



# Groundwater Conservation Overlay District (GCOD) Updates

August 19th, 2025



Planning Department

**CITY of BOSTON**



# ZOOM CONTROLS TO LISTEN TO INTERPRETERS

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**(EN)** Look for the interpretation icon (**globe**) at the bottom of your screen and select the language you want to hear.

**(Español)** Busque el ícono de la interpretación (**globo**) en el borde inferior de su pantalla y seleccione el idioma en el que desea escuchar.

**(简体中文)** 查找屏幕底部的翻译图标(**地球仪**)，然后选择您想听到的语言。

**(繁體中文)** 查找屏幕底部的翻譯圖標(**地球儀**)，然後選擇您想听到的語言。

# ZOOM MEETING INFO + TIPS

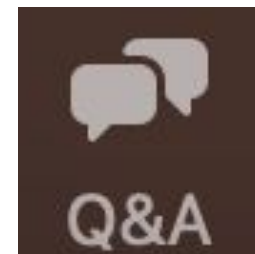
- **The Planning Department will be recording this meeting** and posting it on the Planning Department's project webpage. If you do not wish to be recorded during the meeting, please turn off your microphone and camera.
- **Use raise hand function** (dial \*9 if joining by phone) **and wait to be called upon to unmute** (dial \*6 if joining by phone) before asking your question or providing comment.
- **Zoom controls are available at the bottom of your screen.** Clicking on these symbols activates different features.



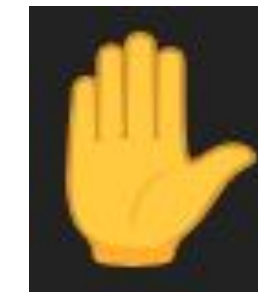
Mute/unmute



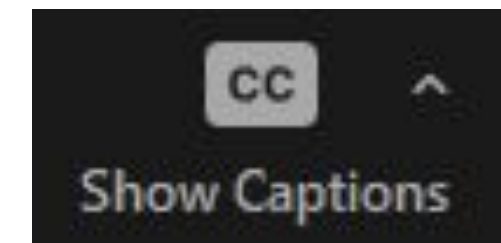
Turn video on/off



Use the Q&A feature for written questions and comments (instead of the chat)



Raise hand to get in line to ask a question or provide comment



Turn on captions





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## 1 WHAT IS GCOD?

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# WHAT IS GCOD?

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# HISTORIC CONTEXT

Some parts of Boston include filled land that was previously underwater.

- Many buildings constructed on top of this fill were constructed on top of wood piles
- The majority of buildings erected on filled land prior to the 20th century rest upon these wood piles





# HISTORIC CONTEXT

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**Wood Piles supporting a row house capped by a granite block.**

- Wood piles were strategically driven through the filled land and the underlying organic silt layer, usually located 15 to 25 feet beneath the current ground surface
- A typical row house usually has a few hundred piles supporting the building
- Larger structures, like Trinity Church in the Back Bay can be supported on thousands of wood piles



