

# ACTION PLAN FEEDBACK

*External Summary*



Planning Department

CITY of **BOSTON**

# EXTERNAL SUMMARY

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After releasing our draft Action Plan in September 2024, we opened a 90-day comment period to gather feedback on strategies for effective engagement, consistent standards, and a coordinated review.

Our team has carefully analyzed every survey response and comment letter. This slide deck provides a summary of the feedback we received.

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# ACTION PLAN ENGAGEMENT

**KEY TAKEAWAY:** Extensive engagement through a variety of methods resulted in rich quantitative and qualitative feedback. Reached thousands of people and received hundreds of comments.

## ENGAGEMENT TO DATE

### GOALS FOR THIS PHASE OF ENGAGEMENT

- Spread awareness
- Collect feedback
- Ensure inclusivity

#### SPREADING AWARENESS

- 10 Email blasts received by 9,500 people
- 14 Social media posts viewed by over 225,000 people
- 4 Press pieces
- Community partners shared information
- Elected officials shared information
- Partnered with Disabilities Commission, MOAC, & Mayor’s Youth Council to create & share videos or content with their networks
- City staff called key community leaders + developers
- Placed Action Plan printouts in libraries across the City
- Held 4 Developer briefings

#### COLLECTING FEEDBACK

- 2 virtual public meetings with ~150 attendees total
- Over 300 survey responses
- About 100 comment letters across stakeholder groups and community members

#### ENSURING INCLUSIVITY

- Attended 14 community events & meetings to hold conversations & collect feedback from under engaged populations, eg. young people, non English speakers, renters, people of color, disability community



# WHO DID WE HEAR FROM? (36 Organizations)

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## ADVOCATES & COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

- Abundant Housing
- Boston Harbor Now
- Boston Tenants Coalition
- Boston Policy Institute
- Chinatown Community Land Trust
- Coalition for a Just Allston Brighton
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Reclaim Roxbury
- Community Alliance of Mission Hill
- Hyde Park Neighborhood Association
- Neighborhood Association of Back Bay
- NEWRA

## INSTITUTIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Boston University
- Fenway Alliance
- Harvard University
- Longwood Collective
- Wentworth Institute of Technology

## DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY

- Boston University
- Fenway Alliance
- Harvard University
- Longwood Collective
- Wentworth Institute of Technology

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPERS

- Asian CDC
- Fenway CDC
- MACDC
  - Allston Brighton CDC
  - Asian CDC
  - Back of the Hill CDC
  - CDC of South Berkshire
  - East Boston CDC
  - Fenway CDC
  - Fields Corner CDC
  - Franklin County CDC
  - Hilltown CDC
  - Hope CDC
  - Lena Park CDC
  - Main South CDC
  - North Shore CDC
  - One Holyoke CDC
  - Quaboag Valley CDC
  - Revitalize CDC
  - Southwest Boston CDC
  - Valley CDC
  - Waltham Alliance to Create Housing (WATCH CDC)
  - Worcester East Side CDC
- Pine Street Inn
- POUA

## LABOR ORGANIZATIONS

- Local 26

## ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Councilor Coletta
- Councilor Weber
- Councilor Worrell
- Councilor Durkan

## GOVERNMENT AGENCIES / COMMISSIONS

- MBTA
- Fair Housing Commission
- Office of Food Justice

*Additionally received 63 comment letters from individual community members and 307 comments from the public survey.*



# FEEDBACK SUMMARY

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*We implemented our engagement recommendations as a part of this project, balancing low-touch and high-touch engagement.*

## ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

**99 COMMENT LETTERS** provided detailed feedback on specific recommendations, including

- 63 Comment letters from community members
- 36 Comment letters from stakeholder organizations

**307 SURVEY RESPONSES** identified areas of broad consensus

- 83% of respondents think we are headed in the right direction

## EXAMPLE FEEDBACK

**COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS** are looking for quick implementation of new engagement methods.

