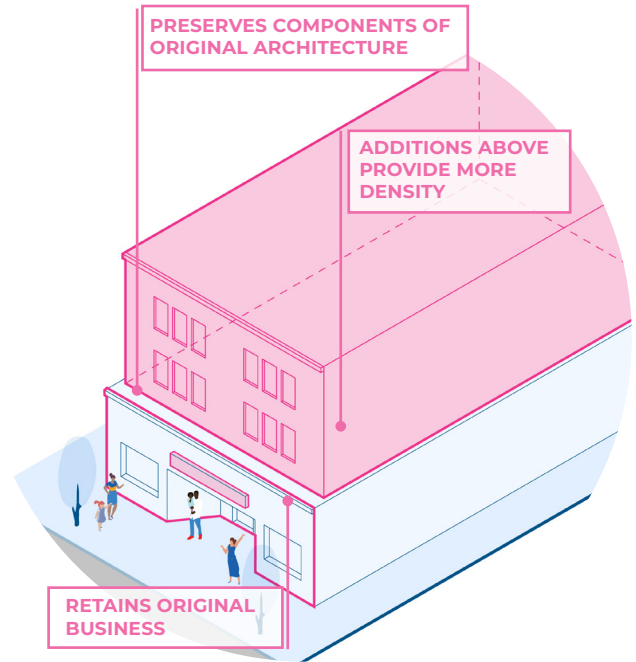
CARE IN DETAILING

Leverage expression and public art to create a sense of place.



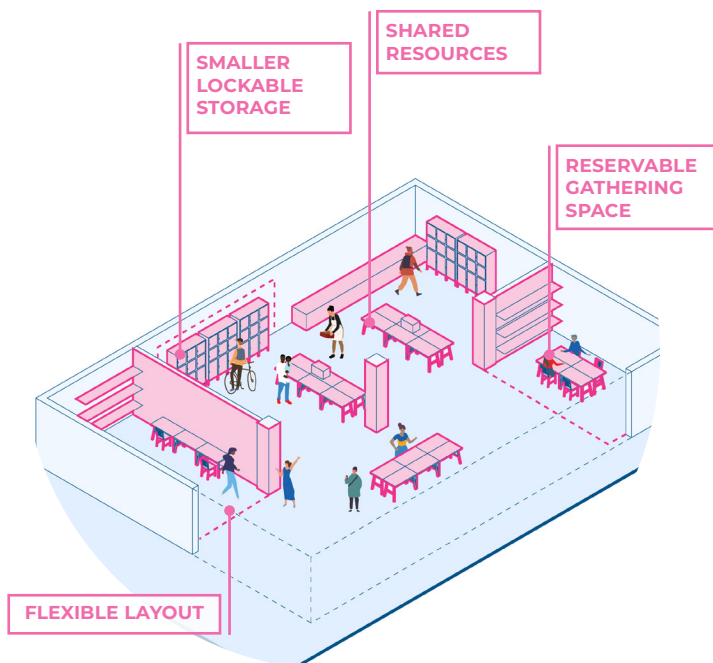
INSIDE/OUTSIDE

Align storefront activity with the placement and design of windows and openings in the building.



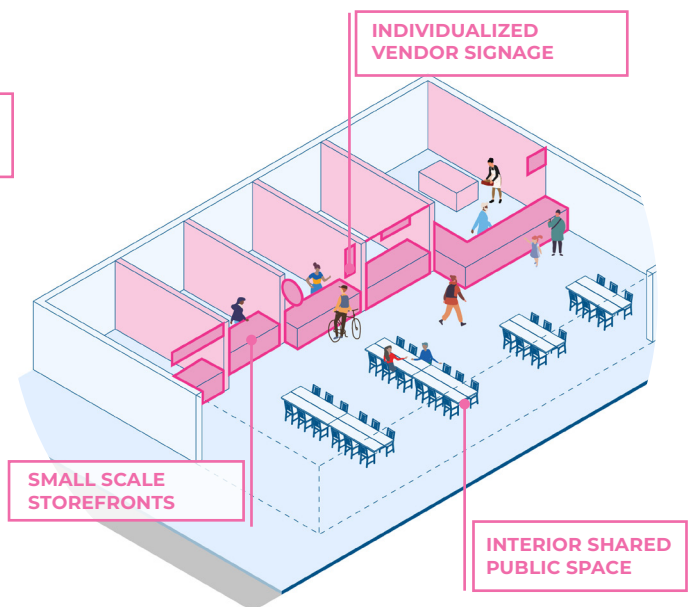
RESTORING HOUSING ABOVE

Enhance development with the quality restoration of housing above existing retail to incentivize preservation and discourage displacement.



COLLECTIVE RESOURCES

Co-locate community resources along main streets.



MULTI-VENDOR SPACES

Build flexible retail floor plates to allow for modular vendor spaces for diverse, local, and small businesses and services.



WHAT'S NEXT



WHAT'S NEXT

The Design Vision's five year roadmap consists of policy, process, and project recommendations aimed at advancing the principles and ideas identified in the plan.

Implementation will be grounded in:

PEOPLE

The City staff and leadership, developers, designers, advocates, residents, and other stakeholders who want to make our built environment better.

POLICY

The ecosystem of local and state policies that govern Boston's urban form.

PROCESS

The processes through which these policies are executed.

PROJECT

The physical actions that can give form to policy and process reforms.