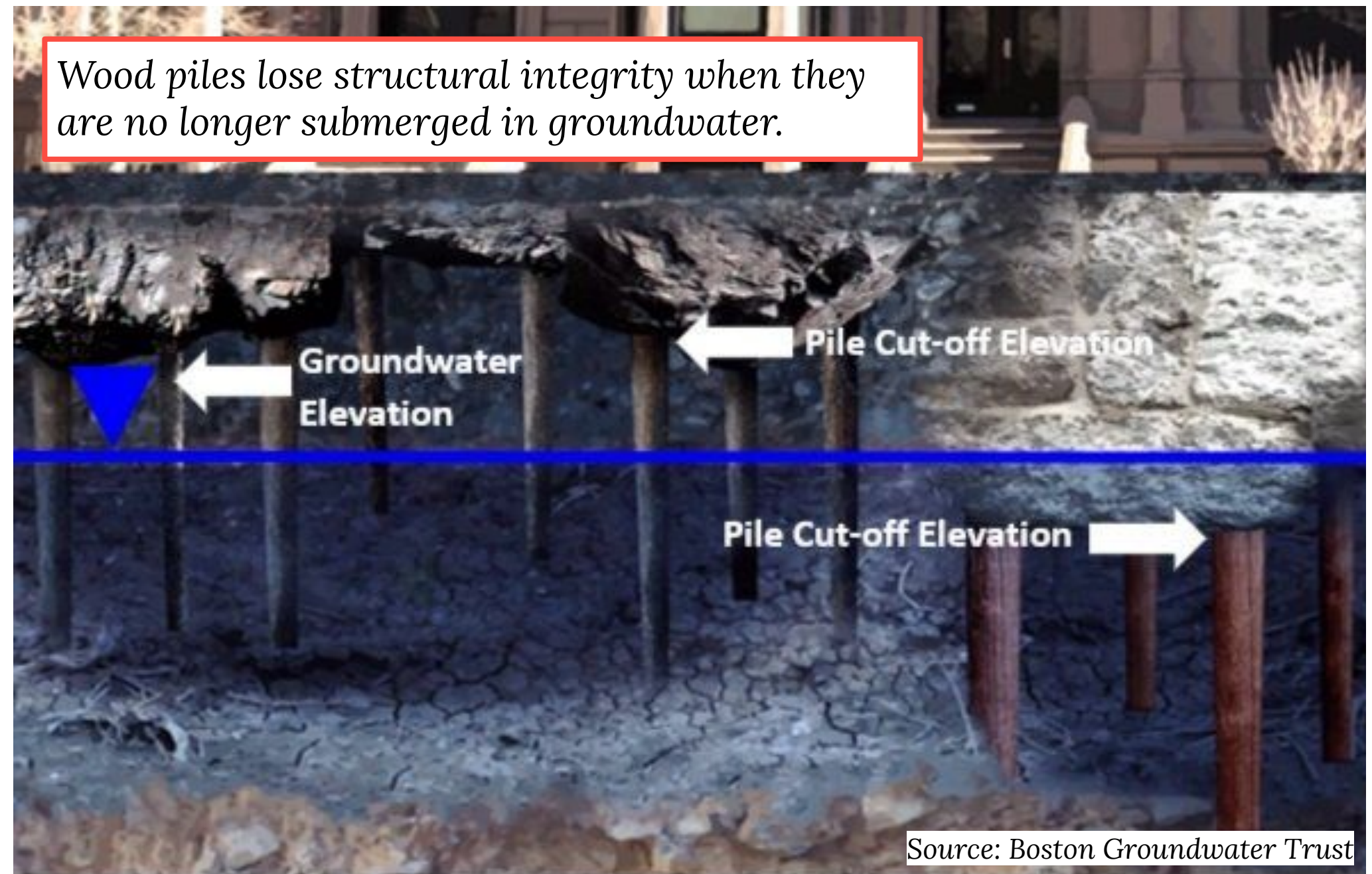
Source: Boston Groundwater Trust



# GROUNDWATER CONSERVATION OVERLAY DISTRICT (GCOD)

GCOD seeks to prevent deterioration of and promote the restoration of groundwater levels in the filled land areas of Boston.

- Mapped in filled land areas where there could be wood pile foundations
- Reduces surface water runoff and water pollution
- Protects value and structural integrity of land and buildings
- Recharge systems are designed and installed to effectively facilitate water infiltration into the ground

