

BOSTON'S LAND USE TRENDS OVER TWO DECADES

An analysis of land use change using property assessment data

June 2025



City of Boston
Planning Department
RESEARCH DIVISION

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Use of our work **requires** the inclusion of the following citation: “City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.”

DEFINING OUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How has Boston's land use changed from FY 2002 to 2025?

- *What is Boston's current land use?*
- *Which land use categories have seen substantial growth or loss? How is this land now being used?*
- *What patterns in land use change emerge within the city's neighborhoods?*

2. How has Boston's residential land use changed over time?

- *What is Boston's current residential land use?*
- *Which residential land use categories have seen substantial growth or loss? How is this land now being used?*
- *What patterns in residential land use change emerge within the city's neighborhoods?*

3. How has Boston's condominium land use changed over time?

- *How do patterns in condominium land use vary by neighborhood? By residential land use category?*
- *How has condominium land use change*

4. How has Boston's tax exempt land changed over time?

- *How does tax exempt land broadly and tax exempt care and custody more specifically, vary by neighborhood?*
- *How has tax exempt land's care and custody changed from 2004 to 2025?*

ABOUT THE DATA

- **Assessing Department's FY2002-FY2025 property assessment tables and shapefiles, containing land use assessments at the parcel level for the City of Boston.**
- **Land use categories:**
 - **Overall:**
 - Commercial, Industrial, Mixed Use, Tax Exempt, Residential
 - **Residential:**
 - We include mixed use in our residential breakdowns due to the residential component of mixed use land.
 - Single Family, 2 unit, 3 unit, 4-6 unit, 7+ unit, Mixed Use.
- **Limitations:**
 - Inconsistencies in parcel polygons from year to year due to issues with the assessing shapefiles.
 - Limits to the sqft accuracy of parcel land area calculations.
 - For alluvial/sankey diagrams in particular, exact square footage quantities may be underestimated.

Land Use in Boston: Current Snapshot & Trends

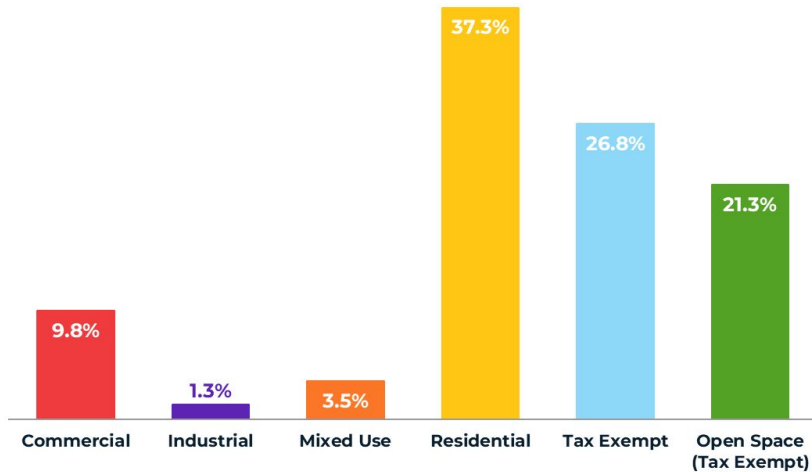
- 1 Overall land use
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Land Use in Boston: Current Snapshot & Trends

- 1 Overall land use**
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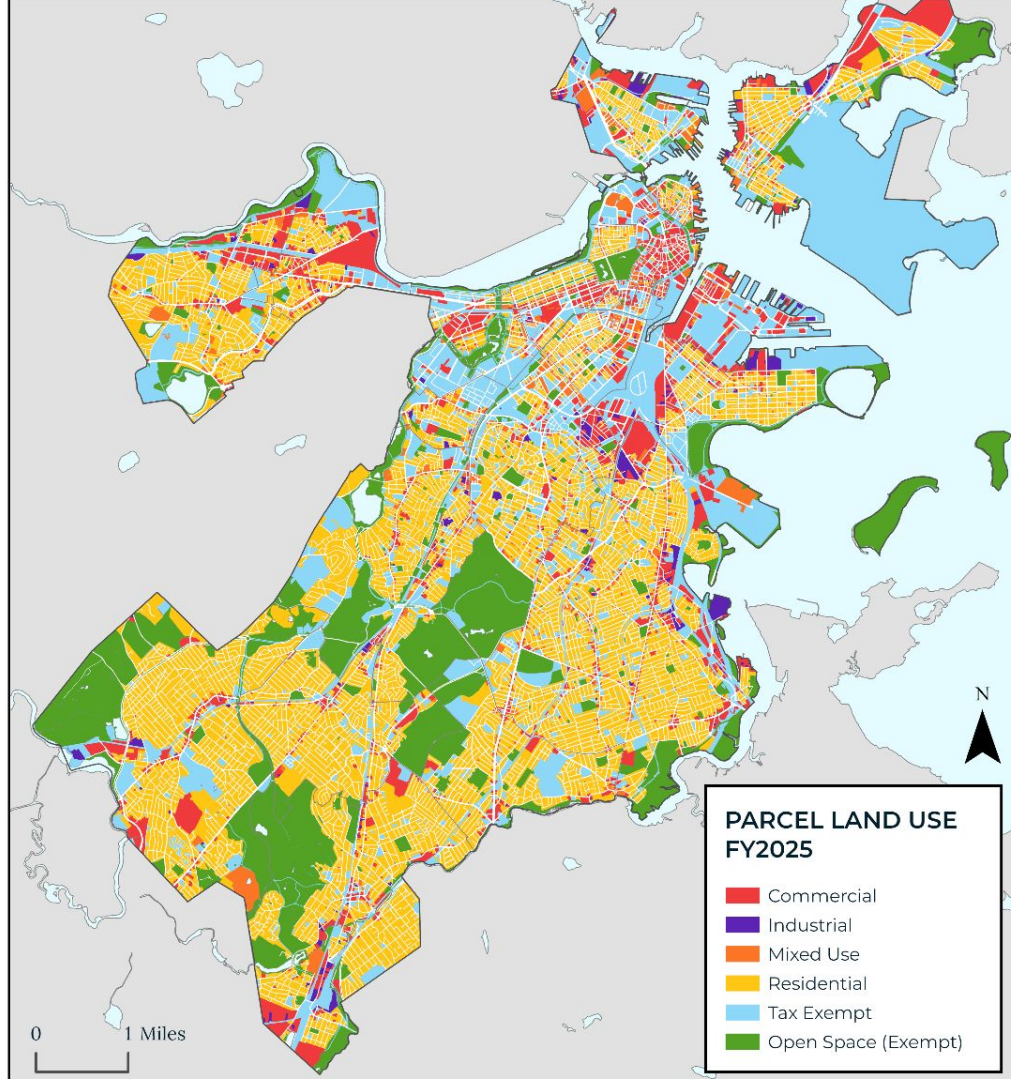
Nearly half of Boston's parcel land area is **tax exempt** (including **open space**), and more than a third is **residential**.

Parcel Land Use by Category in Boston, FY 2025



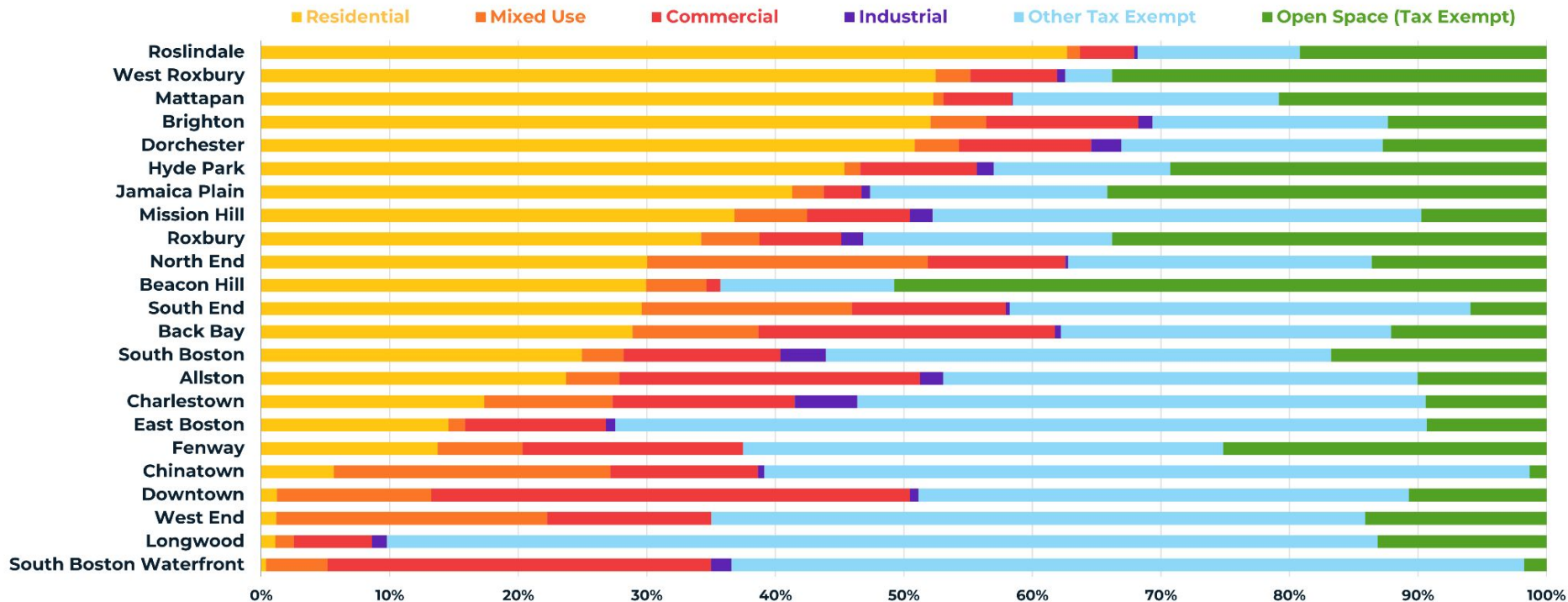
Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

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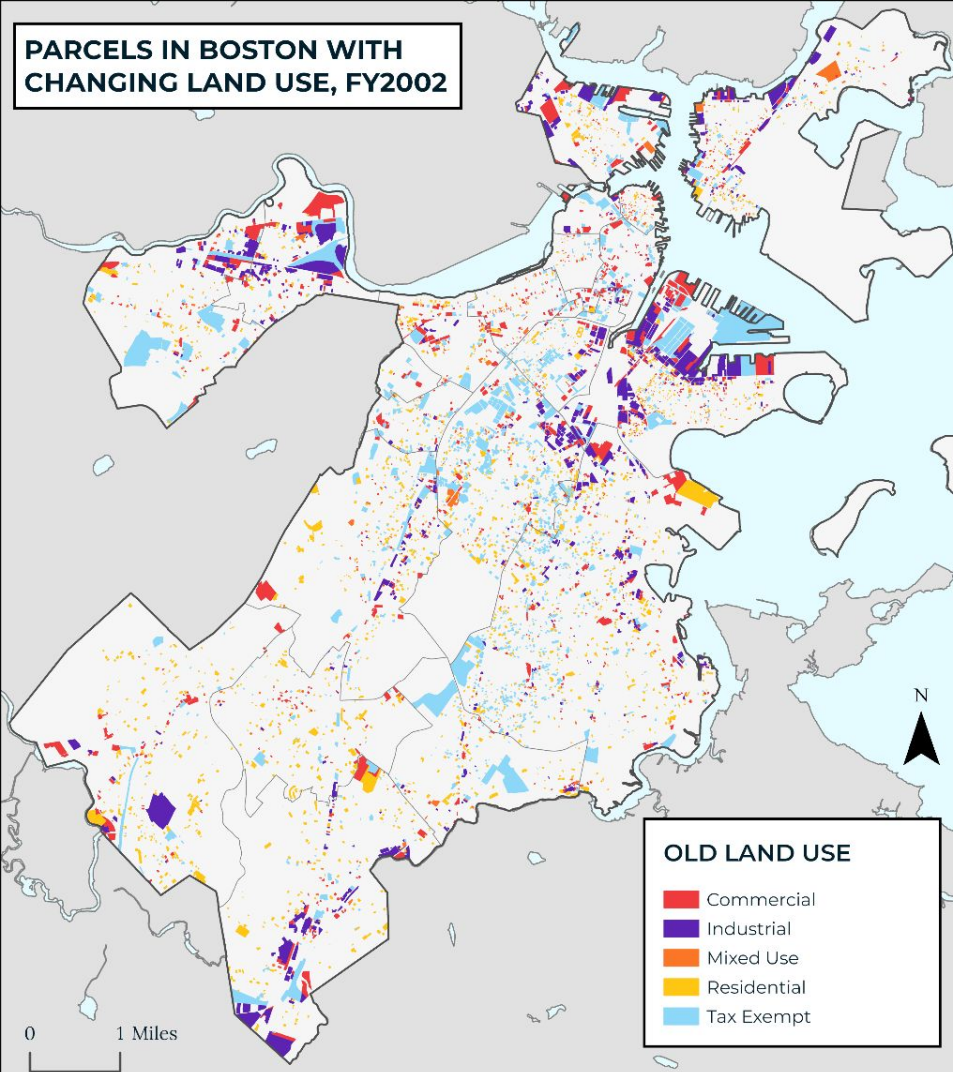
Neighborhoods furthest from city center are mostly residential, while neighborhoods near downtown have larger shares of mixed use and commercial land.

Parcel Land Use by Category and Neighborhood, FY 2025

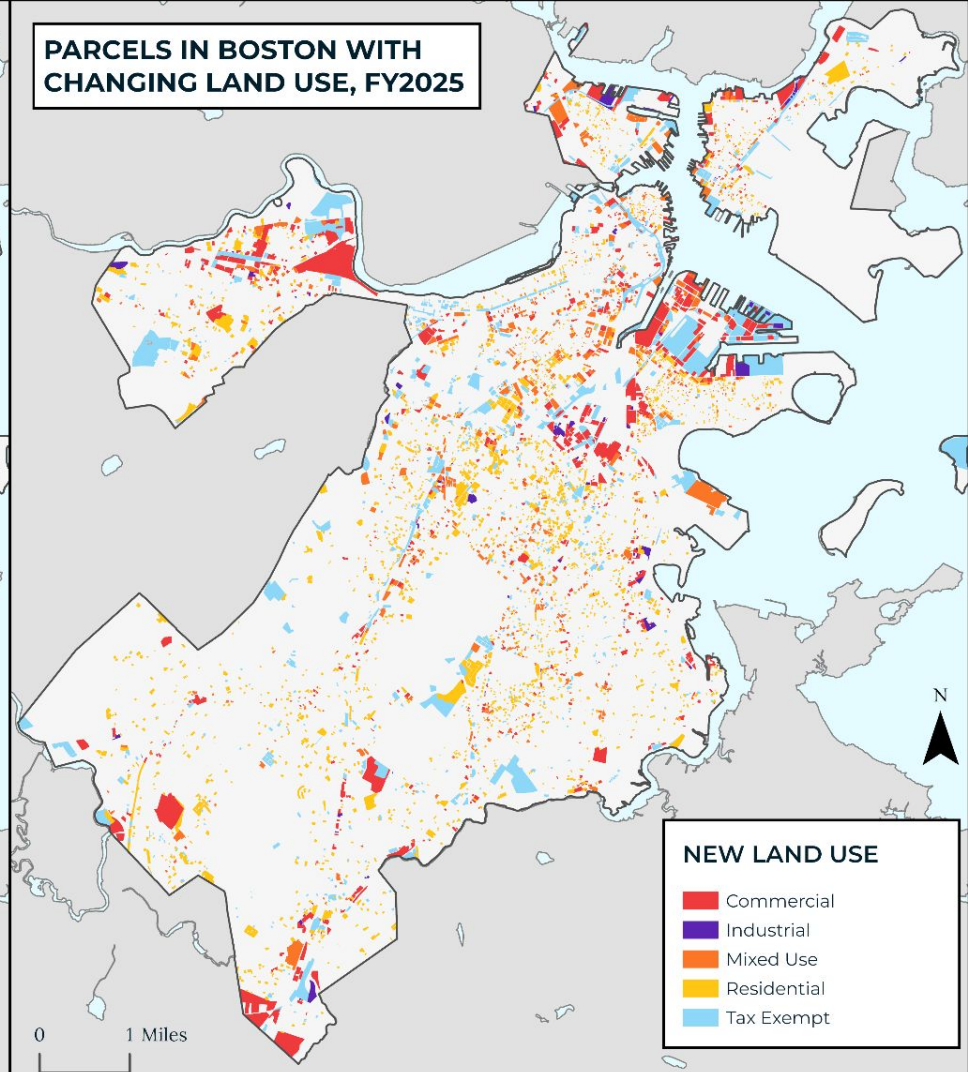


Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

**PARCELS IN BOSTON WITH
CHANGING LAND USE, FY2002**

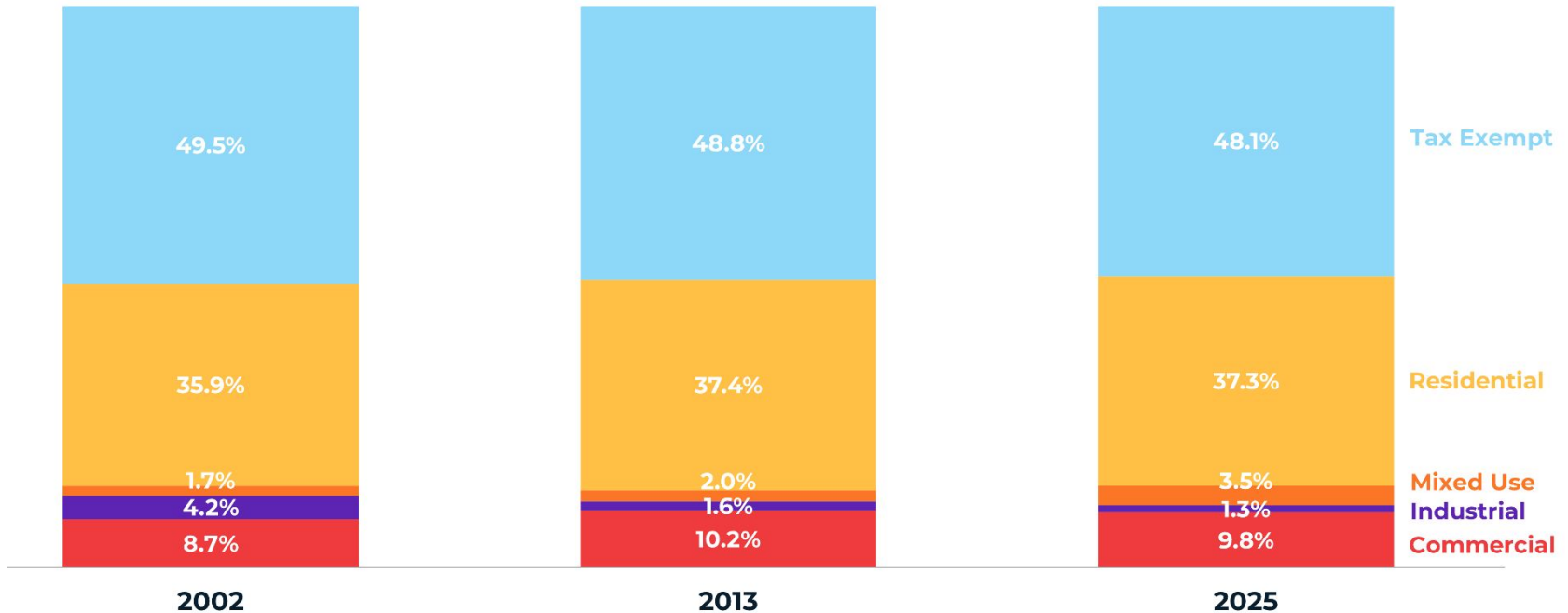


**PARCELS IN BOSTON WITH
CHANGING LAND USE, FY2025**



Industrial land area decreased, tax-exempt, residential, commercial land remained relatively stable, mixed-use land increased.