ROADMAP

The recommendations include short-term and mid-term efforts that will be set on a five year cycle.

This means that every five years, a process of reflection, evaluation, and planning will take place to refine initiatives, gauge progress, and set priorities for the next five years.

Progress will be dependent on the capacity and participation of City staff and leadership, community residents, developers, and designers.

These carefully selected recommendations reflect what was heard during the engagement process, leverage existing efforts to transform the built environment, and advance ideas from past city-making efforts.

PARADIGM SHIFT

To achieve a heterogeneous, diverse city, we acknowledge the need for a paradigm shift to introduce design thinking into the core functions of the city government and the built environment.

The relationship between people and place is deeply connected to the identity, health, and vibrancy of our city.

This paradigm shift presents an opportunity to enhance how design is done by shifting the status quo. Prioritizing the adaption of spaces to people and communicating what we value as a city, which is making Boston a home for everyone.

Some of this work is already underway. New tools are being developed to better serve members of the public and professionals engaged in planning and design work around Boston.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We see the recommendations to be of the most value to the following groups:

Community Members

- Peoples Planning & Design Academy
- Urban Design Glossary
- Neighborhood Character Analysis

Developers and Designers

- Design Principles
- Design Guidelines
- Neighborhood Character Analysis

City Staff and Leadership

- Design Review Process Reform
- Neighborhood Character Analysis
- Database of Community and Cultural Assets
- Case Study Research

2025  2030

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Key design priorities for development projects undergoing Article 80 review.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS REFORM

Reforming the design review process to provide more predictable and constructive design feedback.

DATABASE OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL ASSETS

A database to capture the landscape of assets valued by Boston's communities including privately-owned public art and important community buildings and places.

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Case study research to evaluate the impact and value of approved and constructed projects on diverse communities', quality of life.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER ANALYSIS

An analysis tool and process guidance for developers, designers, planners, and community members can develop better understanding of key defining elements of place.

URBAN DESIGN GLOSSARY

A handout that you, the community member, can take with you to your next public meeting. Language is power!

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Guidelines on designing of built environment elements such as buildings, streets, and open spaces to reflect diverse community needs and enhance quality of life.

PEOPLES PLANNING & DESIGN ACADEMY

An academy to empower Bostonians to take a more effective and active role in shaping the future of their neighborhoods.

KEY

-  PROJECT
-  POLICY
-  PROCESS



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Design Vision is a result of a collaborative, engaged dialogue with Boston residents, advocates, youth, City staff, design practitioners, and developers. This effort would not be possible without their generous contributions of time and insight.

Special thanks to the designers, developers, and community advocates who shared their experiences and ideas at our focus group, your input has been valuable in helping us refine the possibilities for shaping our city's future.

BPDA BOARD

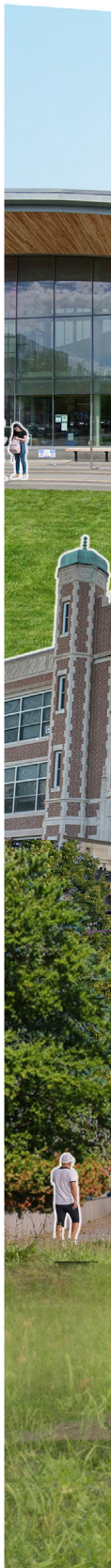
- Priscilla Rojas
Chair
- Kate Bennett
Member
- Dr. Ted Landmark
Member
- Matt O'Malley
Member
- Raheem Shepard
Member

PLANNING DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP

- | | |
|---|--|
| Devin Quirk
Deputy Chief of the Planning Department | Alvaro Lima
Director of Research |
| Teresa Polhemus
Executive Director/Secretary | Luis R. Frias II
Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion |
| Prataap Patrose
Senior Advisor to the Chief | Casey Hines
Senior Deputy Director of Development Review |
| Katharine Lusk
Executive Director of the Planning Advisory Council | Nupoor Monani
Senior Deputy Director of Development Review |
| Lacey Rose
Chief Communications Officer | Rebecca Hansen
Director of Real Estate |
| Aimee Chambers
Planning & Zoning Director | |

PLANNING DEPARTMENT STAFF

- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Seth Riseman | Marin Braco | Yingu Pan | Justin Liu |
| Jill Zick | Jeong-Jun Ju | Kathleen Onufer | Olivia Rouse |
| Alexa Pinard | Isabella Frontado | Kristiana Lachiusa | Jessica Mirr |
| Kristina Ricco | Amber Galko | Mark McGonagle | |
| Elizabeth Turac | Andrew Nahmias | James Fitzgerald | |
| Scott Slarsky | Eva Jermyn | Caroline Vanasse | |
| Te-Ming Chang | Hernan Schlosman | Brittany Comak | |
| Sneha Lohotekar | Jay Lee | Stephanie Johnson | |
| Sam Valentine | John Dalzell | Alla Ziskin | |
| Meghan Richard | Jonathan Palazzolo | Delaney Almond | |





FORMER CITY STAFF TEAM MEMBERS

Elizabeth A. Stifel
Adriana Lasso-Harrier
Michael Cannizzo
Michael Christopher
Emily Wieja
Anita Morson-Matra
Jacob Wessel
Rev. Mariama White-Hammond
Murray Miller
Rosanne Foley
Para Jayasinghe

FORMER CONSULTANT TEAM MEMBERS

Annie Streetman
Devandra Dugad