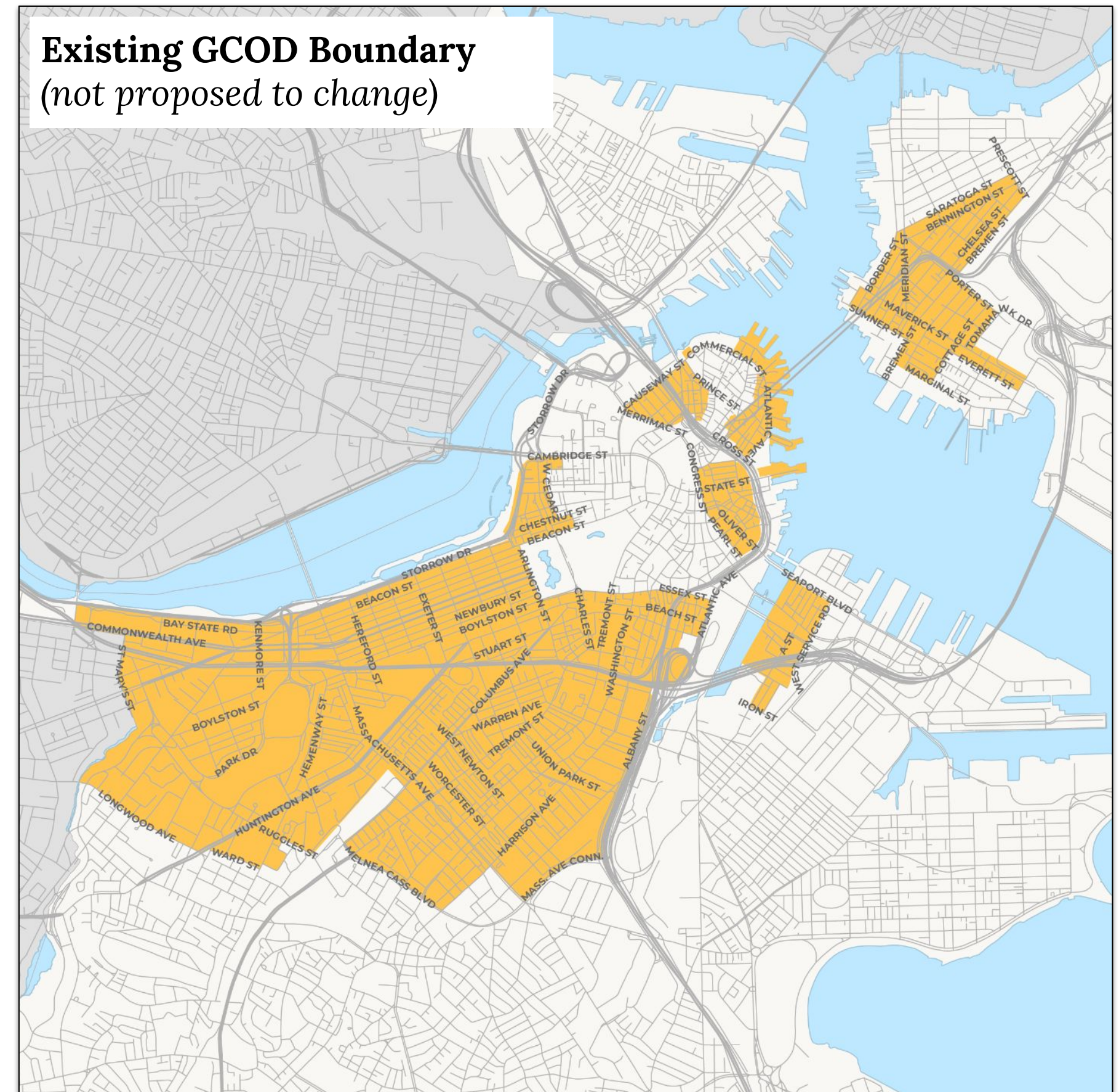




# ARTICLE 32 - GCOD

Article 32 in the Zoning Code governs regulations around GCOD.

- Only some kinds of proposed projects are subject to the regulations
- Applicable projects need to:
  - Incorporate groundwater recharge system that captures water on the site
  - Certify no negative impact on groundwater levels
- Applicable projects require approvals from:
  - Boston Water & Sewer Commission (BWSC)
  - Boston Groundwater Trust (BGwT)
  - Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)





# APPLICABLE PROJECTS



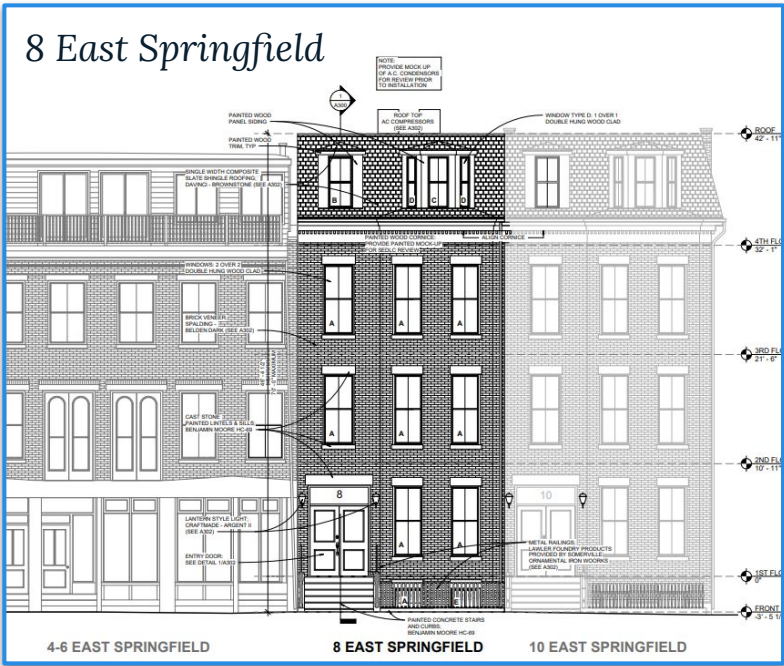
## 1 Dig Down

Erection or extension of any structure that requires excavation below 8 feet Boston City Base.