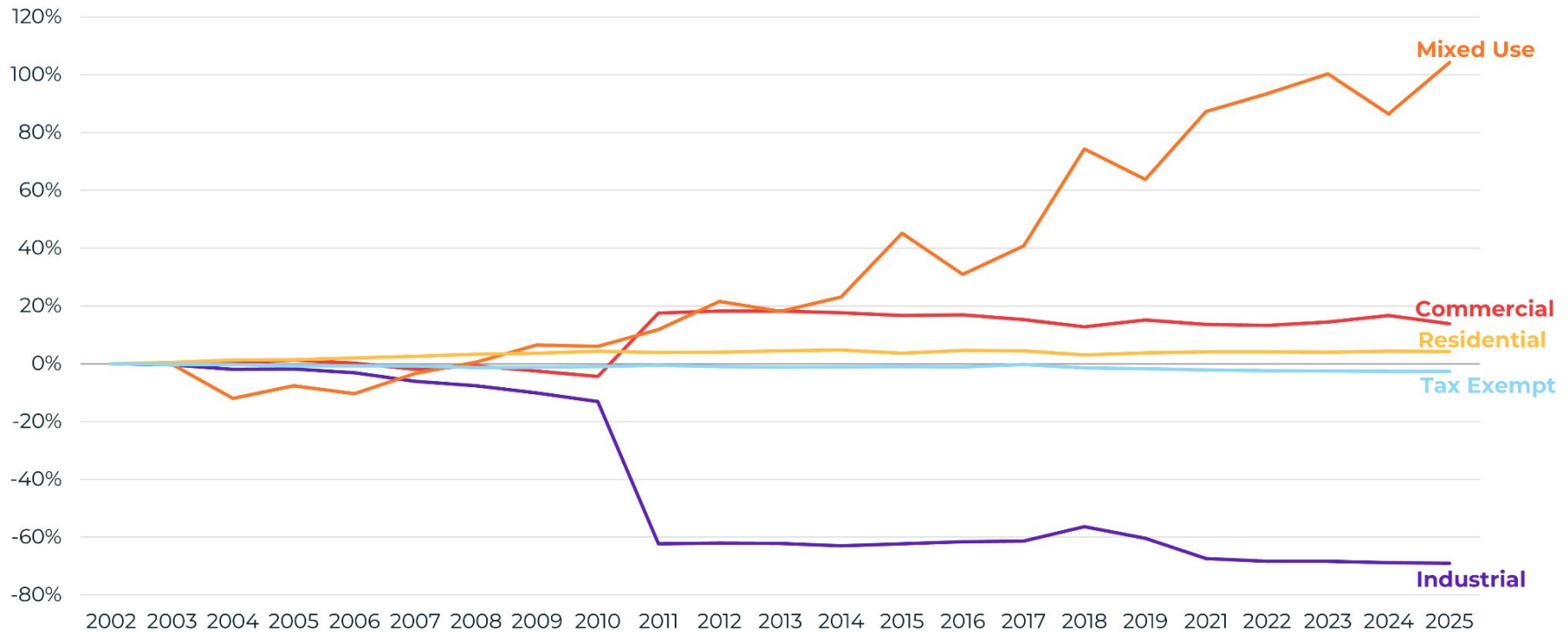
Citywide Land Use As a Share of Total Parcel Land Area, FY 2002 - FY 2025



Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2002, FY 2013 and FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

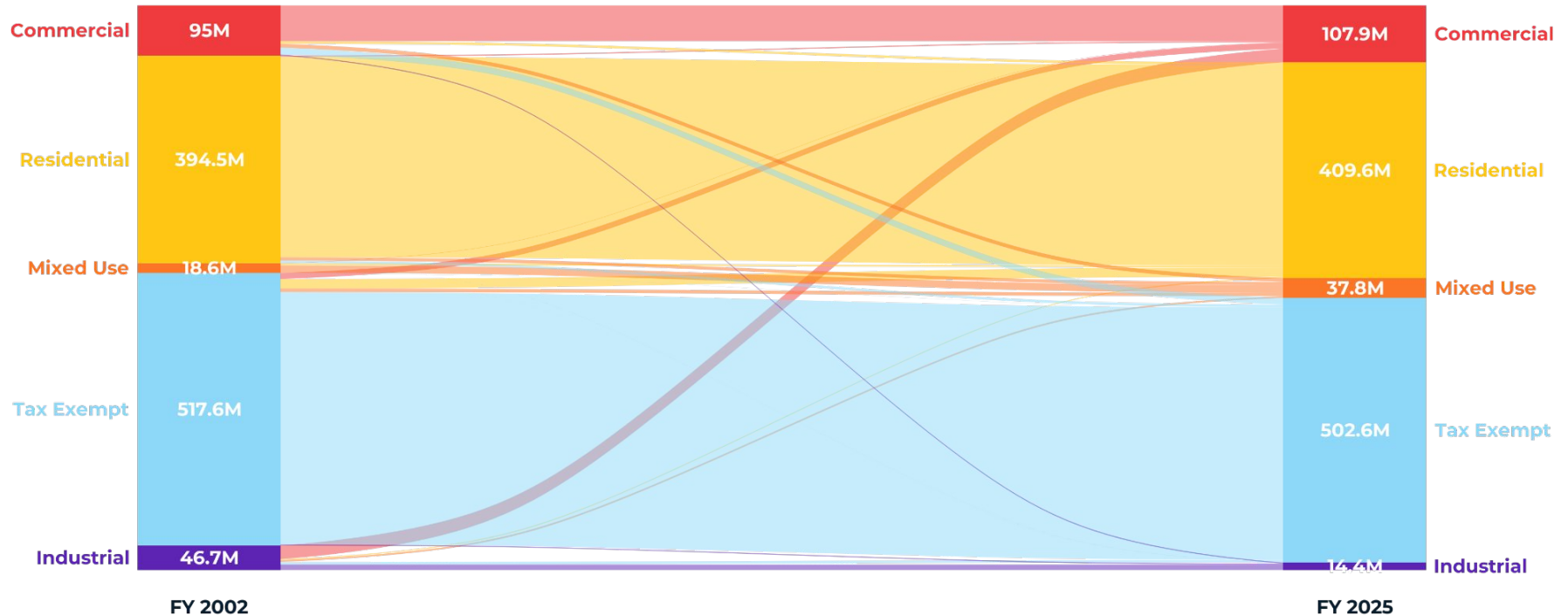
In FY 2011, a significant share of **industrial** land became **commercial**, and **mixed-use** land area has steadily increased since FY 2008.

Citywide Land Use Over Time, Percent Change in Area Since FY 2002



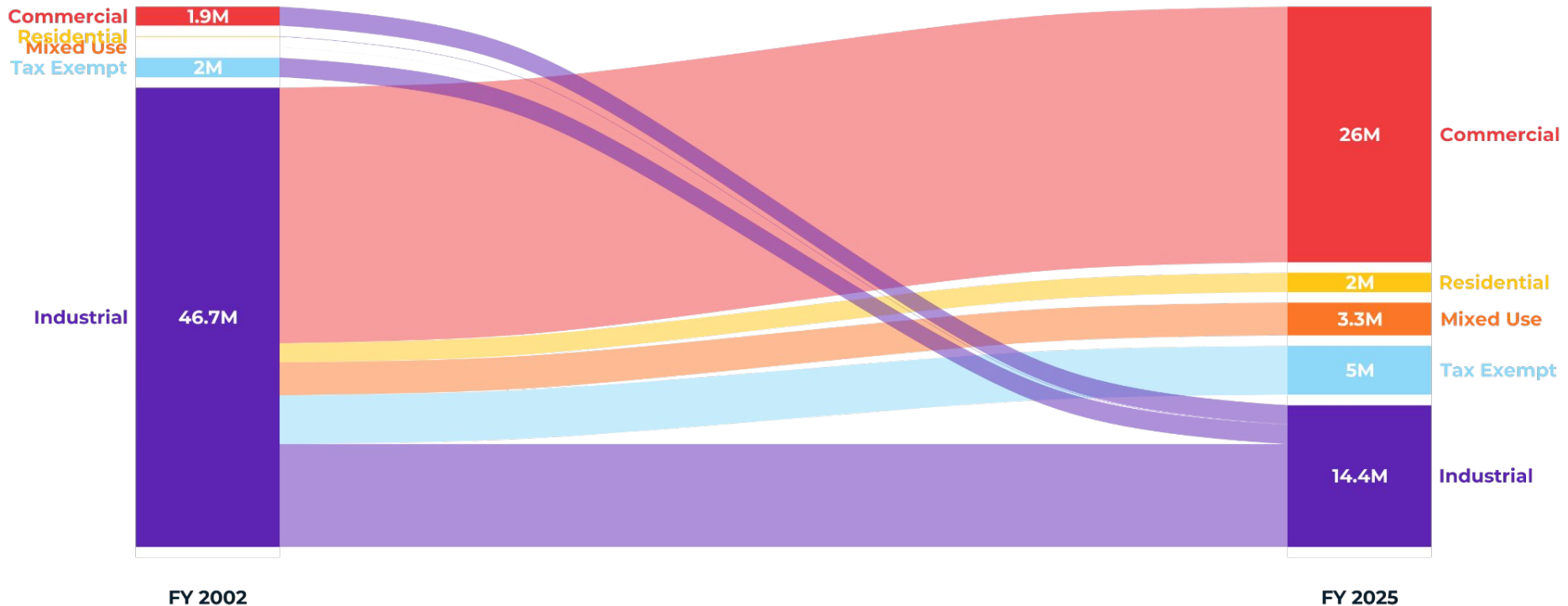
Since FY 2002, most **industrial** land became **commercial**, a portion of **tax-exempt** land became **residential**, and **mixed use** has drawn from all other uses.

Citywide Land Use Change by Category in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



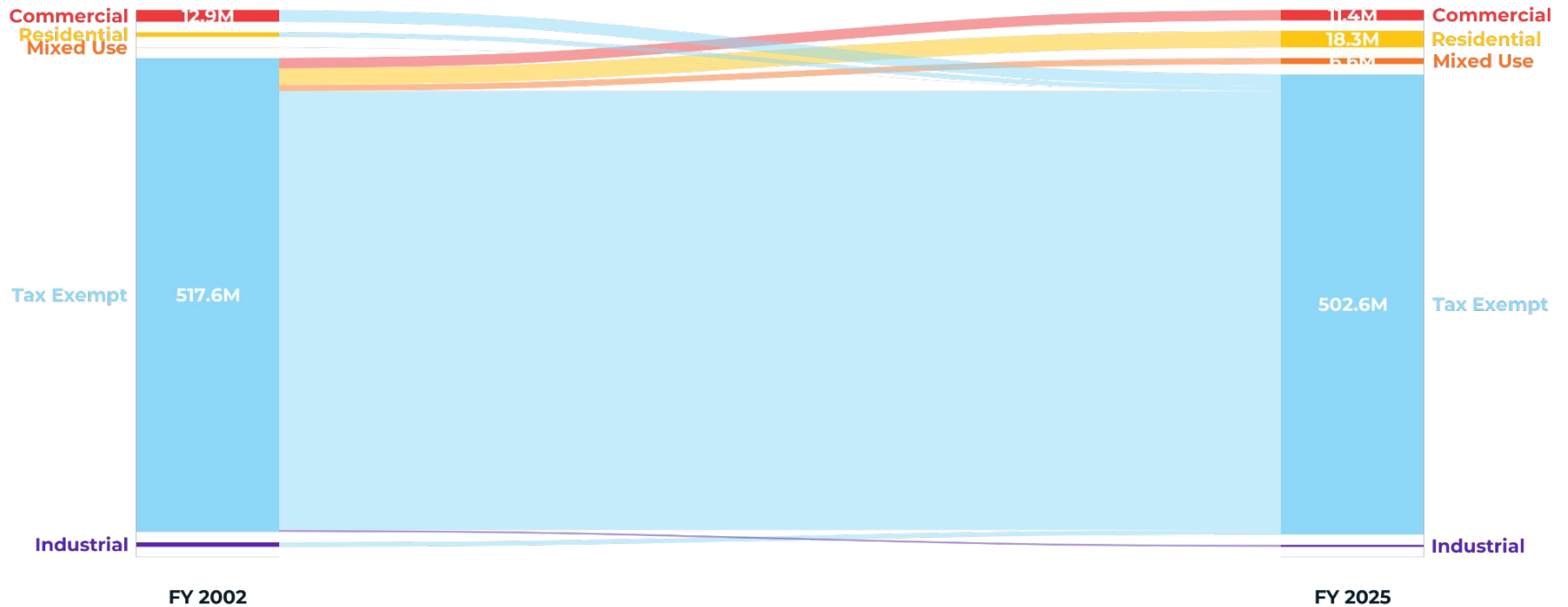
More than half of industrial land in FY 2002 became commercial by FY 2025, while about 4M square feet of previously tax-exempt and commercial land was converted to industrial.

Citywide Land Use Change to/from Industrial in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



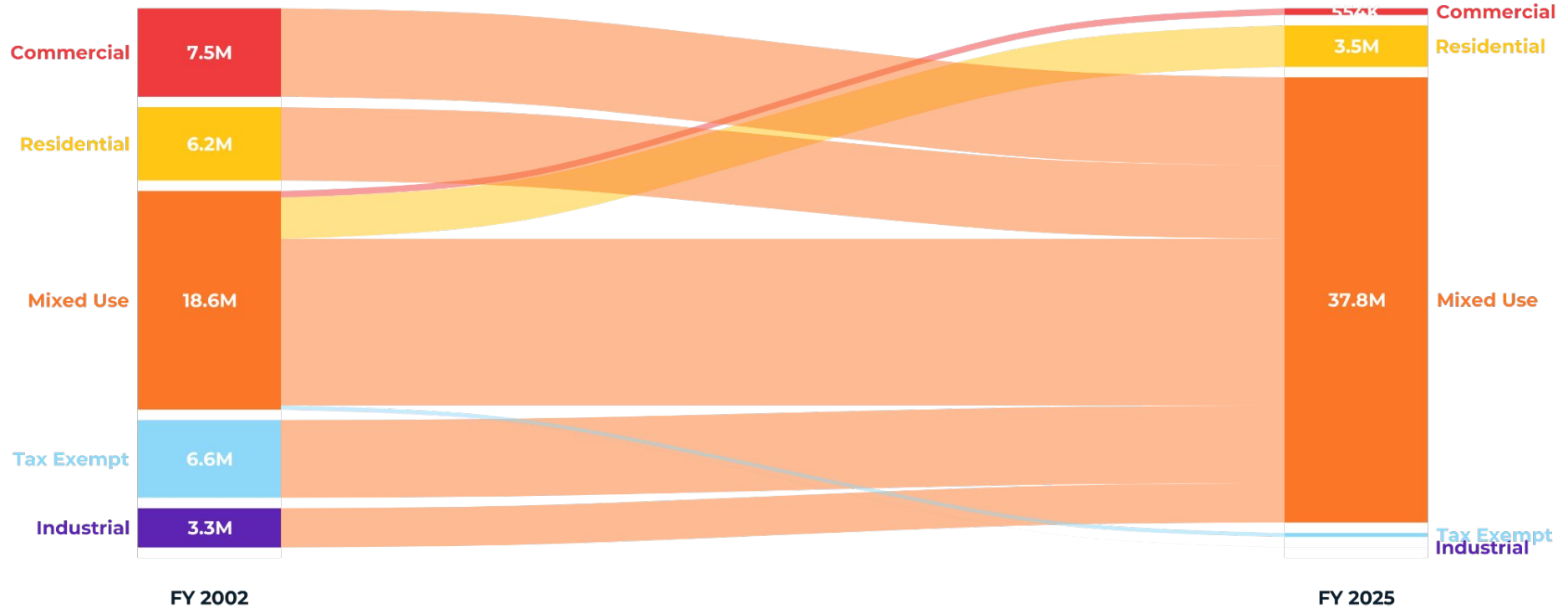
While nearly 13M square feet of FY 2002 commercial land became tax-exempt, 18M became residential, and smaller portions were converted to commercial and mixed use.

Citywide Land Use Change to/from Tax Exempt in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



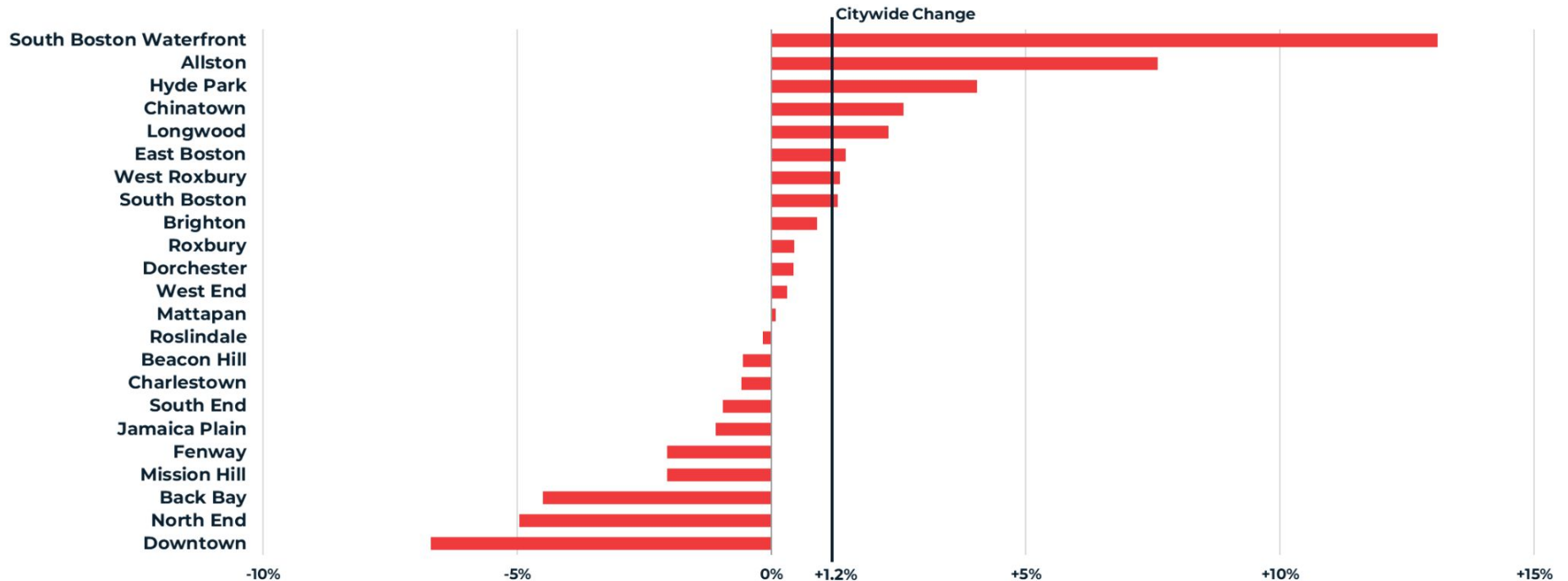
3.5M square feet of 2002 **mixed-use** land in has since become **residential** only, but nearly 80% of **mixed-use** land today was repurposed from all other uses.

Citywide Land Use Change to/from Mixed Use in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



Since FY 2002, the share of **commercial** land in the South Boston Waterfront, Allston, and Hyde Park increased the most, while Downtown and the North End saw the greatest declines.

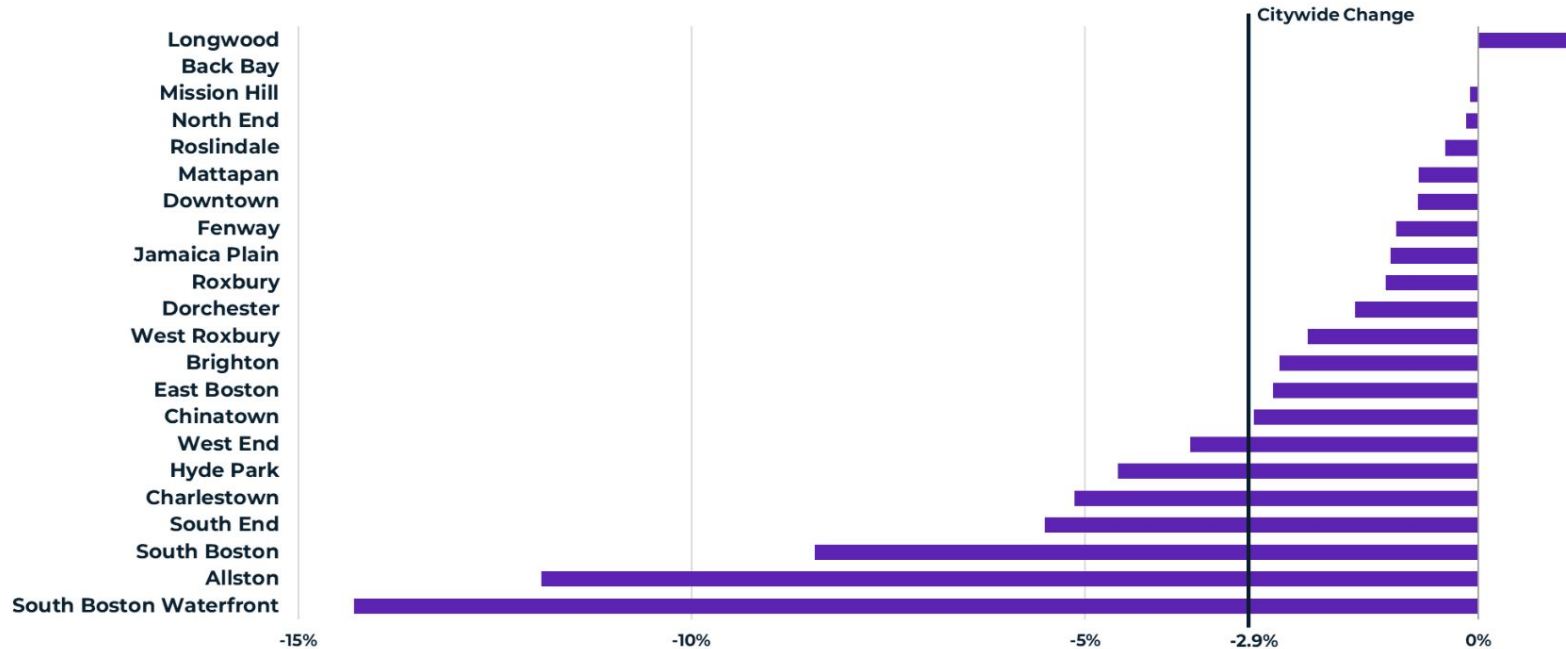
Percentage Point Change in Commercial Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2002 and FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

South Boston Waterfront and Allston both saw their industrial land shares drop more than 10 points, driven by the conversion of large sites like Beacon Park Yards, and parcels along the Fort Point and Reserved Channels.