*Example: 85% of public meeting participants “like” or “strongly like” the recommendation to add new methods of engagement*

**DEVELOPMENT STAKEHOLDERS** are interested in early operational changes that improve predictability.

*Example: “We suggest implementing the new policies on an interim, pilot basis in order to give the Planning Department the opportunity to fine-tune procedures”*



# RESPONSE TO CORE CHANGE 1

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## *Effective Engagement*

### CHANGES WITH BROAD SUPPORT

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**Expanding the methods** for low/high touch engagement to create a large more diverse pool of feedback

Support for **reporting results** of engagement - why or why not certain community feedback was implemented

**Developer-led** early engagement is a positive, but Planning Dept needs to be able to confirm engagement standards were met

Support for **CATs having an expanded neighborhood-wide scope** and moving from individual project-based IAGs

### AREAS LACKING CONSENSUS

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Disagreement on **role/scope of CATs**; ability to make design recommendations & ability to veto/delay project

Disagreement on the size, nomination process & membership **composition of CATs**

Disagreement on **how early “early engagement” begins** - when there is a concept of a project, or earlier, at the ‘pre-concept’ stage

Disagreement on **when engagement ends** - Should detailed public input continue after the concept design stage?



# EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO CORE CHANGE 1

View all comment letters  
online on our [website](#)

## Effective Engagement

### **CAT membership terms should align with the lifespan of an Institutional Master Plan (IMP).**

IMPs are typically long-term, phased initiatives spanning five to ten years or more. Continuous involvement of CAT members throughout the entire duration of an IMP is essential to avoid disruptions, minimize the impact of learning curves, and maintain a high level of informed feedback.

This flexibility would preserve institutional memory and established expertise, enhancing the advisory team's effectiveness.

- BOSTON UNIVERSITY

*Prioritizing equity and inclusion in how meetings and workshops are facilitated is likely to improve their environment for and the participation rate of attendees. 49% of community respondents desire more open house opportunities to provide feedback on development projects in their neighborhoods.*

***... there is still a strong desire for in-person public gatherings on these topics, and public meetings should not be further reduced or impeded in the early engagement/feedback stage.***



- COUNCILOR BRIAN WORRELL

*During public meetings, use the “flipped classroom” model. In a flipped classroom model, students look over the material on their own time and come to class with questions and comments. The instructor then addresses the issues raised by the students with clarifications and further details.*

***In the context of development projects, have the plans/modified plans/new ideas available at a given site (virtual and/or physical, for instance, in posters displayed 30 min previous to the start of the meeting), and the meeting STARTING with the public's input.***

- COALITION FOR JUST ALLSTON BRIGHTON (CJAB)

# RESPONSE TO CORE CHANGE 2

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## Consistent Standards

### CHANGES WITH BROAD SUPPORT

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**Definitions** will provide much needed clarity on expectations set for developers and community at large.

**Calculating in-kind contributions** will increase transparency and accountability.

**Connecting Planning** to community benefits through needs assessments will better deliver on neighborhood specific and city-wide planning goals.

Support for the notion that “some projects are themselves the benefit.” (**Affordable housing exemption**)

### AREAS LACKING CONSENSUS

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Mitigation should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. **Formula must be flexible** enough to not render projects infeasible.

Mitigation **cap will be seen as a new minimum** commitment, concern that projects will only be credited for additional contributions

Additional clarity needed on Anti-Displacement Disclosure and how it interacts with AFFH requirements and BIFDC

Concerns that current proposed community benefit “**menu**” categories do not reflect city priorities



# EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO CORE CHANGE 2

View all comment letters  
online on our [website](#)

## Consistent Standards

**NAIOP suggests that mitigation requirements be set low enough so that there is room to provide benefits and not make a project's proforma unworkable.**

For example, the new inclusionary zoning requirements and recently adopted linkage obligations, which are planned to increase again on January 1, 2025, currently take up a very large (and sometimes unworkable) proportion of project budgets, so the resources available for other mitigation or public benefits will be limited.

- NAIOP

We are concerned that a creation of committee or council charged with creating standardized community benefit packages would create a “one size fits all” cookie cutter approach that would inevitably detract from actual benefits accrued to neighbors and community members, and fail to **capitalize on educational institutions’ special abilities, and unique skills and expertise in assisting our neighbors and the wider city of Boston.**

- FENWAY ALLIANCE

The City historically takes the lead in these discussions and coordination with outside agencies such as the MBTA can be ad-hoc. This can result in lost/missed opportunities and can on occasion negatively impact or burden the transit system and ridership. Coordination and consideration of the public transit network should be identified by the City with the developments as part of the community benefit and mitigation conversation.