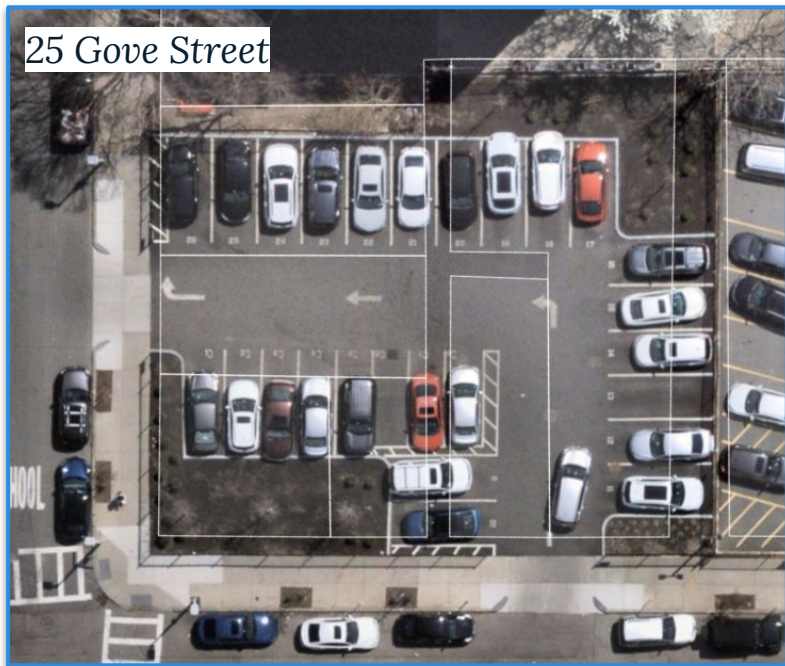
## 2 Lot Coverage

Erection or extension of any structure where the lot coverage increases by more than 50 square feet.



## 3 Paving

Any new paving or replacement paving of an existing paved surface.



## 4 Substantial Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation of a structure that costs more than 50% of the physical value of the structure.