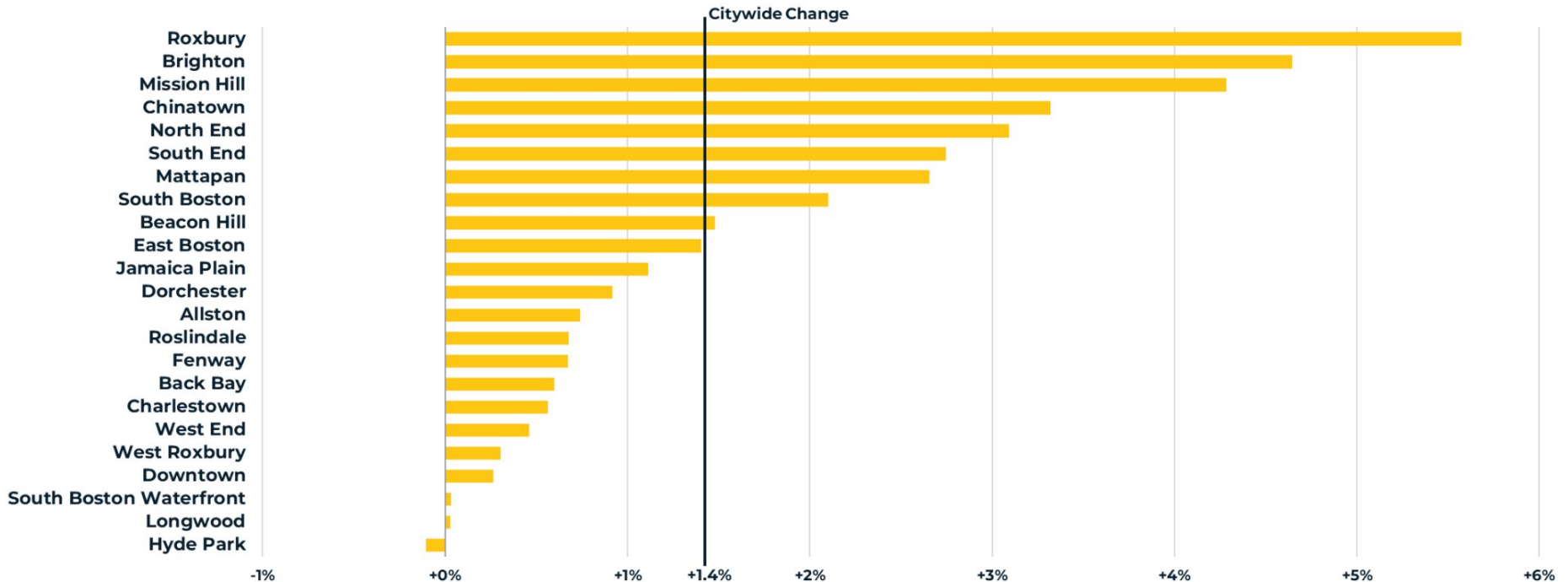
Percentage Point Change in Industrial Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2002 and FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

Roxbury, Brighton, and Mission Hill saw residential land increase by more than 4 percentage points.

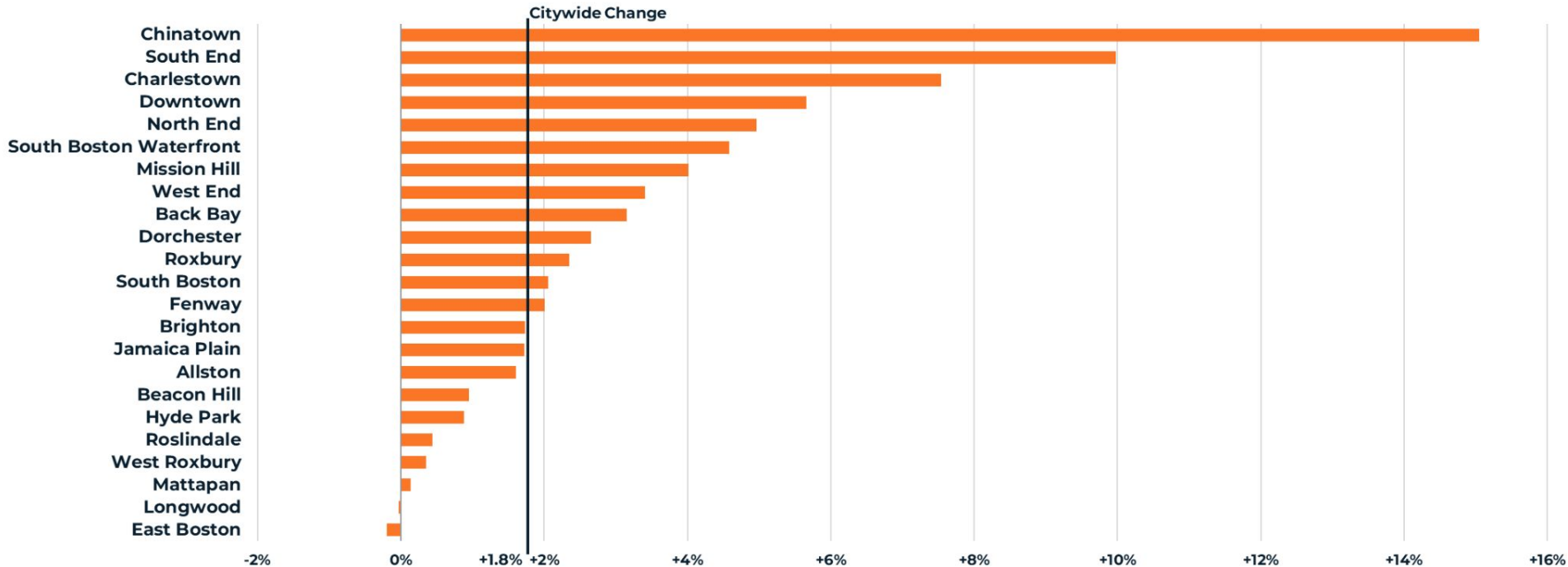
Percentage Point Change in Residential Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2002 and FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

Mixed-use land share increased in all neighborhoods except East Boston, with Chinatown and the South End seeing increases of 10 points or more.

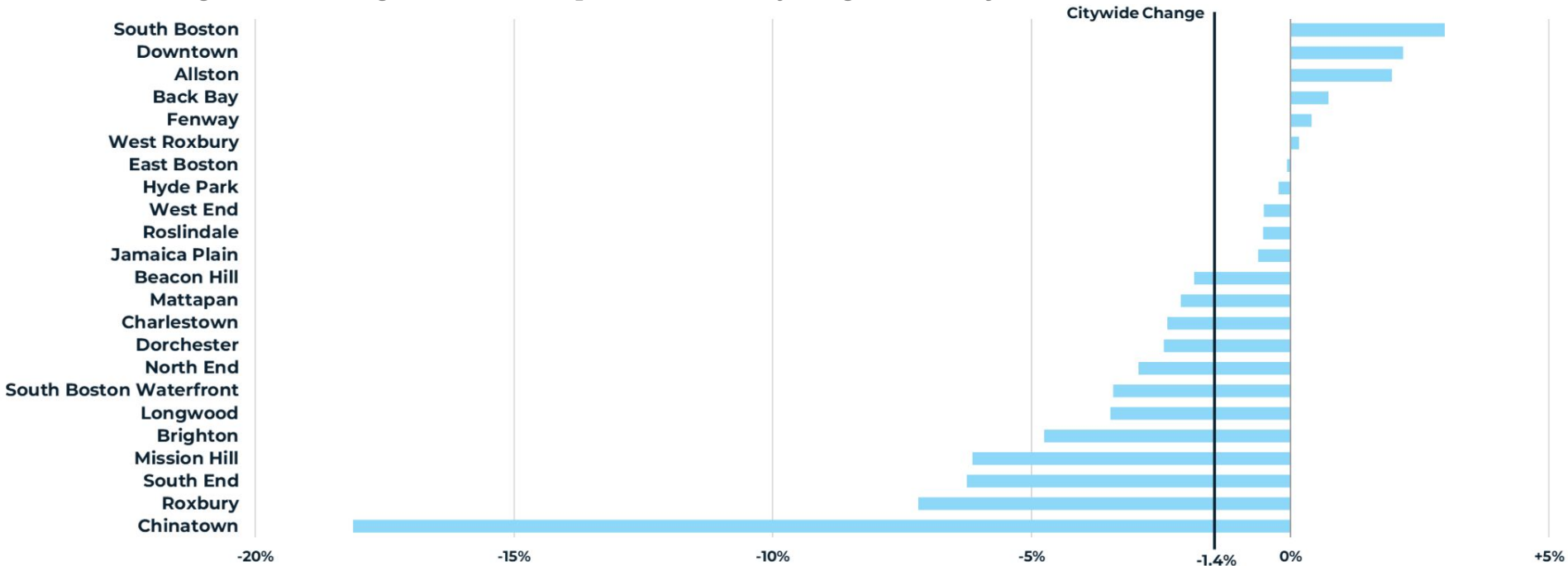
Percentage Point Change in Mixed-Use Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2002 and FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

Downtown, South Boston, and Allston saw the largest increases in tax-exempt land share, while Chinatown saw a significant drop of nearly 20 percentage points.

Percentage Point Change in Tax-Exempt Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2002 and FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

What patterns of land use have emerged among Boston's neighborhoods?

NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE CHANGE PATTERNS



More Commercial & Mixed Residential

- Marked by more commercial and mixed residential uses, less industrial and tax exempt.
- ex. Citywide, Brighton, Chinatown, Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, **South Boston Waterfront**



More Mixed Residential

- Marked by more residential uses, less solely commercial, industrial, or tax exempt land use.
- ex. Charlestown, **Mission Hill**, North End, South End, West End



More Non-Industrial

- Marked by a decrease in industrial land and increase in all other land use types.
- ex. **Allston**, South Boston, West Roxbury

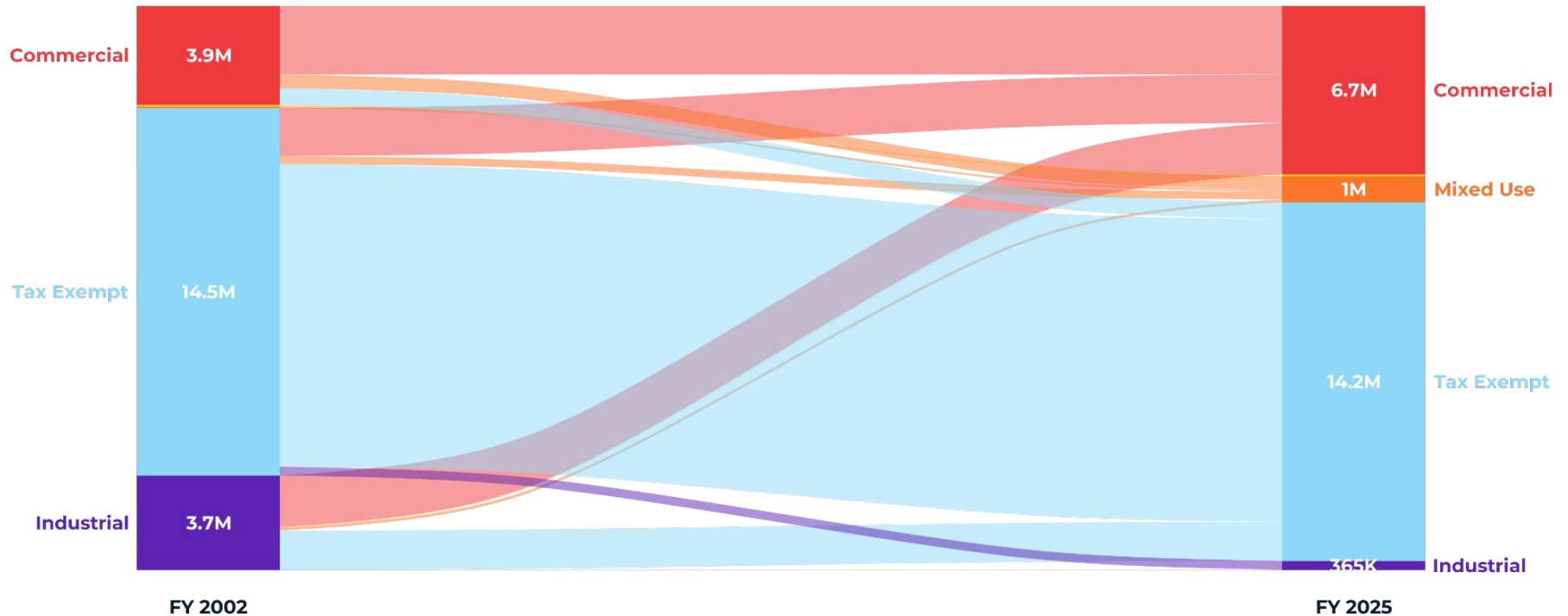


More Mixed Residential & Tax Exempt

- Marked by more mixed use, residential, and tax exempt land, less commercial and industrial.
- ex. Fenway, Jamaica Plain

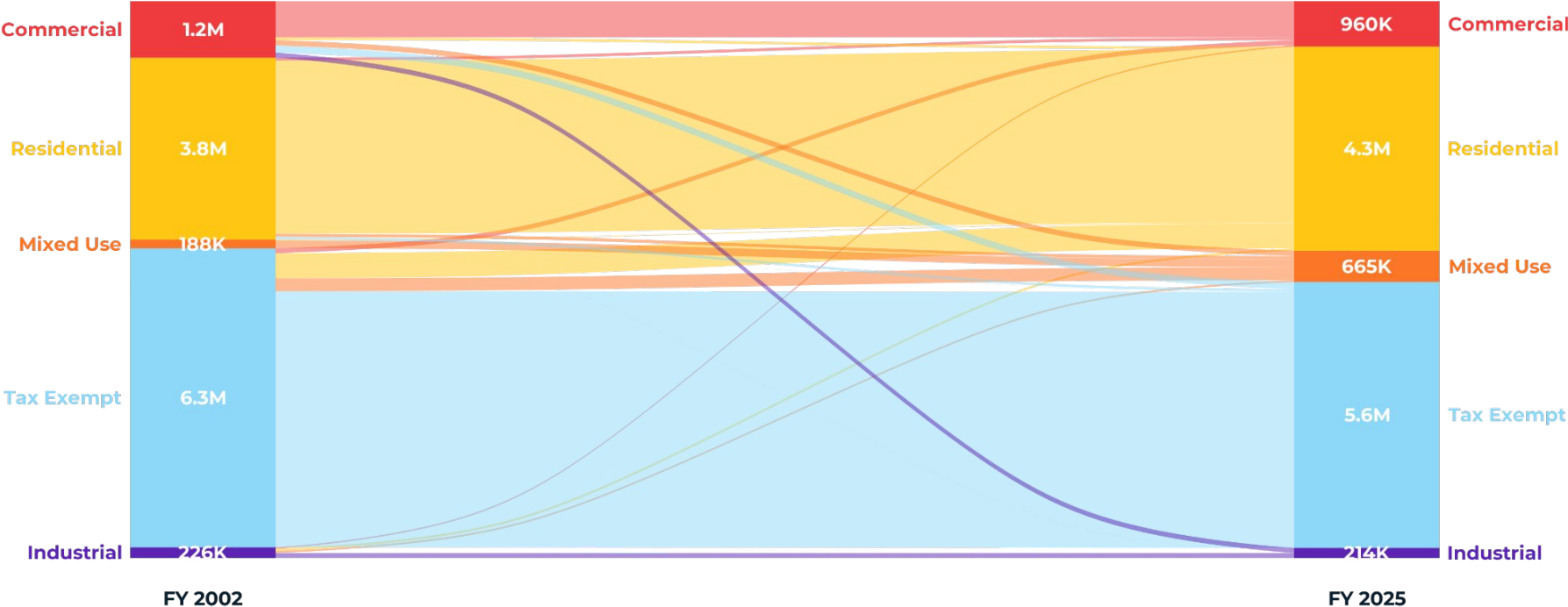
Industrial and tax-exempt land in the South Boston Waterfront has largely given way to commercial and some mixed-use/residential development.

South Boston Waterfront Land Use Change by Land Use Category in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



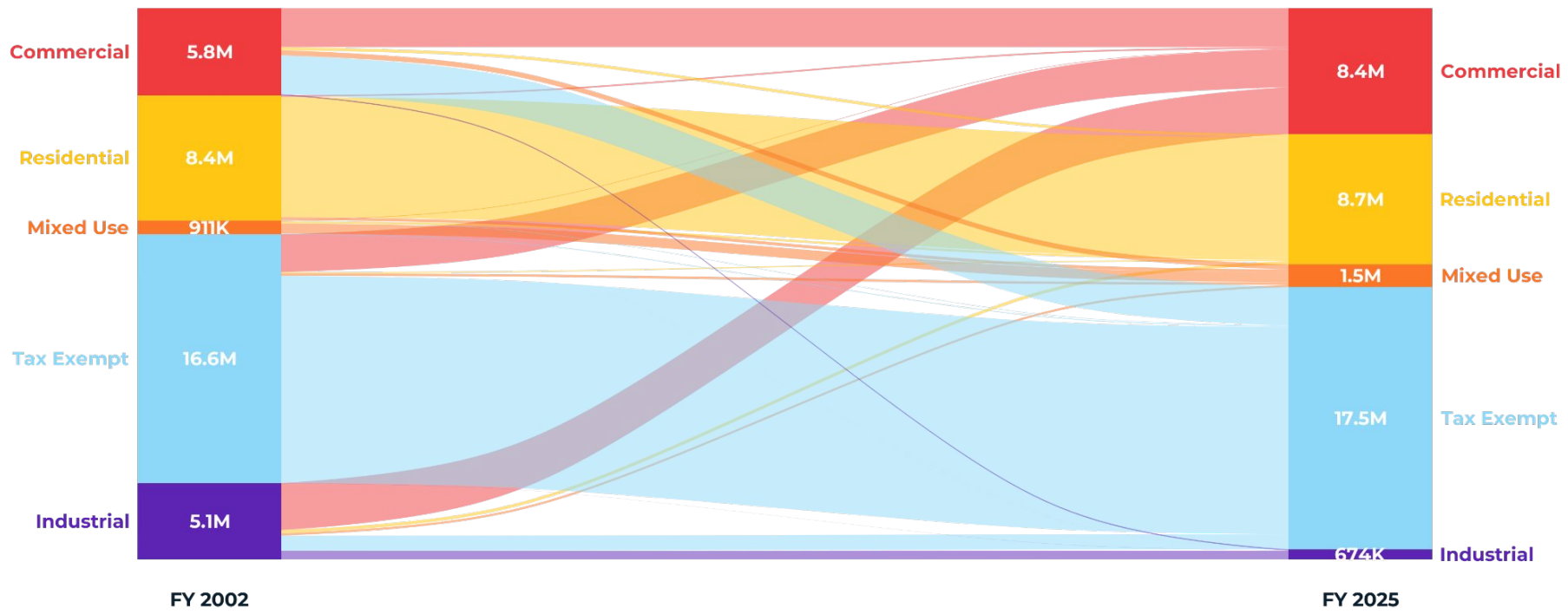
In Mission Hill, growth in **mixed-use & residential** land came largely from conversions of **tax-exempt** and **commercial** land.

Mission Hill Land Use Change by Land Use Category in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



Allston saw growth across all non-industrial land categories, driven by conversions from **commercial**, **industrial**, and **tax-exempt** uses.