- MBTA

# RESPONSE TO CORE CHANGE 3

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## *Coordinated Review*

### **CHANGES WITH BROAD SUPPORT**

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**Updated and enforced review timelines** will ensure timely approval and permitting

**Structured pre-file process** with early engagement and templates for filing content for pre-file submissions will create more transparency for decision making

**Updated data and reporting systems** will increase accountability and transparency

**Empower project managers** to enforce timelines and coordinate all aspects of review

**Reform BCDC** to avoid contradiction and speed up review times

### **AREAS LACKING CONSENSUS**

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Concerns that independent agencies won't buy into new system. Encourage **greater coordination or resequencing review steps** from Parks, Landmarks, etc.

Concern that Pre-concept Design is not a productive review stage. Recommend that we **combine Pre-concept and Concept design step**

Concern over Concept Determination, especially clarity of decision making - **who is making the decision for the "early no?"**

How will the new Article 80B community engagement and filing sequence relate to the **new filing processes for IMPs and PDAs**



# EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO CORE CHANGE 3

View all comment letters  
online on our [website](#)

## Coordinated Review

***Opportunities to enhance and streamline review so that developers and community members understand how a project is approved or denied.***

*CDCs would argue that this section will allow us to move through the development process with better direction and expected steps, outcomes, and subsequent approvals.*

- ASIAN CDC



***The final Action Plan should describe the process for arbitrating project-related disagreements between departments and commissions.***

*For example, the Planning Department's Urban Design division and the Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC) often review projects at different moments in a project's design and can provide conflicting direction.*

- HARVARD UNIVERSITY

# EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO CORE CHANGE 3

View all comment letters  
online on our [website](#)

## Coordinated Review

Current delays in Article 80 and Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA) approvals often cause our projects to miss critical, once-a-year funding application deadlines to Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). **We strongly advocate for a coordinated, consolidated, or truncated permitting process that allows us to secure entitlements earlier**, ensuring Boston remains competitive statewide. In particular, the Boston Civic Design Commission should have clearer guidelines and timelines so that their proposed changes do not create financial hardship for affordable housing development proposals.

- MACDC



**The emphasis on clearer timelines and earlier decision points is an excellent step forward.** Having “early no” determinations for proposals that don’t align with city goals will save time and resources for everyone involved... However, there are a few areas where I believe the plan could go further. One persistent issue is the misalignment between desk review and the Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC). Often, projects are guided in one direction during design review, only for the BCDC to recommend conflicting changes later. This back-and-forth adds unnecessary layers of work for architects, delays timelines, and increases costs through design adjustments or prolonged review periods. **Greater coordination at the outset would streamline this process and reduce avoidable costs and delays.**

- COUNCILOR SHARON DURKAN

# EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO CORE CHANGE 3

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## Coordinated Review

Many projects require input from multiple city departments, which can lead to conflicting timelines and requirements. Creating a more cohesive framework for interdepartmental communication could streamline reviews and minimize bureaucratic hurdles.

**Consistently leveraging the Planning Advisory Council to establish a framework for annual mitigation and community benefits should be a key component of how these recommendations are developed.**

- COUNCILOR GABRIELA  
COLETTA

**Timelines can be enforced through incentives for Planning Department employees to hit on-time targets, or by updating a weekly or monthly dashboard that tracks the percentage of projects that are on track with their official project timelines.**

Paired with well-enforced timelines, the overall process will become streamlined. In the development process, time is money so by reducing the time around obtaining approvals, permitting, etc. This reduces the overall cost of building.

- ABUNDANT HOUSING MASSACHUSETTS

**NAIOP is strongly supportive of the recommendations in the Draft Plan eliminating the Design Committee; providing for the Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC) to meet twice a month; and requiring that all BCDC meetings are hearings where a vote can be conducted to approve a project.**

NAIOP believes that implementation of these changes is critical to ensuring project timeliness and predictability.

- NAIOP