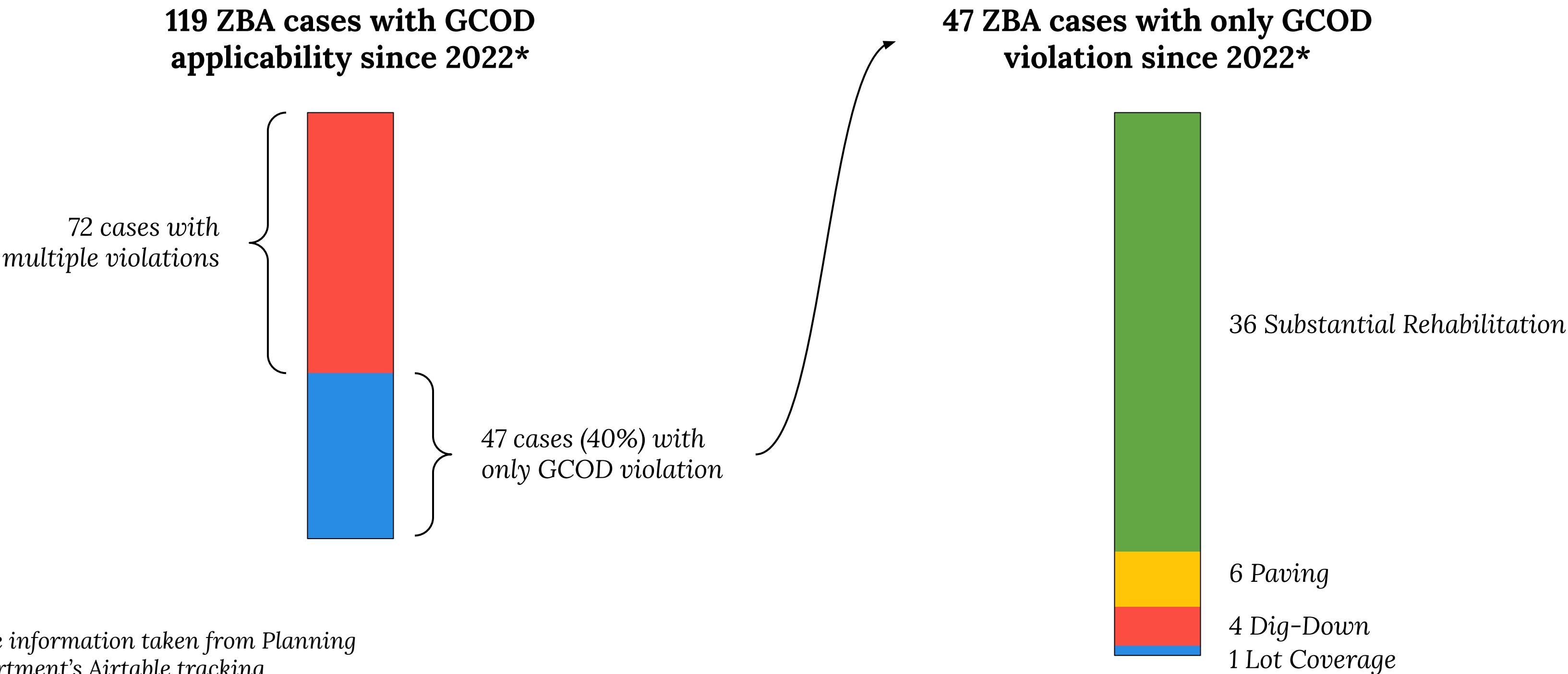
\*All project examples have GCOD as the only zoning violation



# GCOD APPLICABILITY AT THE ZBA



GCOD compliance is ultimately confirmed by BWSC and BGwT staff rather than ISD plans examiners, often meaning the Zoning Board of Appeal is an unneeded venue for evaluating all GCOD projects.



\*Case information taken from Planning Department's Airtable tracking



# Proposed Updates

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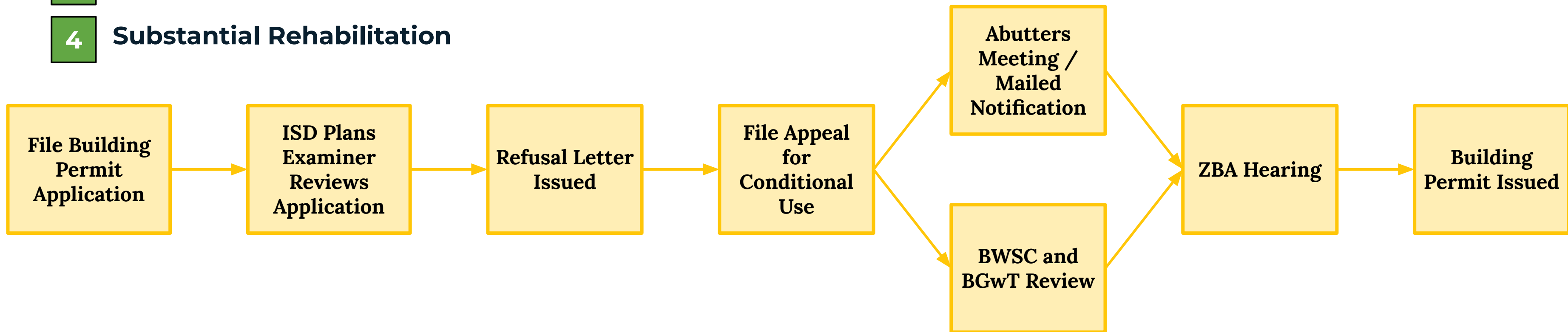
2