Allston Land Use Change by Land Use Category in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025

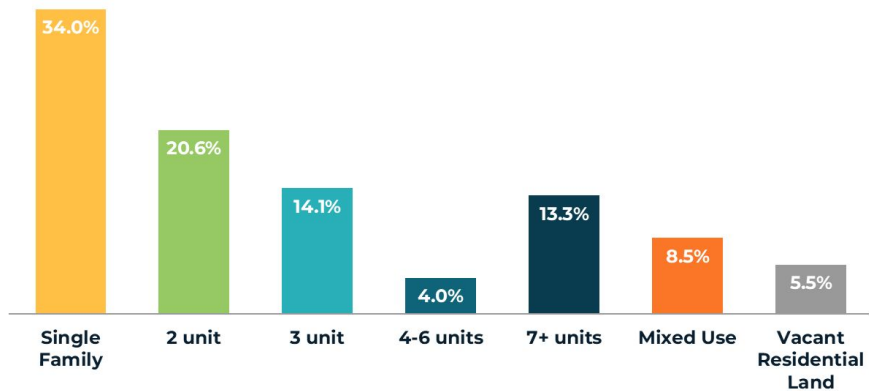


Land Use in Boston: Current Snapshot & Trends

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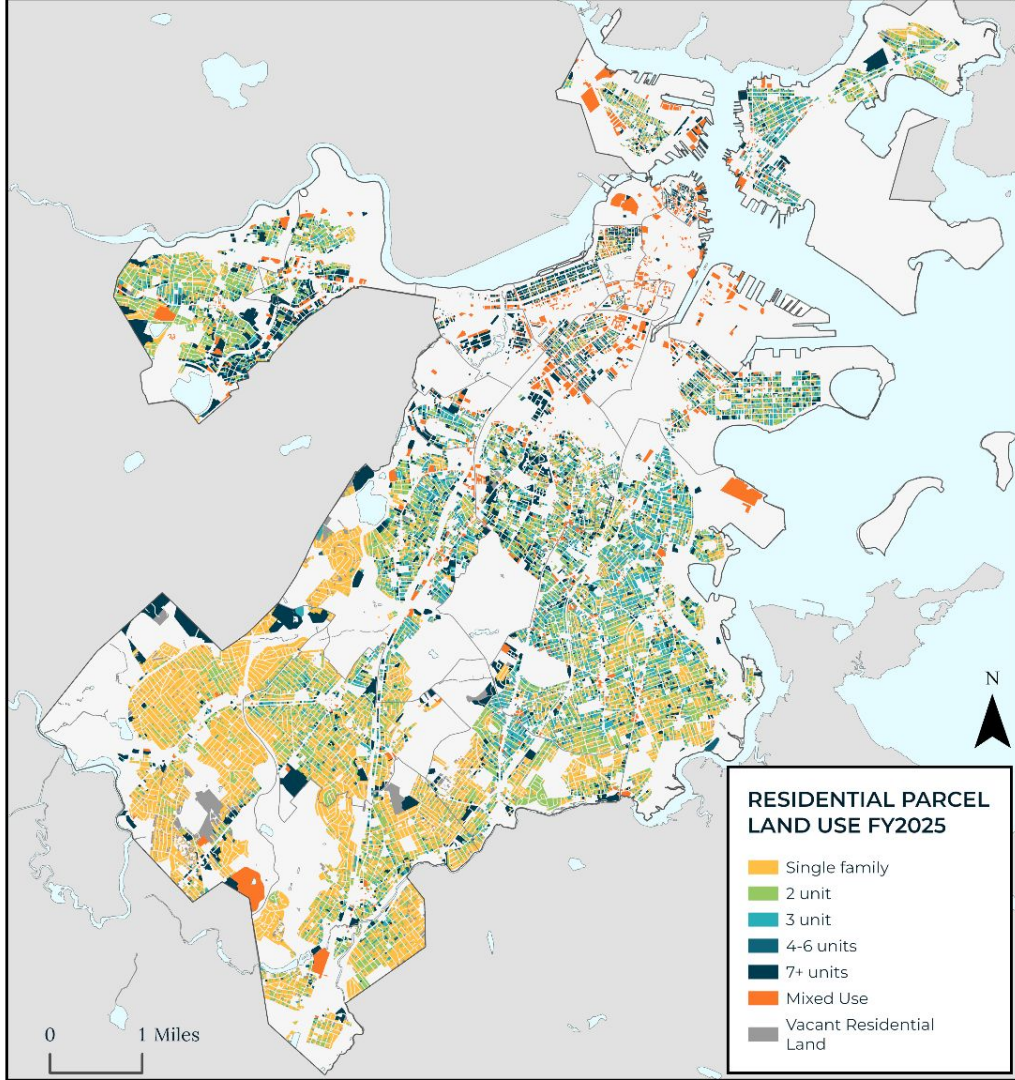
Single-family homes make up a third of residential/mixed use land, but only 17% of the city's total housing units.

Boston Parcel Land Use by Residential Category, FY 2025



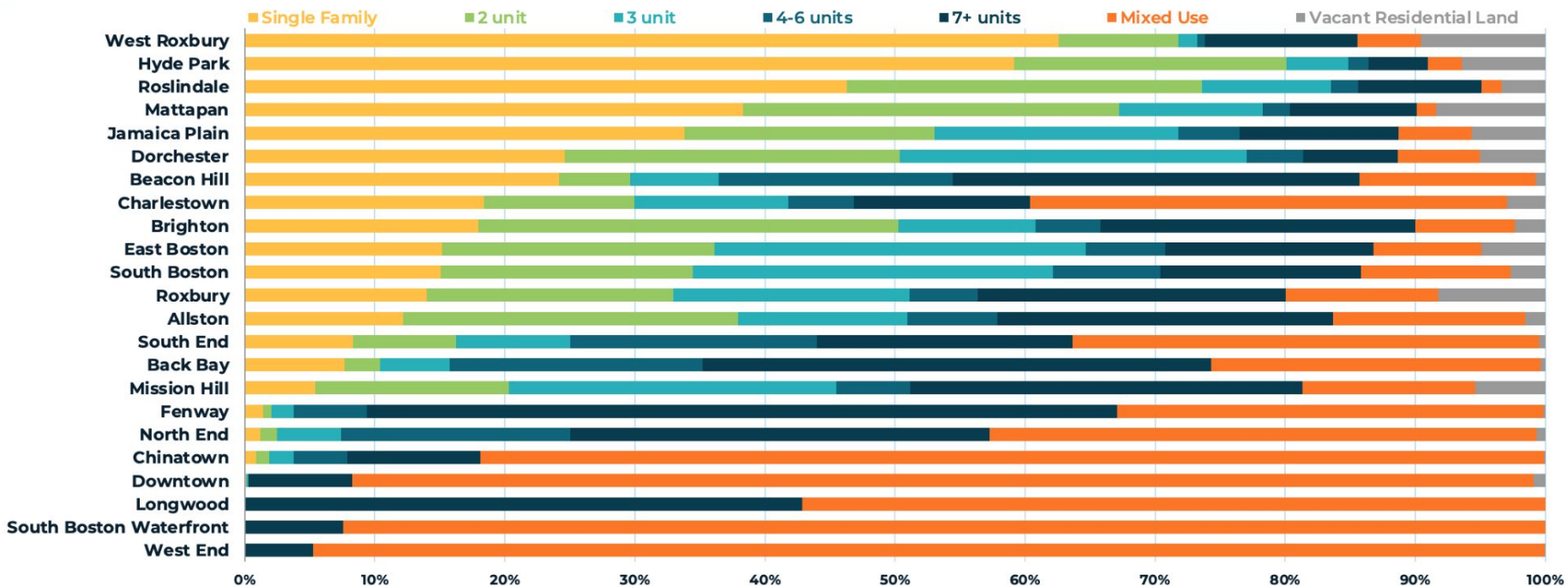
Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

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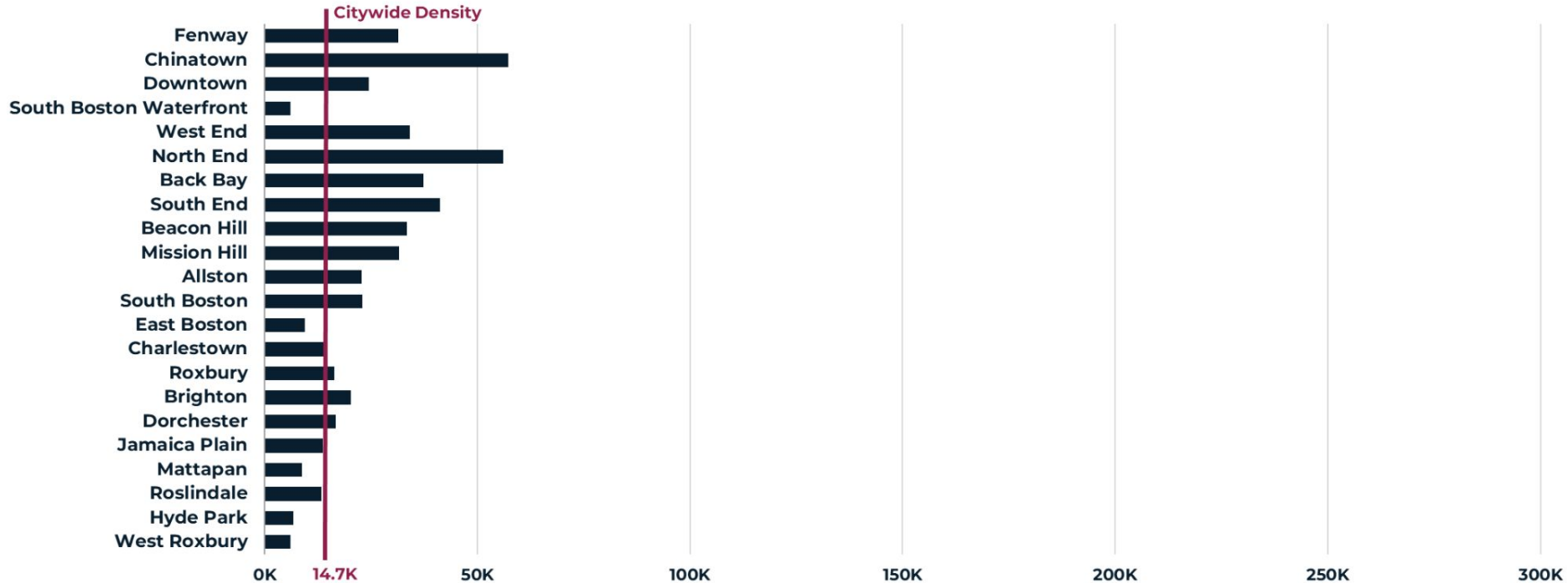
Single-family residential dominates in neighborhoods furthest from downtown like West Roxbury and Hyde Park, while **middle-housing (2-6 units)** and **higher-density (7+ units)** use is more prevalent near downtown.

Parcel Land Use by Residential Category and Neighborhood, FY 2025



Chinatown, North End, South End, and Back Bay have the highest population densities when measured by total land area, and the South Boston Waterfront has the lowest population density.

Population Density by Neighborhood Using Total Land Area (people per square mile of total land), 2024

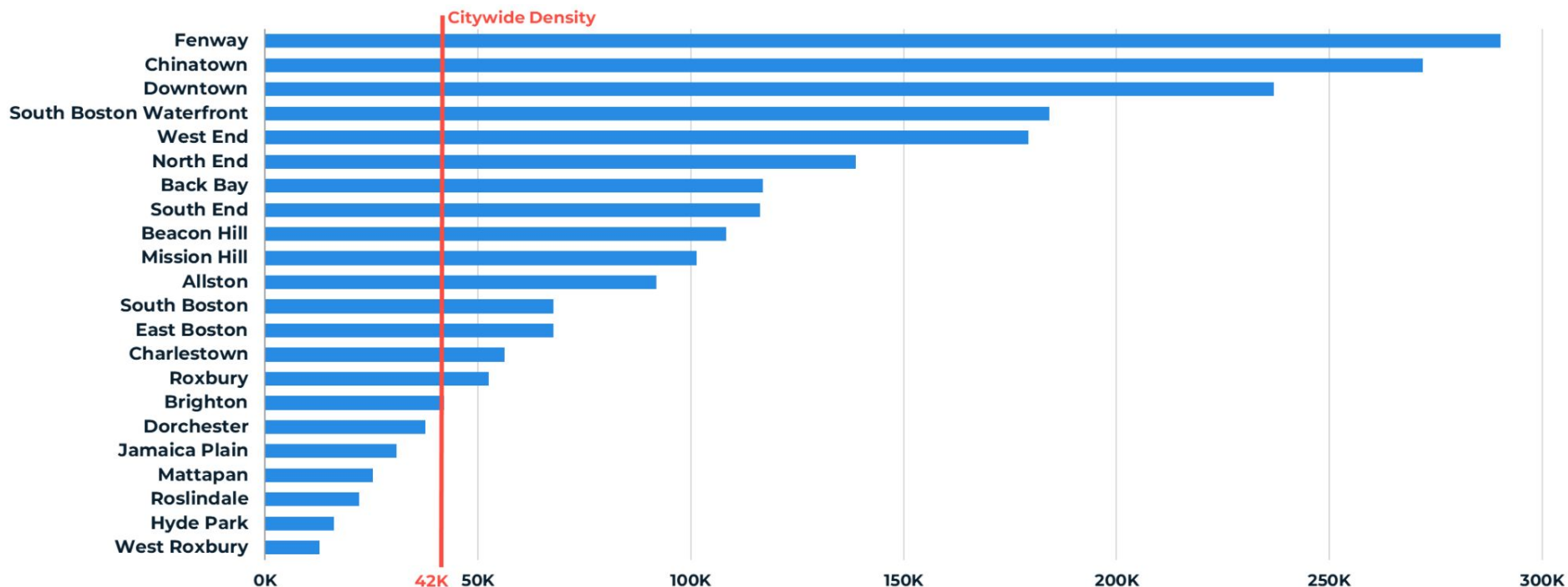


Note: Population densities for Census Tract-based neighborhoods are shown using 2024 population estimates. Longwood is not shown.

Source: City of Boston Planning Department Research Division 2024 Population Estimates & Analysis

However, when considering only **inhabited land** (residential, mixed-use, subsidized housing) Fenway, Chinatown, and Downtown have the highest population densities.

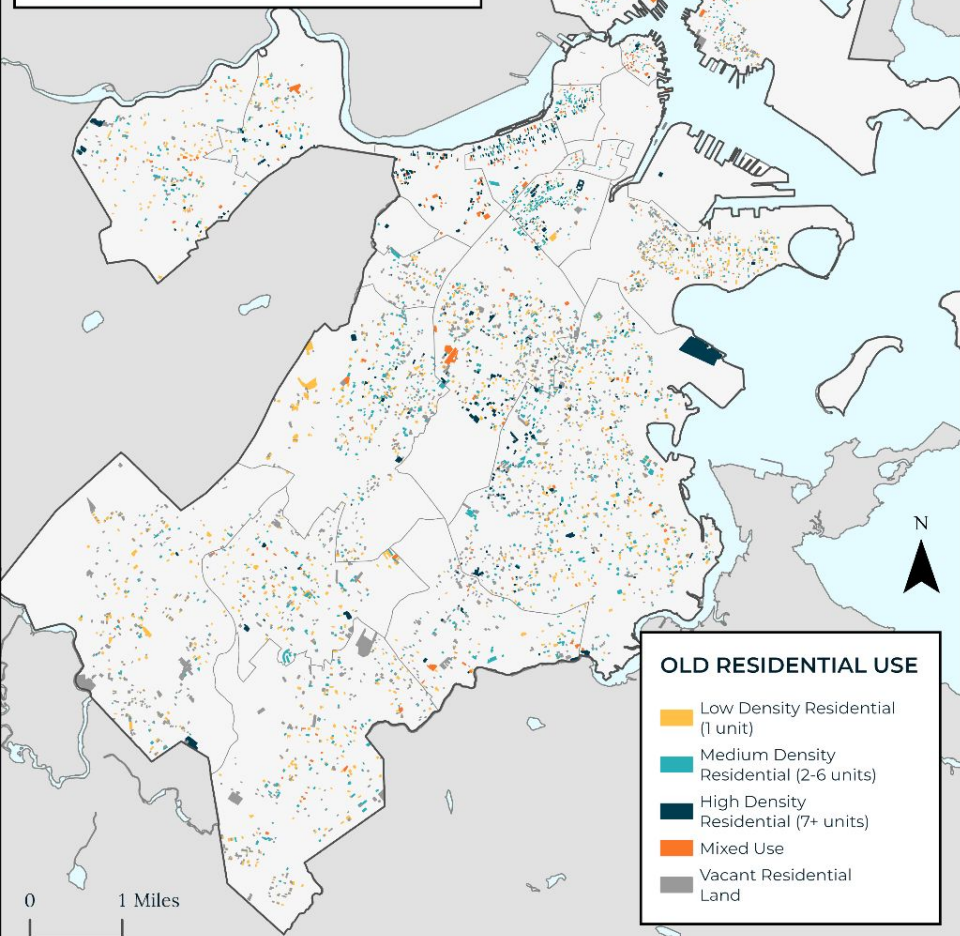
Population Density by Neighborhood Using Inhabited Land (people per square mile of inhabited land), FY 2025



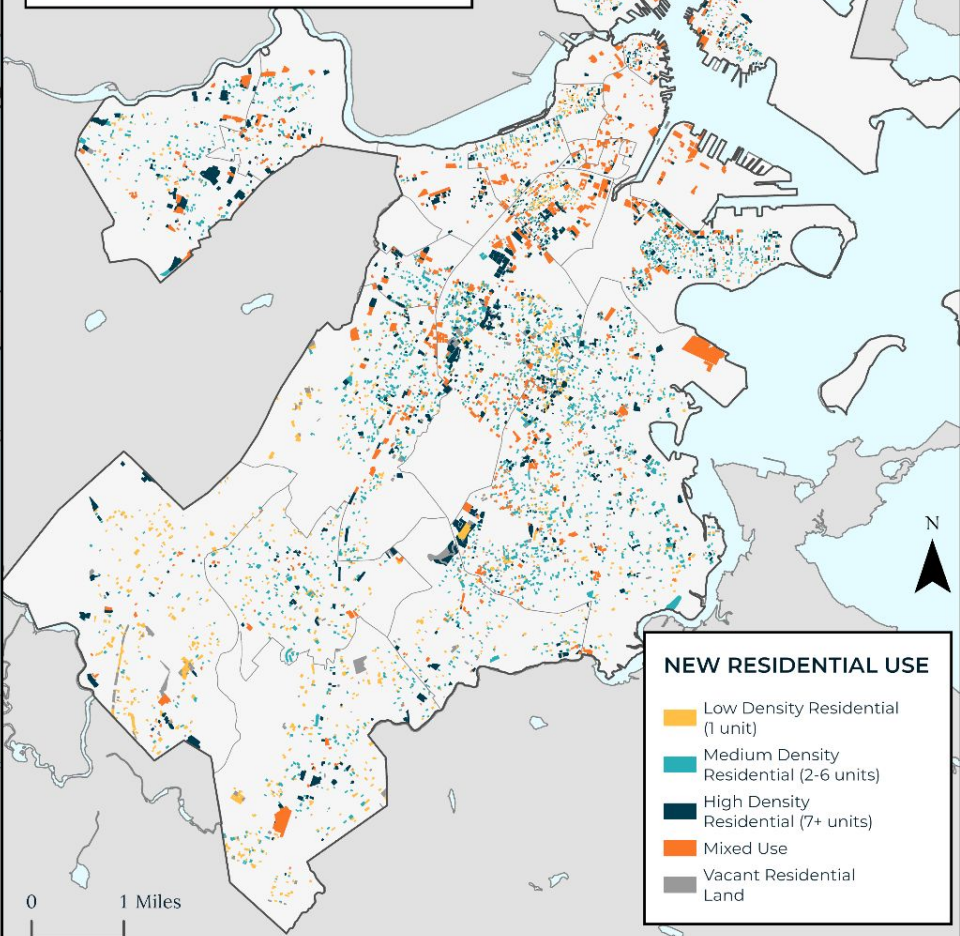
Note: Census tract-based neighborhoods are shown. Density is calculated using total population divided by total non-vacant residential and mixed use land, in addition to other “inhabited” parcels such as rooming houses, nursing homes, and subsidized housing. Longwood is not included because of the high concentration of dormitories that are difficult to distinguish from other university-owned parcels.

Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division 2024 Population Estimates & Analysis.

**PARCELS IN BOSTON WITH
CHANGING RESIDENTIAL USE,
FY2002**

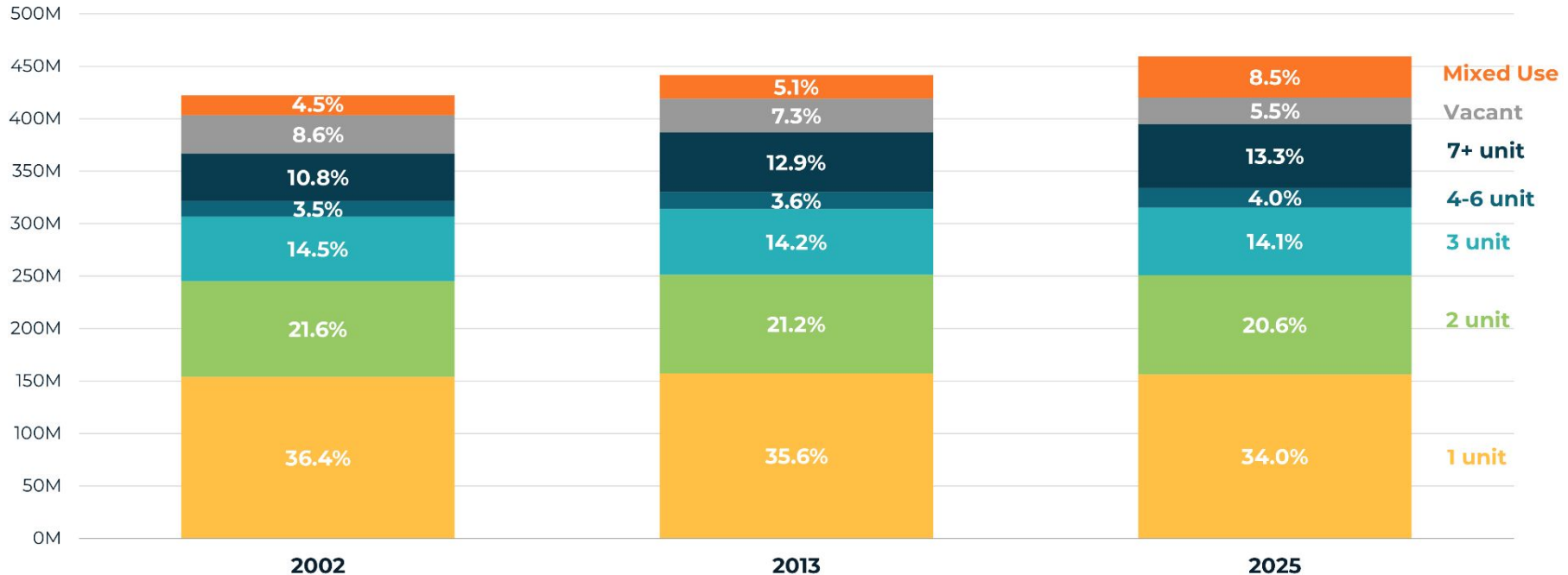


**PARCELS IN BOSTON WITH
CHANGING RESIDENTIAL USE,
FY2025**



Land used for **single-family homes has remained the top category among residential uses, and land used for **2-unit** and **3-unit** parcels has consistently made up more than a third of total residential/mixed-use land.**

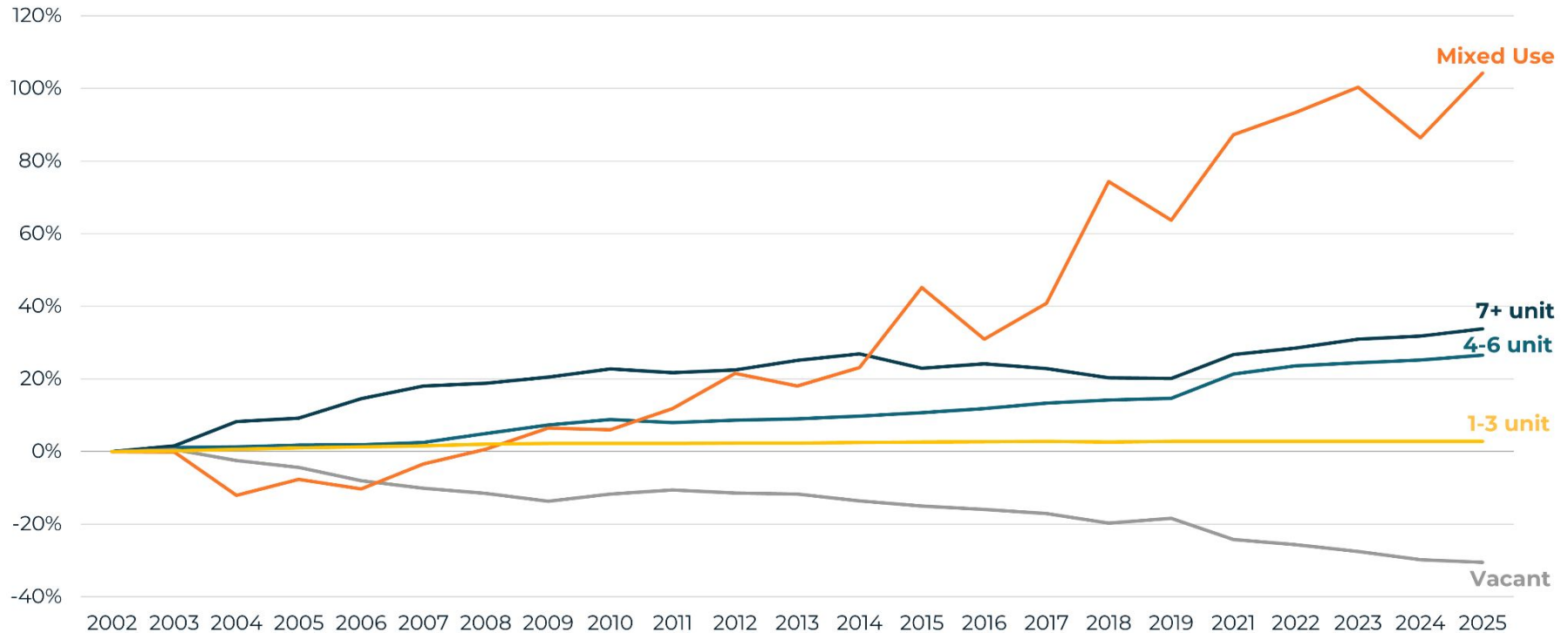
Citywide Residential Land Use as Share of Total Residential/Mixed Use Land Square Feet, FY 2002 - FY 2025



Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2002, FY 2013 and FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

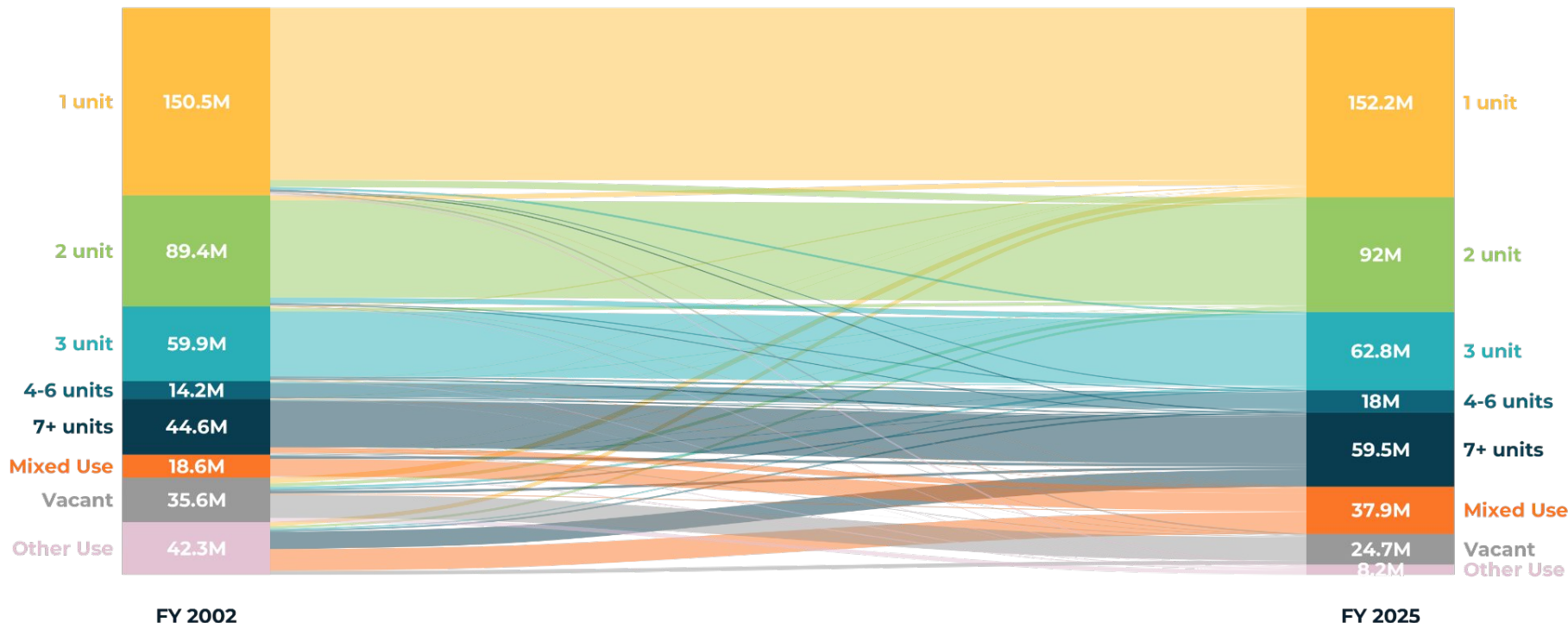
Land used for higher-density housing has increased by nearly a third since FY 2002, while vacant residential land use has declined significantly.

Citywide Residential Land Use Over Time, Percent Change in Area Since FY 2002



Boston's shift toward higher-density and mixed use has been driven primarily by conversions from non-residential land, with more modest transitions from lower-density to medium- and higher-density housing.

Citywide Land Use Change by Residential Category in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025

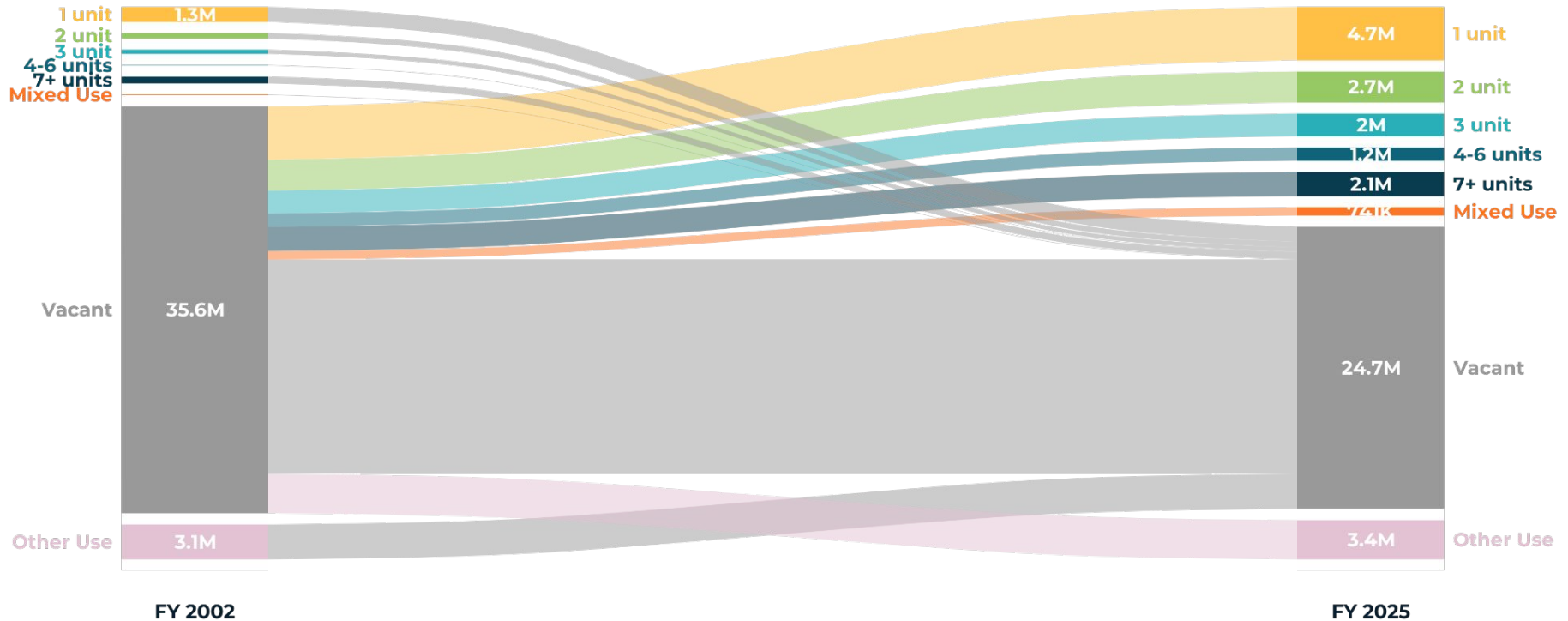


FY 2002

FY 2025

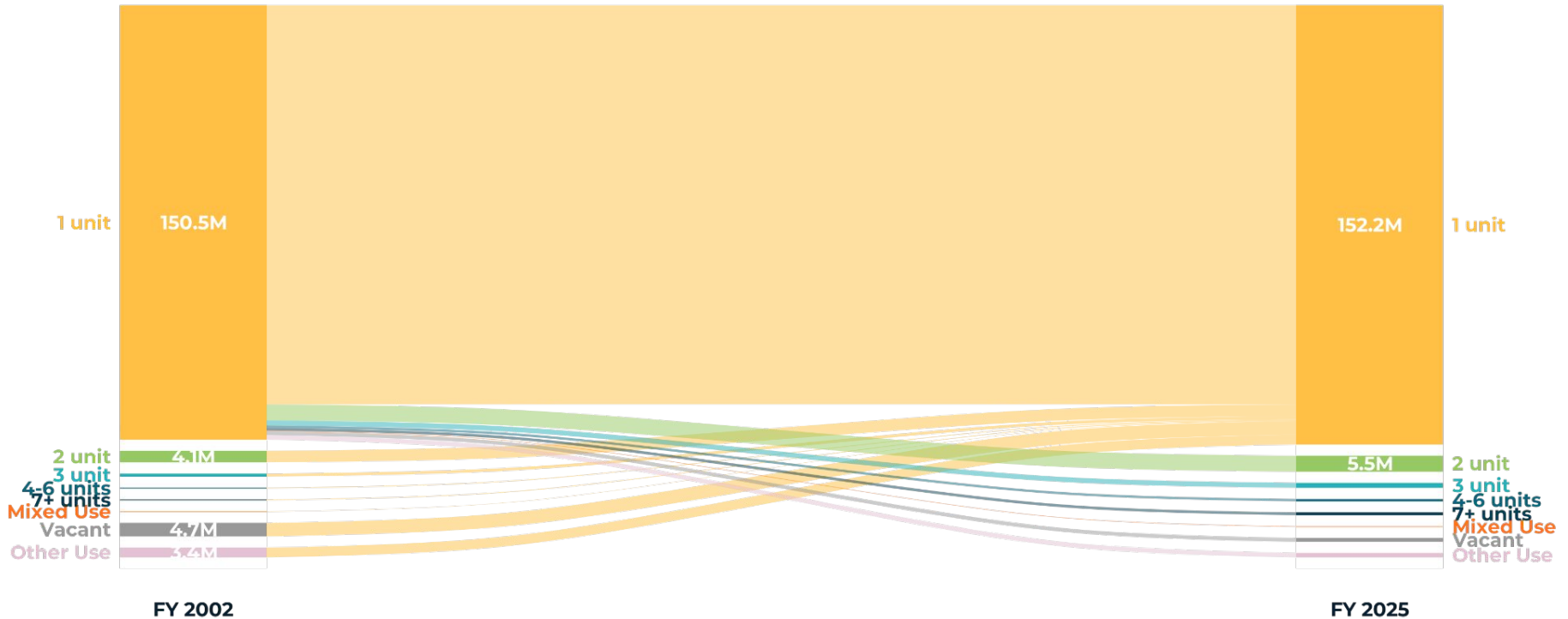
About half of vacant residential land was converted to non-vacant land by FY 2025, with 4.7M square feet converting to single-family use.

Citywide Land Use Change to/from Vacant Residential Use in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



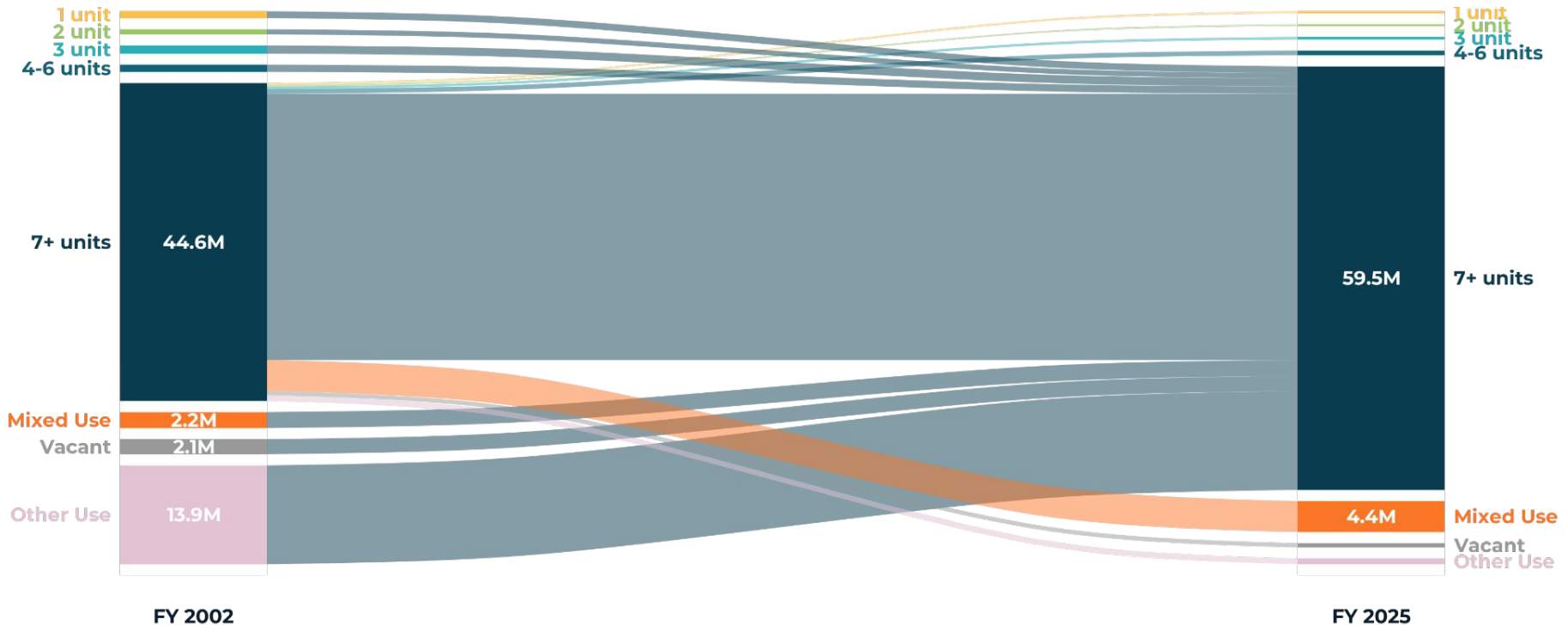
Since FY 2002, about 5.5M square feet of **single-family** land has been converted to **2-unit** use, while 4.1M square feet of **2-unit** land has shifted to **single-family**.

Citywide Land Use Change to/from Single-Family Land in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



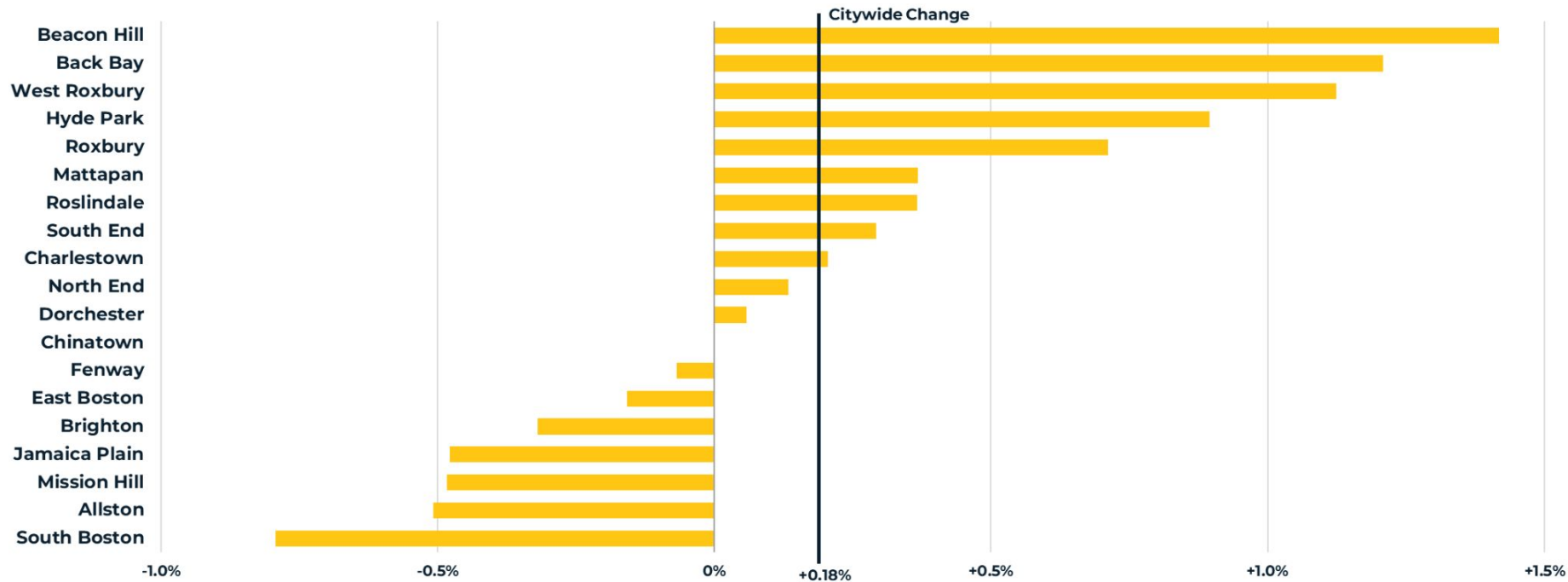
37% of high-density land today was repurposed from land that had been used for other uses, mostly drawing from non-residential land.