# EXISTING PROCESS - All Projects Conditional Use



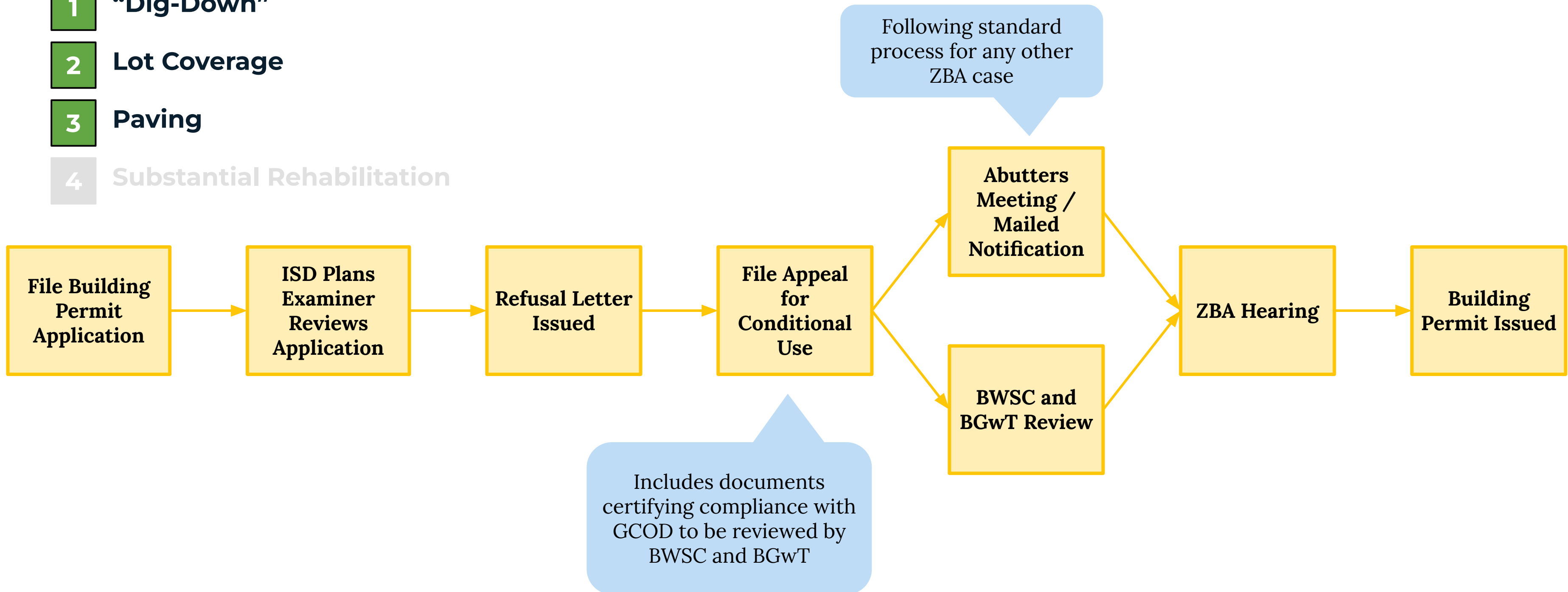
- 1 "Dig-Down"
- 2 Lot Coverage
- 3 Paving
- 4 Substantial Rehabilitation