Citywide Land Use Change to/from High-Density Housing in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



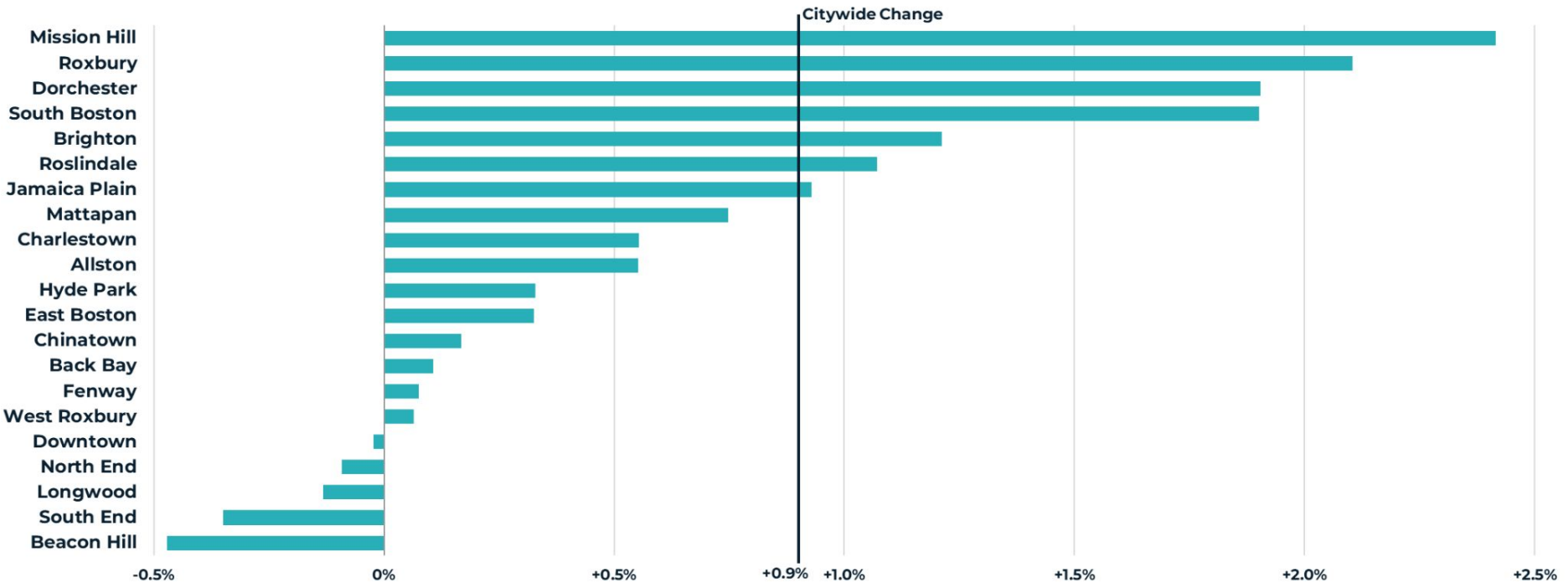
Land used for **single-family homes** has increased the most in **Beacon Hill and Back Bay**, and has declined the most in **South Boston**.

Percentage Point Change in Single-Family Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



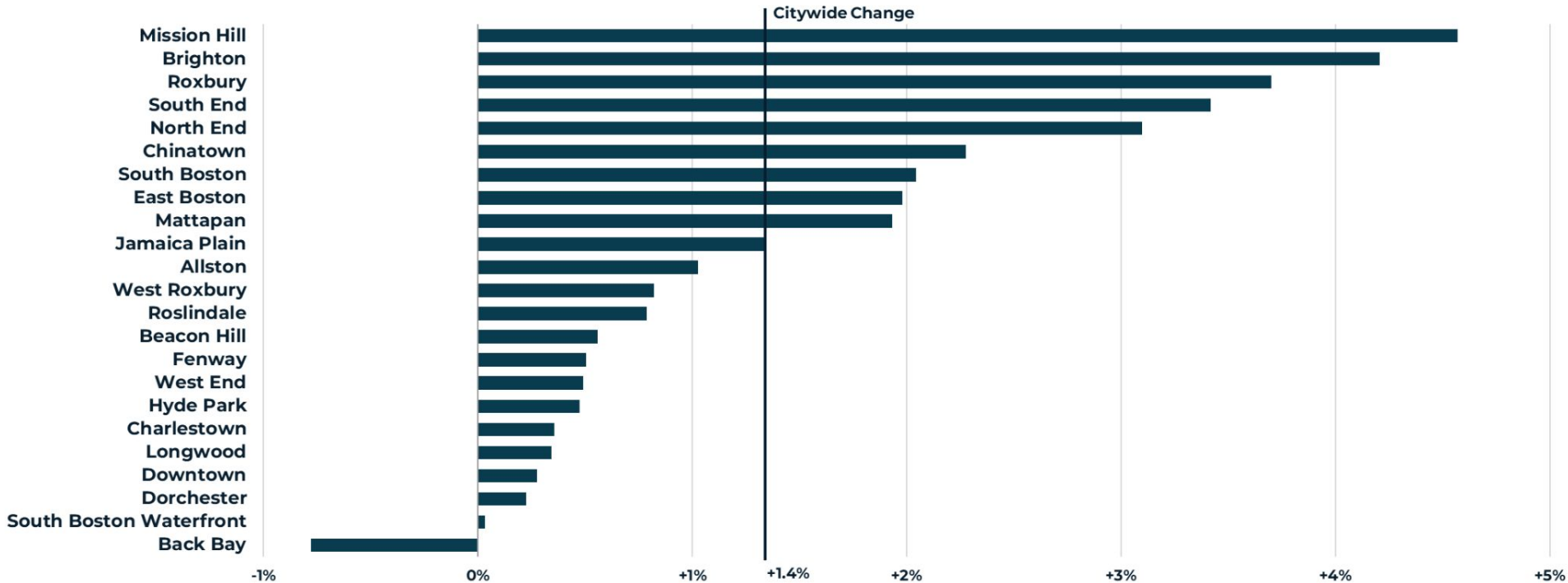
Medium-density (2-6 units) land use has increased by more than 2 percentage points in Roxbury and Mission Hill, but has declined in the South End and Beacon Hill.

Percentage Point Change in Medium-Density Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



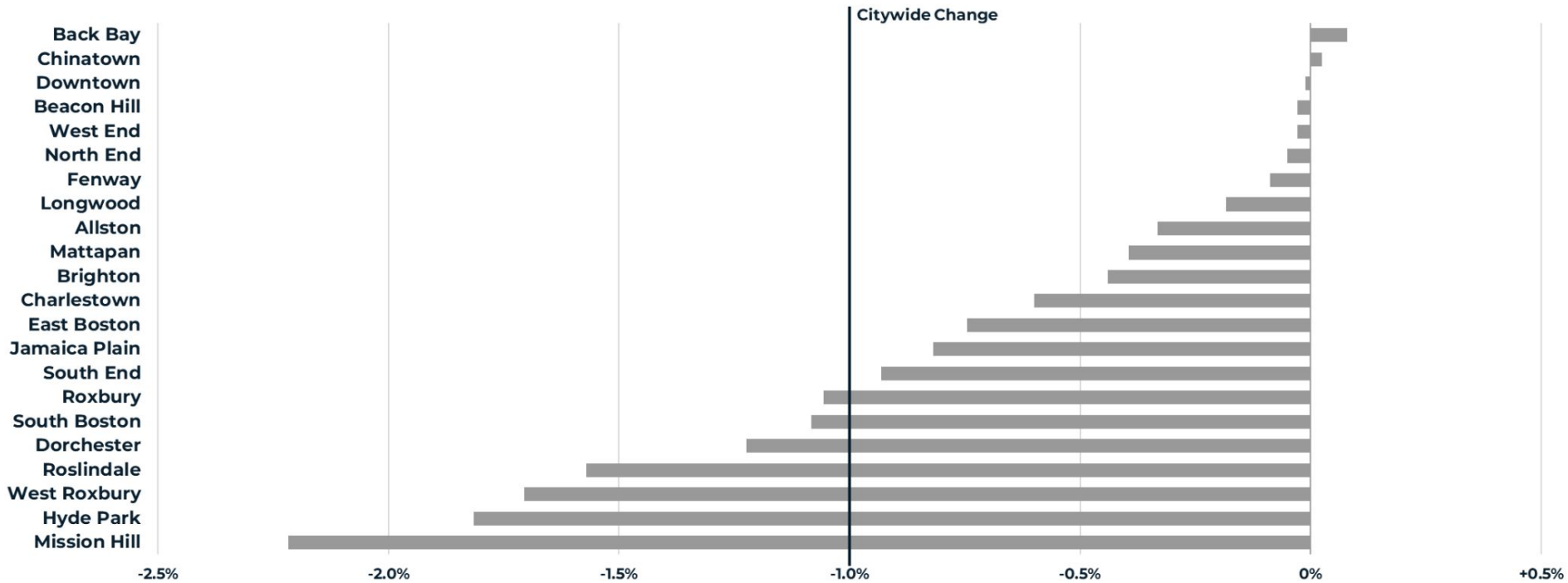
High-density residential land use has increased the most in Mission Hill and Brighton, by has decreased by nearly 1 percentage point in Back Bay.

Percentage Point Change in High Density (7+ units) Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



Vacant residential land use has declined the most in Mission Hill, Hyde Park, and West Roxbury.

Percentage Point Change in Vacant Residential Land Share by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



What patterns of residential land use have emerged?

NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL LAND USE PATTERNS



Broad-based Growth

- Up in all resi categories, except vacant.
- Typical of neighborhoods further from the city center.
- ex. *Citywide, Hyde Park, Mattapan, Roxbury, Dorchester.*



Multifamily-led Growth

- Up in all resi categories except for single family and vacant land.
- Typical of neighborhoods nearer to the city center, transit-rich and centrally located.
- ex. *Allston, Mission Hill, Jamaica Plain, South Boston*

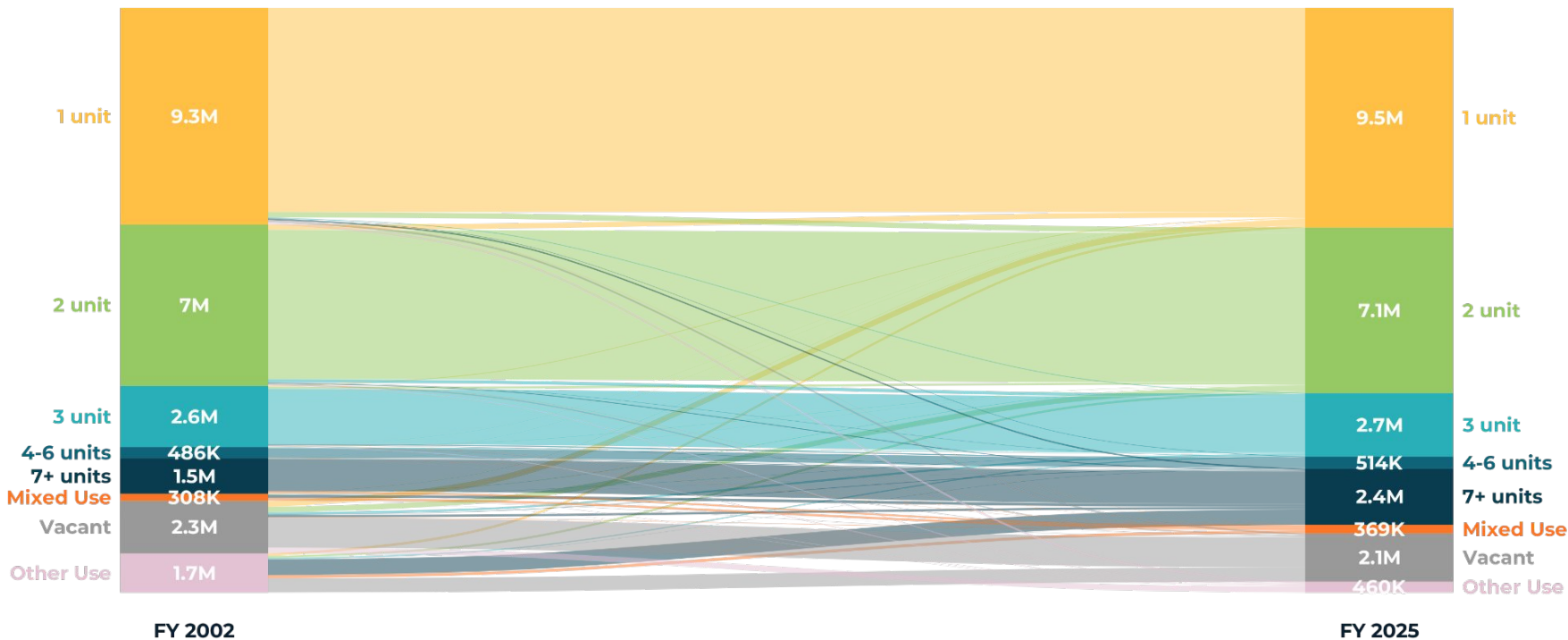


Uneven Growth

- Up especially in single family and mixed use land with either high density increase with middle density decrease or inverse.
- Typical of neighborhoods in the city center, high-demand older central neighborhoods.
- ex. *Beacon Hill, South End, Back Bay*

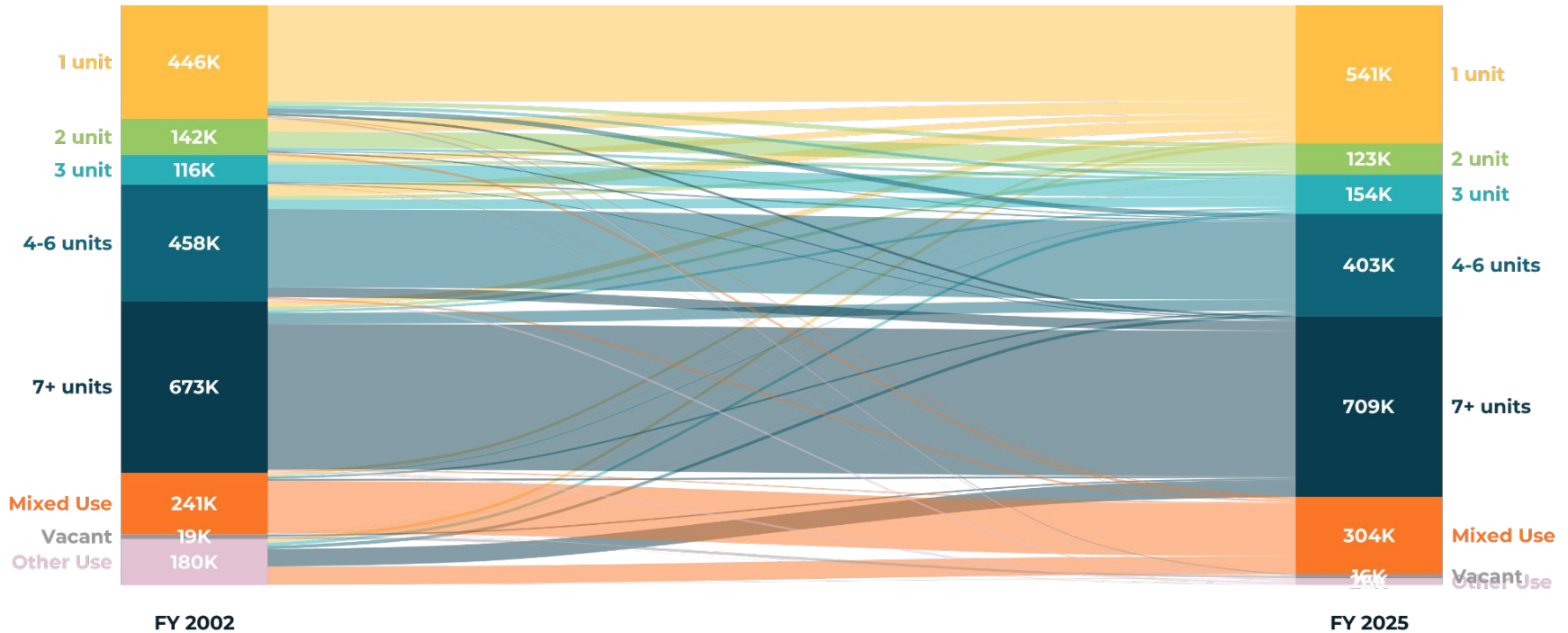
Mattapan saw growth in all residential land use categories except for vacant use, with its largest relative increase in high-density land.

Mattapan Land Use Change by Residential Category in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



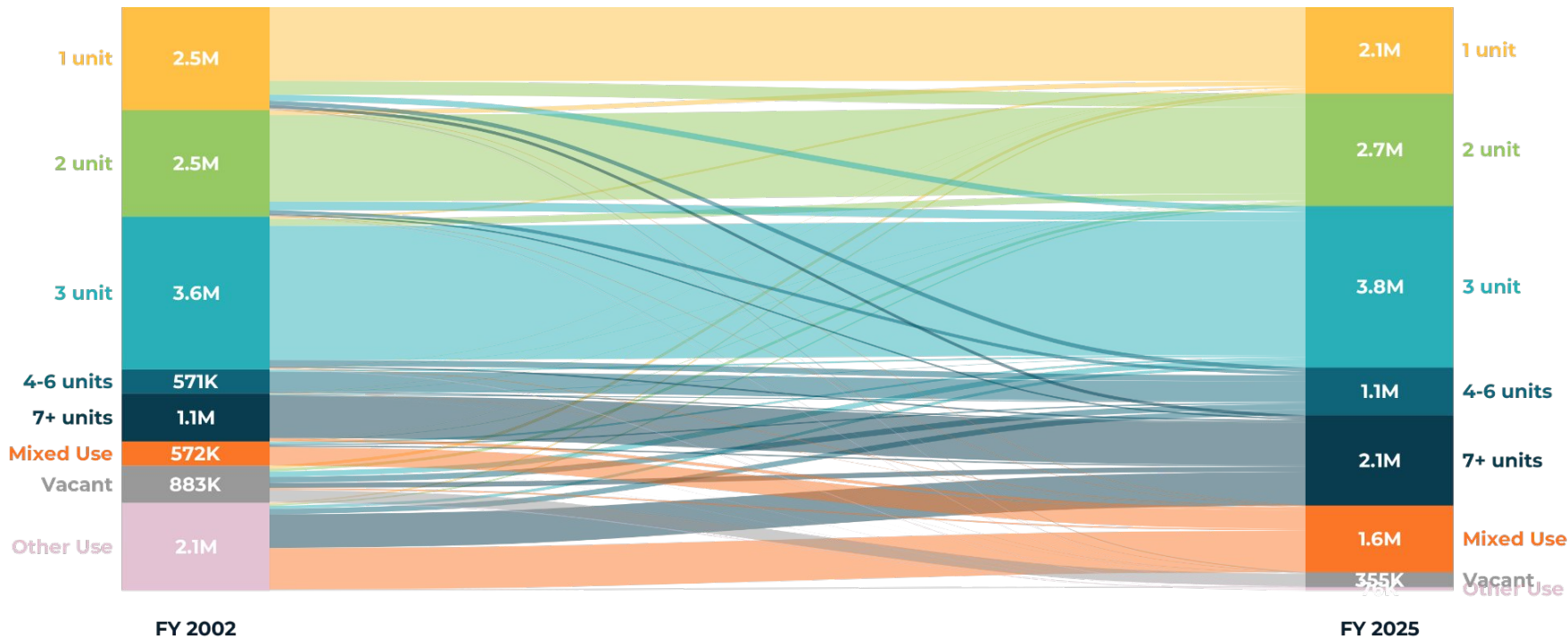
Beacon Hill saw substantial de-densification of existing residential land, with **single-family** land increasing the most, drawing from all other residential uses.

Beacon Hill Land Use Change by Residential Category in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025



By contrast, South Boston's land used for 4-6 unit and high-density housing nearly doubled, drawing from all other uses.

South Boston Land Use Change by Residential Category in Square Feet, FY 2002 to 2025

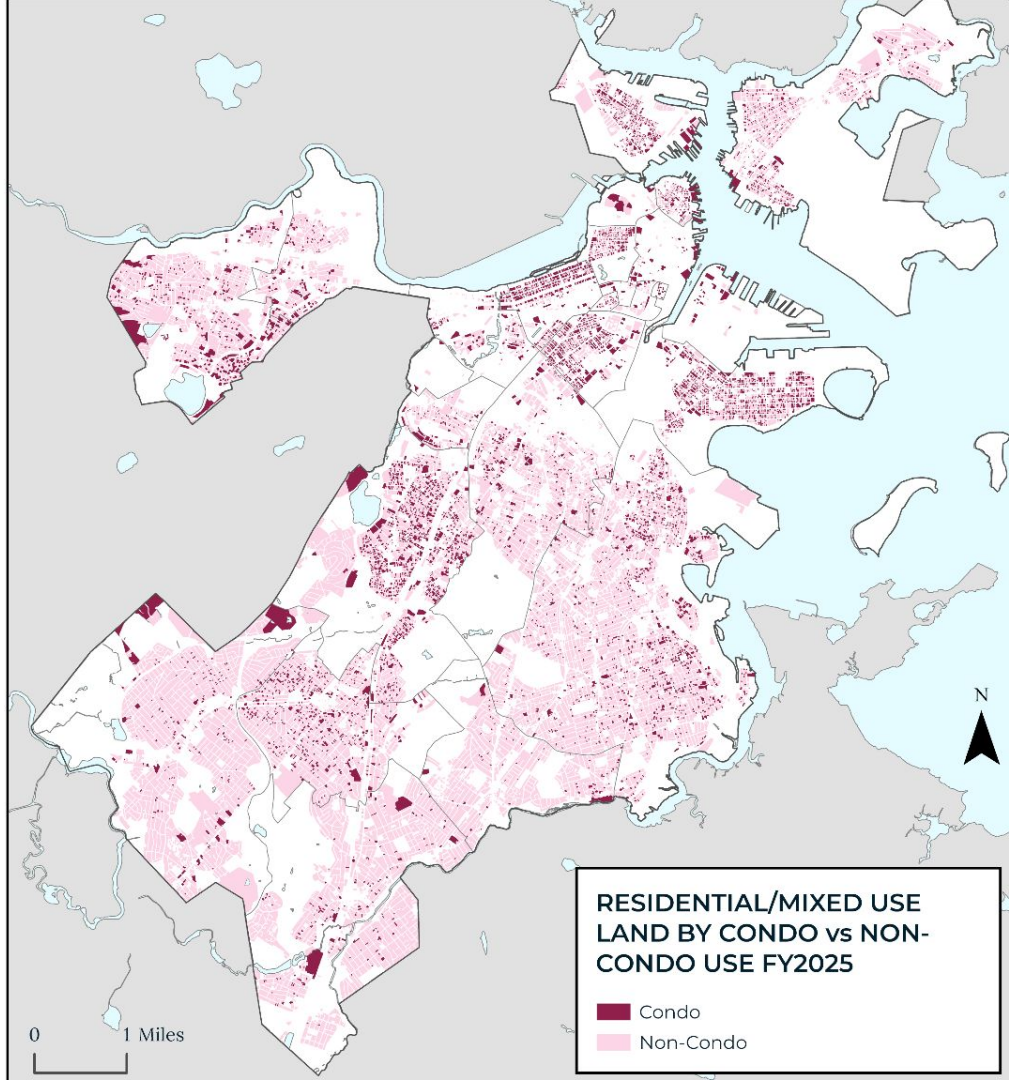
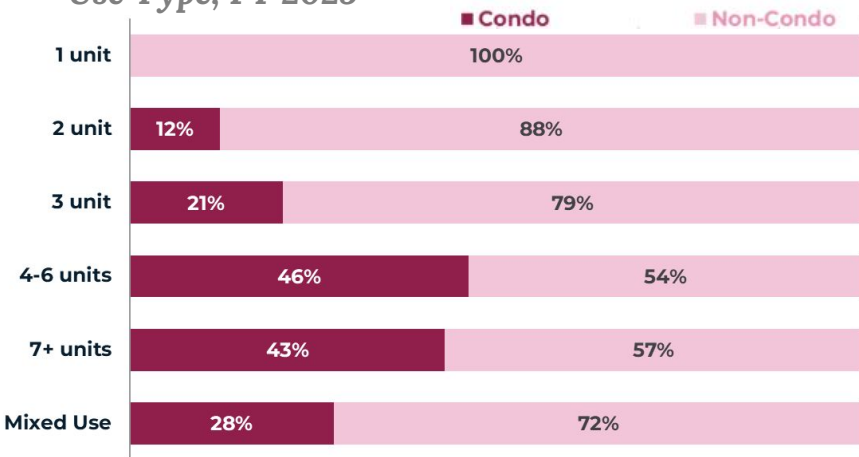


Land Use in Boston: Current Snapshot & Trends

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Nearly half of the land area for 4-6 unit and 7+ unit properties is made up of **condo parcels**, and more than a quarter of mixed use land area is made up of **condo parcels**.

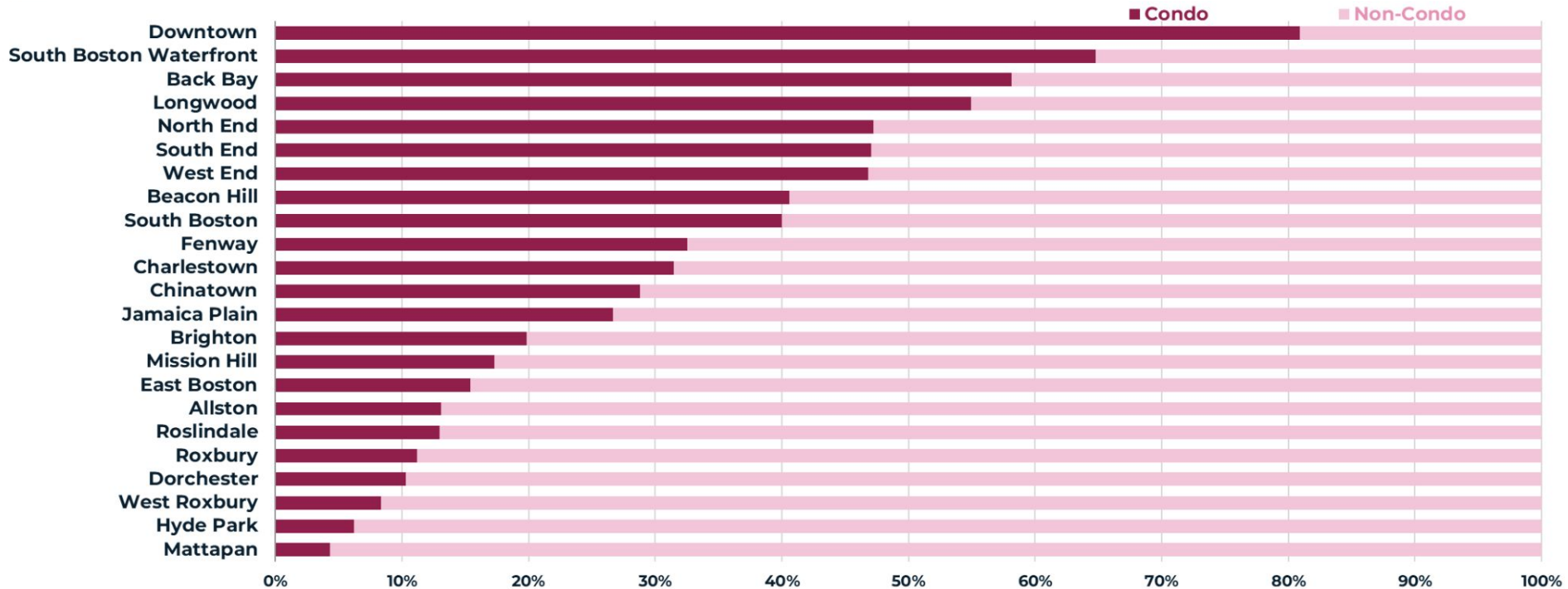
Condo vs Non-Condo Land Area by Residential Use Type, FY 2025



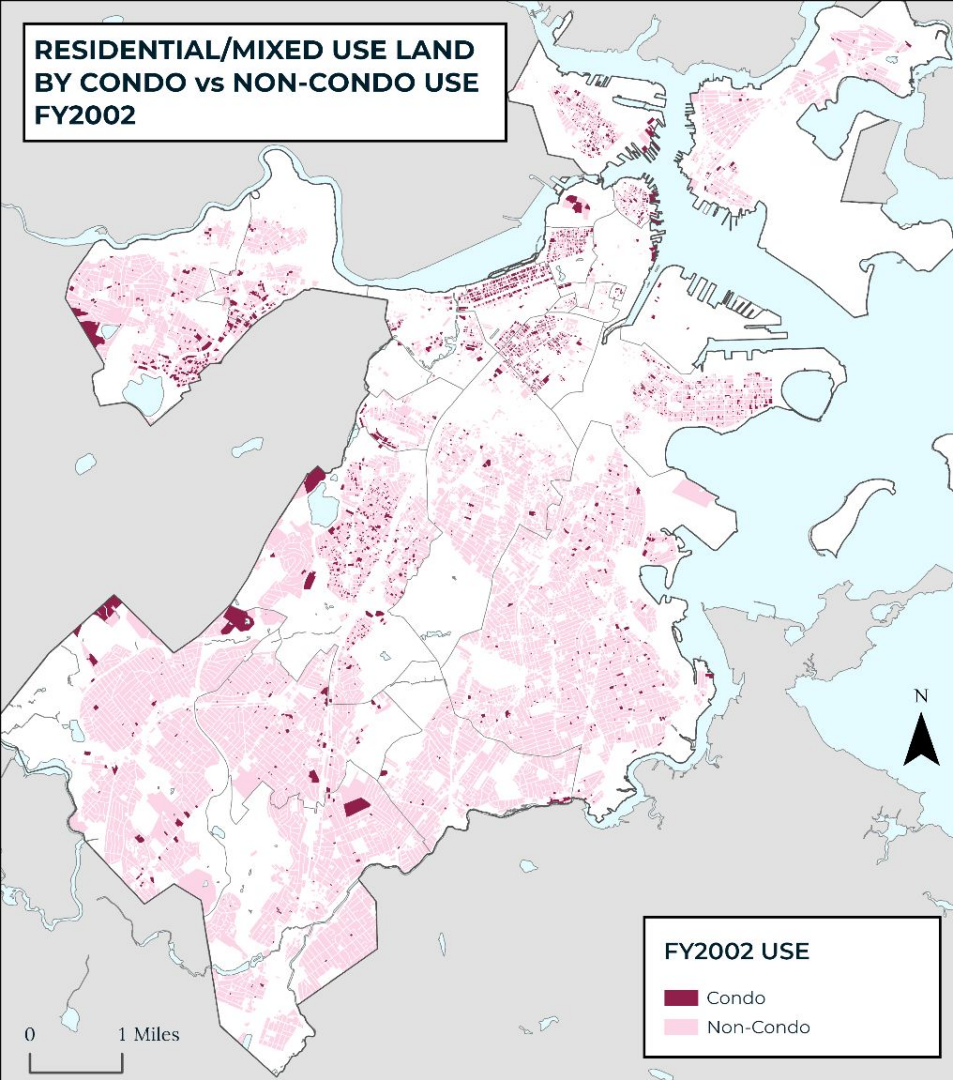
Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Condominium residential/mixed use land is more common in neighborhoods near downtown, while non-condo residential/mixed use land is common in outer neighborhoods.

Residential/Mixed-Use Land Area by Neighborhood and Condo vs Non-Condo, FY 2025



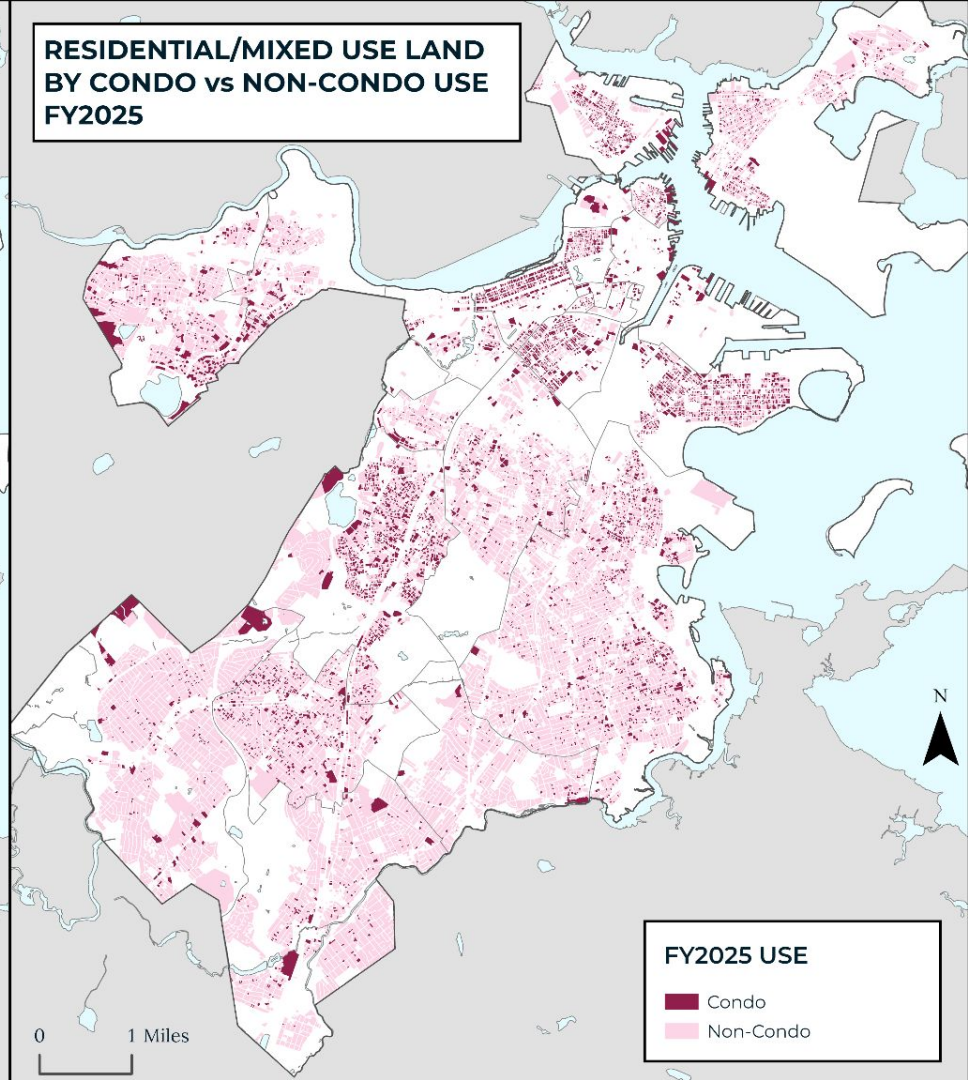
**RESIDENTIAL/MIXED USE LAND
BY CONDO vs NON-CONDO USE
FY2002**



FY2002 USE

■ Condo
■ Non-Condo

**RESIDENTIAL/MIXED USE LAND
BY CONDO vs NON-CONDO USE
FY2025**

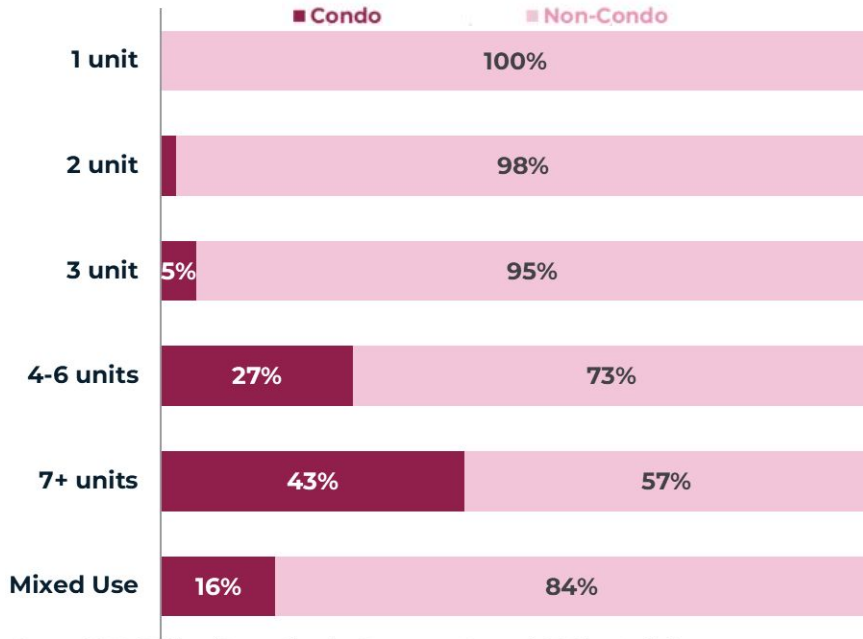


FY2025 USE

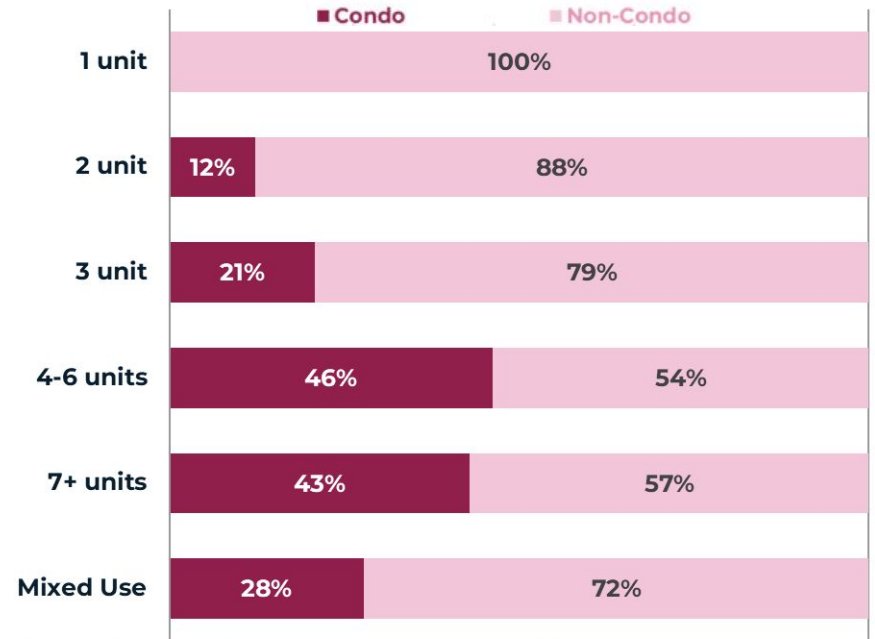
■ Condo
■ Non-Condo

The share of mixed-use and medium-density (2-6 units) residential land used for **condos** has increased significantly since FY 2002.

Condo vs Non-Condo Land Area by Residential Use, FY 2002

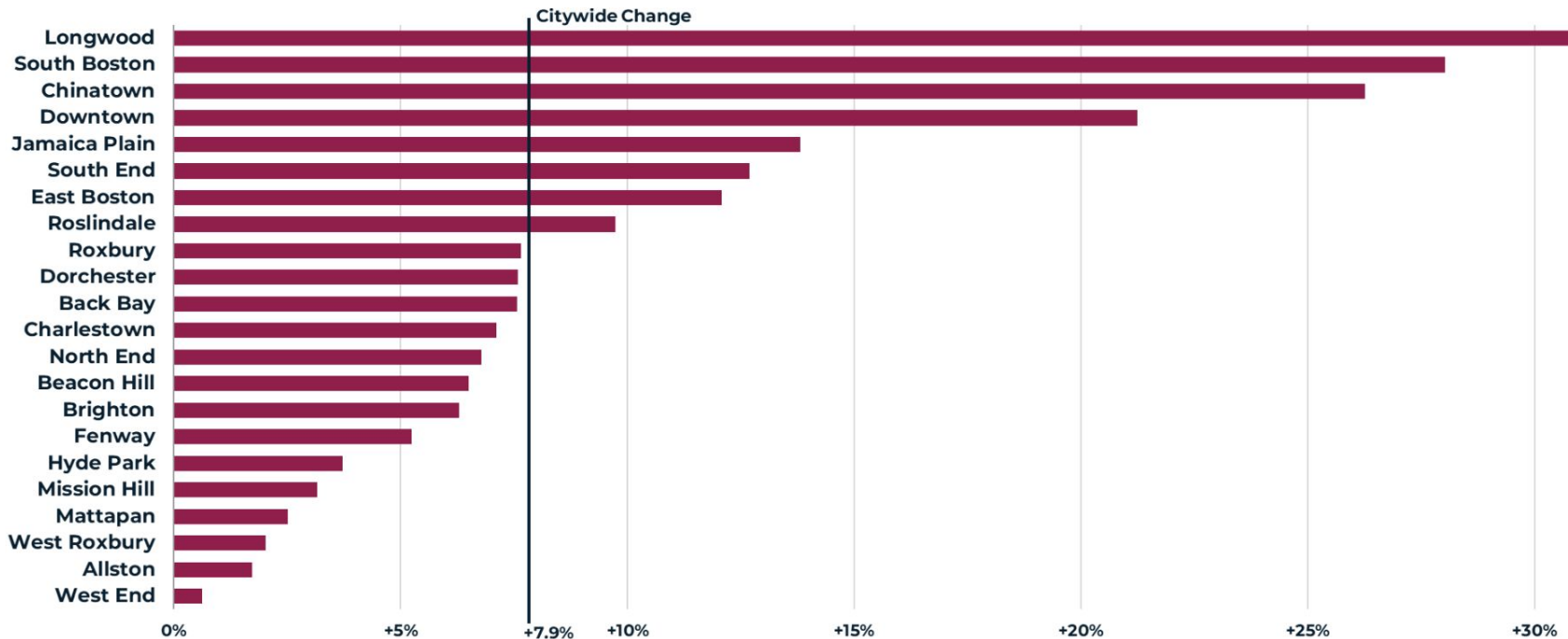


Condo vs Non-Condo Land Area by Residential Use, FY 2025



The share of residential/mixed-use land used for **condo buildings** has increased significantly in Longwood, South Boston, and Chinatown since FY 2002.

Percentage Point Change in Condo Land Share* by Neighborhood, from FY 2002 to 2025



*Share of total residential/mixed-use land.