# EXISTING PROCESS - Conditional Use

- 1 "Dig-Down"
- 2 Lot Coverage
- 3 Paving
- 4 Substantial Rehabilitation



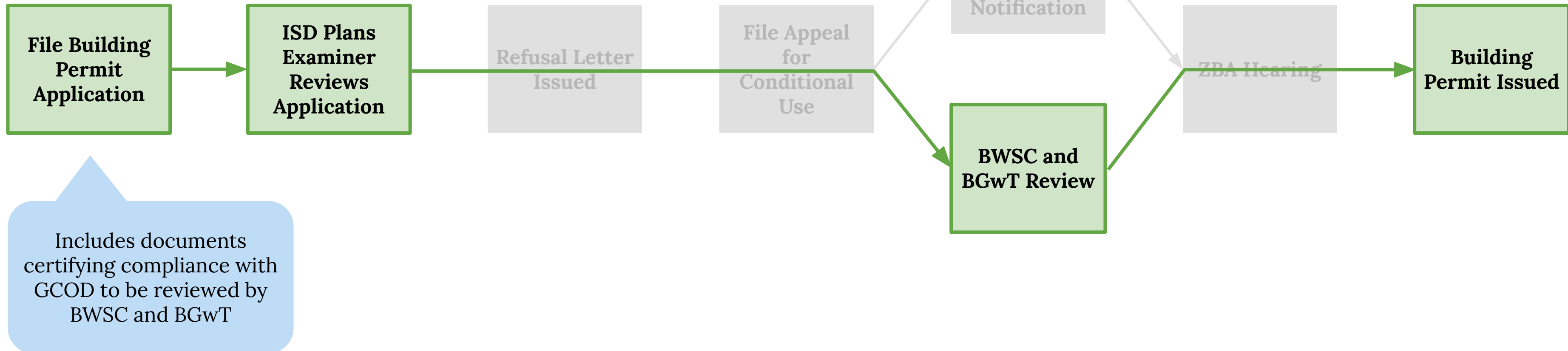


# PROPOSED PROCESS - Building Permit



- 1 "Dig-Down"
- 2 Lot Coverage
- 3 Paving
- 4 Substantial Rehabilitation**

Note: project can still get refusal letter if there are other non-GCOD zoning violations.





# OTHER CHANGES

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**Besides removing Substantial Rehabilitation projects from needing a conditional use permit, other small administrative changes are also proposed:**

- Removing unnecessary sections of Article 32 that are duplicative of other parts in the Code
- Moving the definition for Substantial Rehabilitation from Article 32 to Article 2 - Definitions
- Simplifying the purpose statement language
- Adding the GCOD map to the Article 32 text rather than in an appendix



# WHAT'S NOT CHANGING

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**All projects cited for GCOD will still:**

- Require a BWSC approval letter for a groundwater recharge system
- Require a no harm letter certification that certifies no negative impact either onsite or on adjacent lots
- Continued collaboration with ISD, BWSC, and BGwT ensuring effective management and sustainable groundwater practices in the city



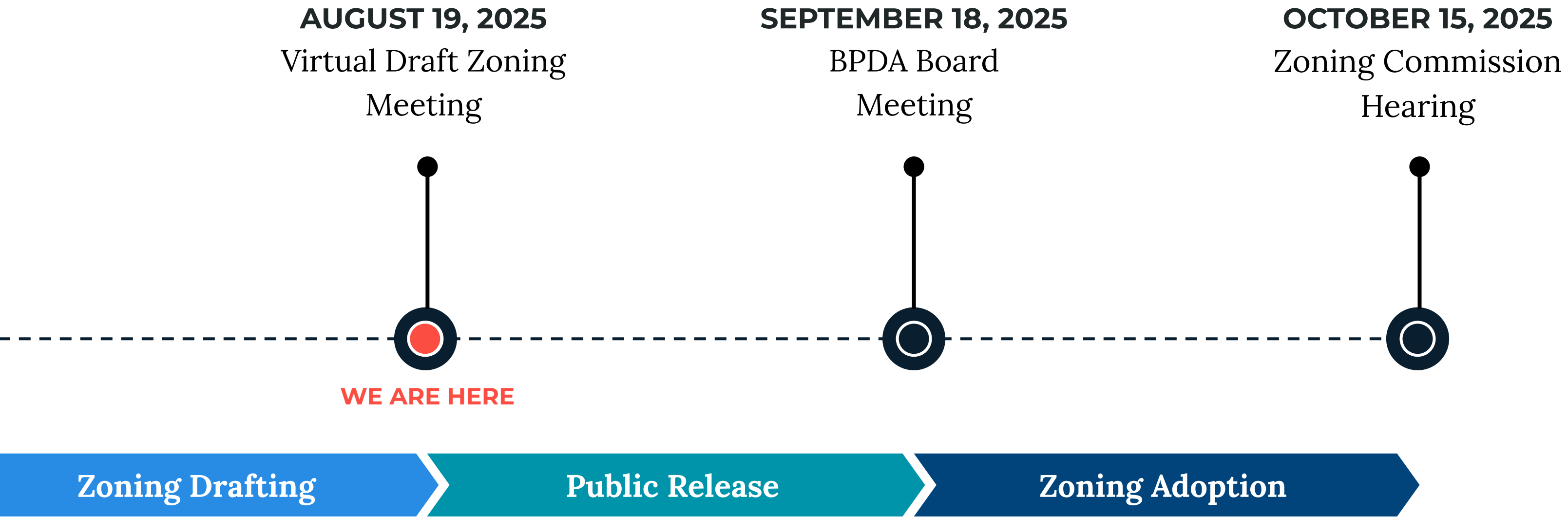
# Next Steps & Timeline

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# ADOPTION TIMELINE





# THANK YOU

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## HAVE QUESTIONS?

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OR VISIT:

[bosplans.org/UpdatingGCOD](https://bosplans.org/UpdatingGCOD)



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