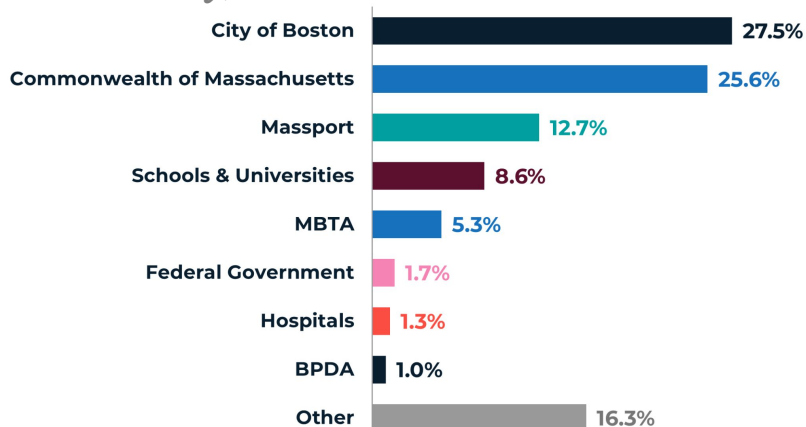
Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2002 and FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division.

Land Use in Boston: Current Snapshot & Trends

- 1 Overall land use
- 2 Residential land use
- 3 Condominium land use
- 4 Tax-exempt land use

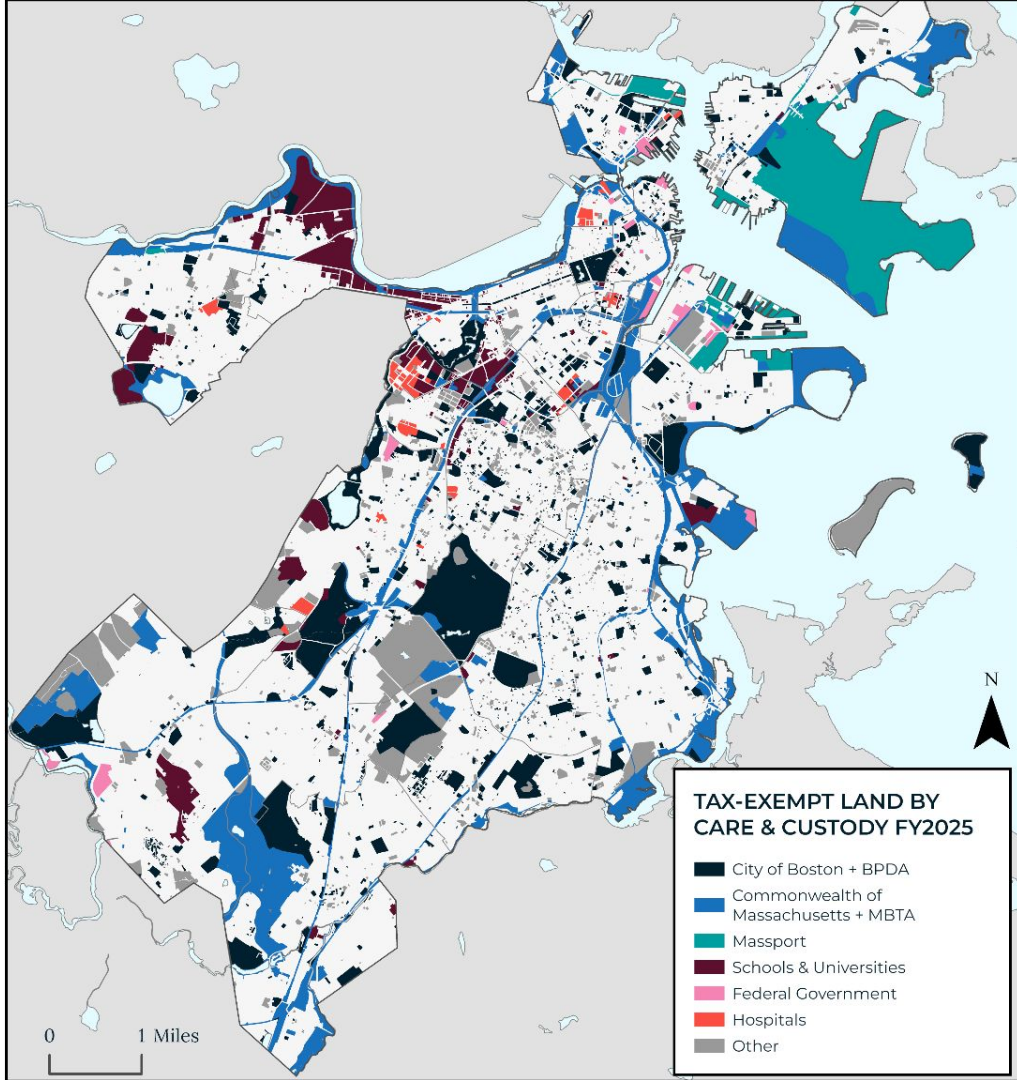
The City of Boston and Massachusetts are together responsible for a majority of tax-exempt land, largely made up of major public parks and other public buildings.

Boston Tax-Exempt Parcel Land Area by Care and Custody, FY 2025



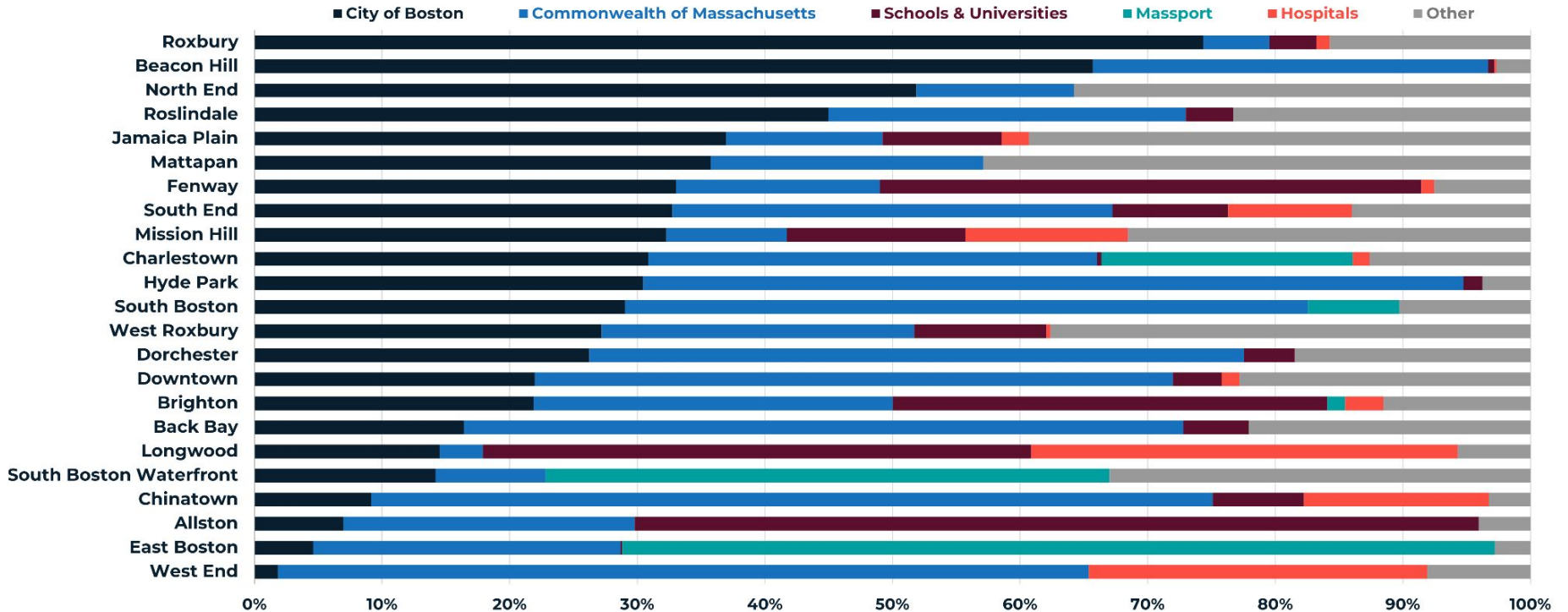
Note: 'Other' includes all other care and custody types, such as museums, religious organizations, and nonprofits, and excludes most roads.

Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.



The City of Boston is responsible for large shares of exempt land in Roxbury, Beacon Hill, and the North End, with key neighborhoods shaped by schools/universities, hospitals, and Massport.

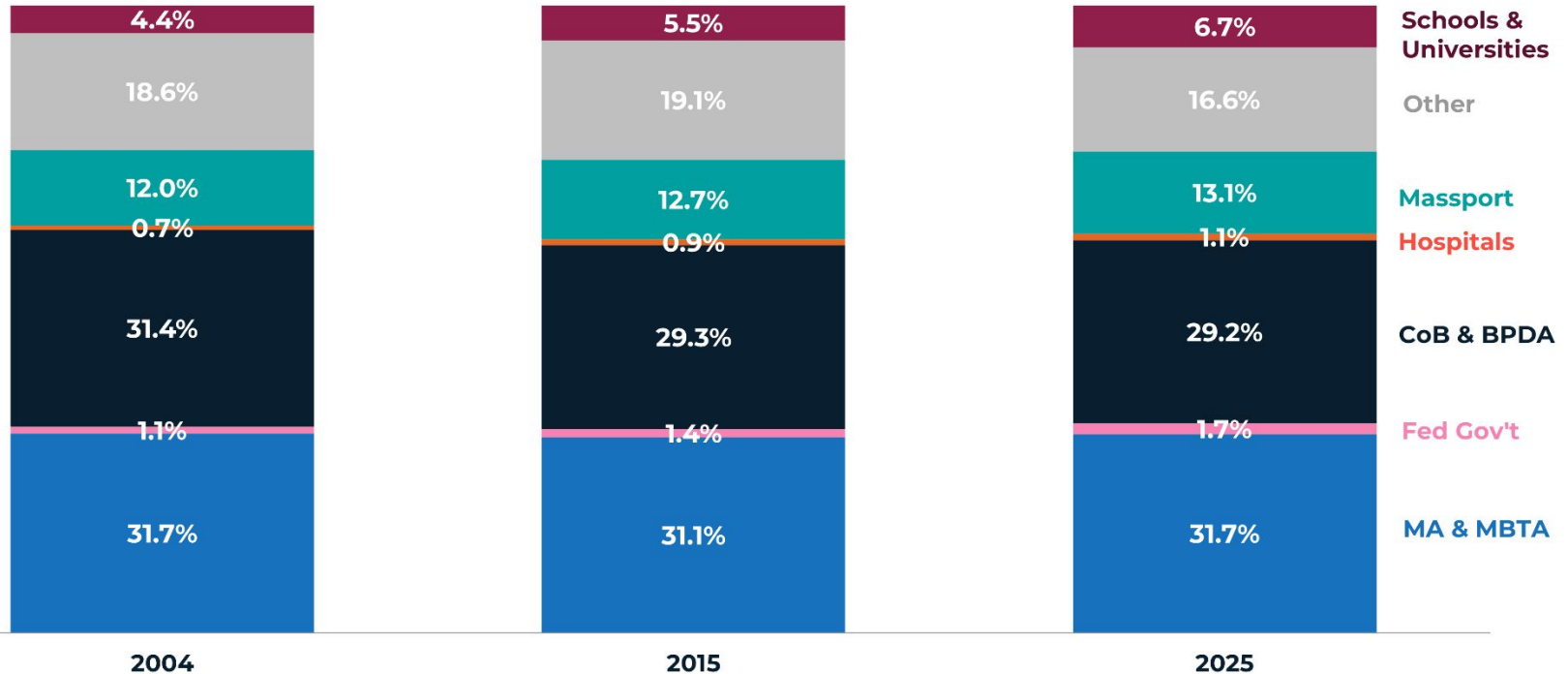
Tax-Exempt Parcel Land Area by Care and Custody and Neighborhood, FY 2025



Note: 'Other' includes all other care and custody types, such as museums, religious organizations, and nonprofits, as well as the federal government, and excludes most roads.

While **Massachusetts** -controlled land has remained stable, **City of Boston** land has declined slightly over the past two decades.

Citywide Tax-Exempt Land Care and Custody as Share of All Tax Exempt Land, FY 2004 to 2025



Note: 'Other' includes all other care and custody types, such as museums, religious organizations, and nonprofits.

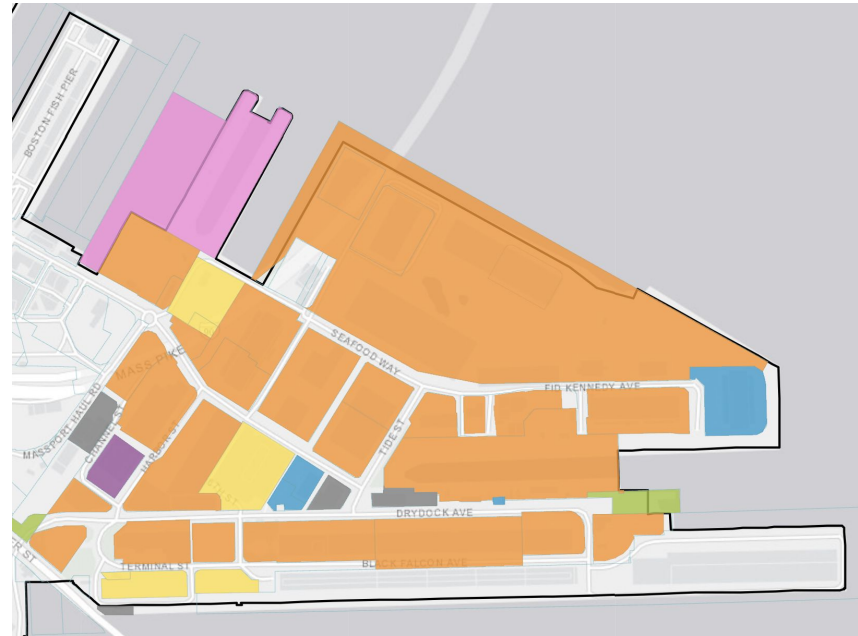
Source: City of Boston Assessing Department FY2004-FY 2025, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis.

Some BPDA- and Massport-controlled land appears as tax-exempt, but many parcels generate revenue through ground leases to private entities who pay regular taxes, or through PILOT agreements.

BPDA land, Charlestown Navy Yard



BPDA land, Marine Industrial Park



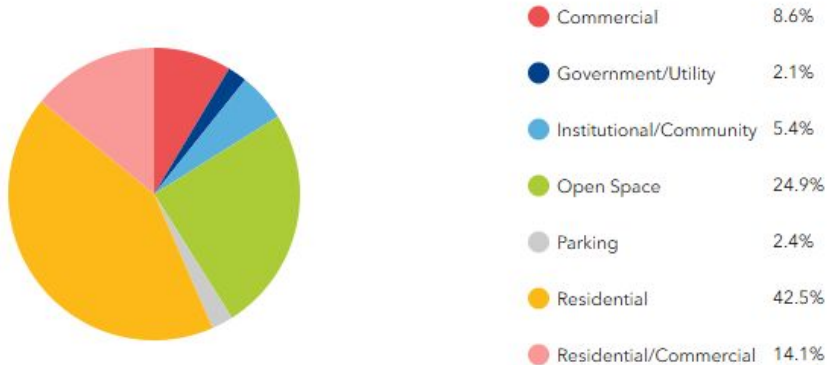
BPDA-Owned Parcel

- Developable
- Not developable
- Ground Leased
- Commercial lease/license
- Open Space/Community Garden
- Designated
- Future Planning Needed
- Parking lot/Garage
- Long Term Maintenance Agreement

Source: BPDA Owned Land, <https://www.bostonplans.org/real-estate/bpda-owned-land>

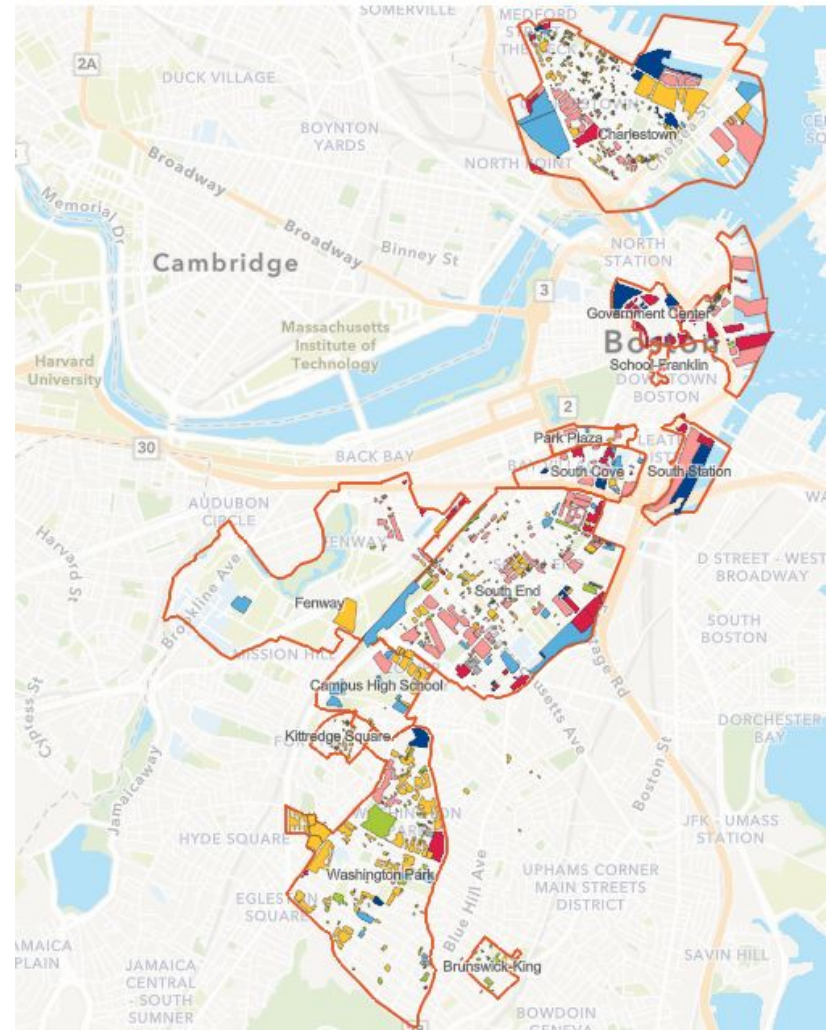
Land Disposition Agreements (LDAs) – contractual covenants that protect land use for the benefit of the city – remain common in certain neighborhoods, reflecting areas where the BPDA still retains direct influence over land use decisions.

Land Disposition Agreements by General Use



Source: BPDA's [Urban Renewal Dashboard](#)

LDA General Use by Urban Renewal Area



Curious to learn more? Dive into the data with our [Land Use Explorer](#)

LAND USE EXPLORER

City of Boston Planning
Department Research Division

Land Use Residential Land Use Land Value Total Value

FILTER PARCELS

Neighborhood: 0 Selected

Main Street: 0 Selected

Squares + Streets: 0 Selected

Census Tract: 0 Selected

Clear filters

SELECT PARCELS

Place point, or draw polygon

Land Use in FY2025 (square feet)

Category	Value
Commercial	111M
Industrial	15M
Mixed Use	39M
Residential	421M
Tax Exempt	542M

Land Use Over Time (square feet)

Year	Commercial	Industrial	Mixed Use	Residential	Tax Exempt
2010	111M	15M	39M	421M	542M
2020	111M	15M	39M	421M	542M
2025	111M	15M	39M	421M	542M

Conclusion



City of Boston
Planning Department

Land Use Trends Summary

Current Land Use Snapshot

- Nearly half of Boston's parcel land is tax exempt, including open space, and over one-third is residential.
- Single-family homes make up the largest share (34%) of citywide residential land area, and are located primarily in outer neighborhoods, like West Roxbury and Hyde Park.
- Medium- (2-6 units) and high-density (7+ units) residential, mixed residential/commercial, and strictly commercial uses are more prevalent in neighborhoods closer to downtown.
- City of Boston and Massachusetts control more than 60% of tax-exempt land.

Significant Shifts in Land Use

- There has been a dramatic transformation from industrial to commercial use citywide, and a slight decrease in land that is tax exempt, which tends to be converted to commercial and residential uses.
- Mixed-use land has increased consistently, especially in downtown-adjacent neighborhoods, and higher-density residential land use has increased in most neighborhoods.
- Vacant residential land has declined citywide.
- However, single-family land use has increased in Back Bay, Beacon Hill, and West Roxbury.
- Condominiums are increasingly prevalent among medium-density and mixed-use parcels.

Implications for Planning & Urban Design

- **Tax-exempt land dominance** continues to create budget constraints for the City, although a decline in tax-exempt land over the past two decades demonstrates a growing property tax base.
- As less industrial land is available to be converted to other uses, there will be **fewer opportunities for large-scale redevelopment of former industrial sites**, increasing development pressure within existing neighborhoods.
- Rapidly densifying neighborhoods will require **expanded transit and infrastructure** to support growth.
- Neighborhoods dominated by single-family homes and showing limited growth—especially near quality transit—**offer key opportunities for targeted upzoning to medium- and high-density housing**, a focus of the *Squares + Streets* planning and zoning initiative.
- Continued **adaptive reuse of underutilized commercial spaces**, such as the *Office to Residential Conversion Program*, will be crucial for addressing housing shortages.
- **What else...**