



# **DOWNTOWN ZONING AND PLAN: DOWNTOWN AMENDMENT**

Public Meeting | January 15, 2025



Planning Department



CITY of **BOSTON**

# ZOOM CONTROLS TO LISTEN TO INTERPRETERS

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

**(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

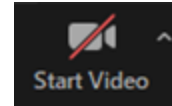
- **Zoom controls are available at the bottom of your screen.** Clicking on these symbols activates different features.
- **Use raise hand function** (dial \*9 if joining by phone) **and wait to be called upon to unmute** (dial \*6 if joining by phone) before asking your question or providing comment.
- Please ask questions in the **chat** along the way! (We will also have a discussion period at the end)



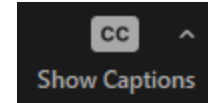
Mute/unmute



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



Turn video on/off



Turn on captions

## Meeting Recording

This event will be recorded and posted on the PLAN: Downtown project webpage at <https://bit.ly/PLAN-Downtown> for those who are unable to attend the zoom event live.

It is possible that participants may be recording the meeting with their phone cameras or other devices. If you do not wish to be recorded during the meeting, please turn off your microphone and camera.

If your camera and microphone are off, you can still participate through the text chat feature at the end of the presentation.

## Virtual Meeting Etiquette

We want to make sure that what we cover is accessible to everyone so you can all share your informed feedback.

We want to ensure that this conversation is a pleasant experience for all, and that all community members/ stakeholders are comfortable sharing their comments, questions, and feedback.

Please be respectful and mindful of each other's time when asking questions/providing comments, so that all attendees can participate in the meeting.





# **DOWNTOWN ZONING AND PLAN: DOWNTOWN AMENDMENT**

Public Meeting | January 15, 2025



Planning Department



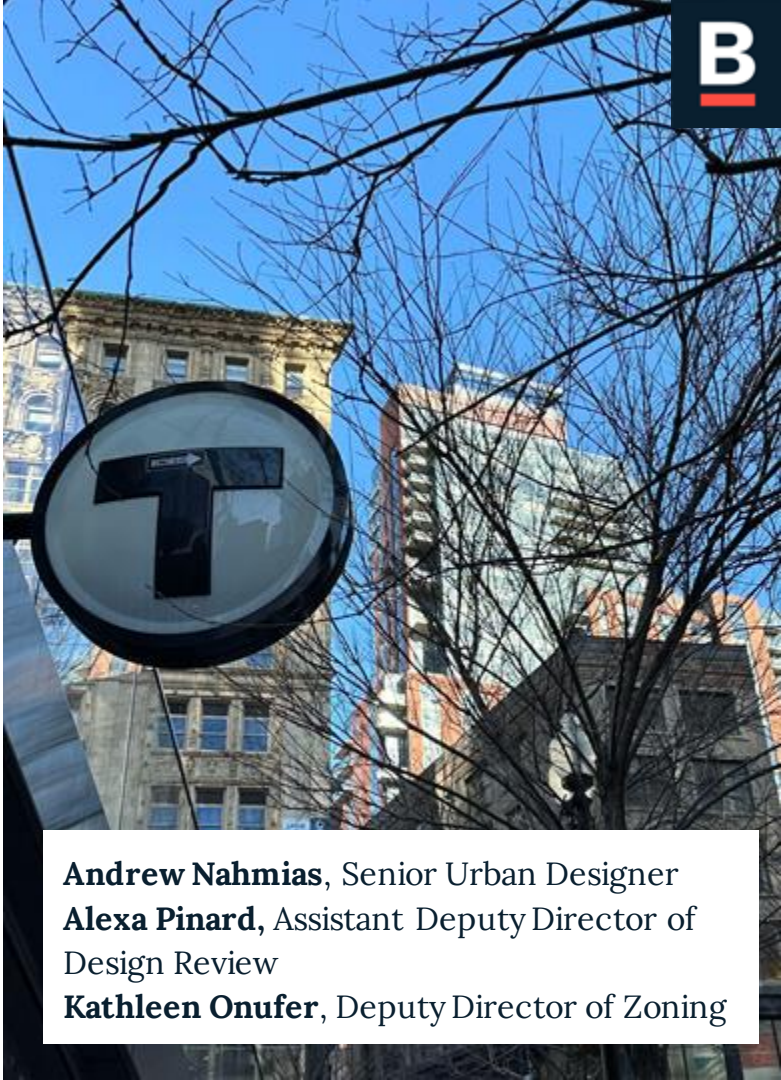
**CITY of BOSTON**

# AGENDA

---

1. Process so far
  2. Critical themes and updates
    - a. Comprehensive approach to critical corridors Downtown
    - b. Prioritizing adaptive reuse and historic preservation
    - c. Linkage requirement and Conditional uses
  3. Next Steps
- < *Questions and Comments* >

**Release of Draft  
Zoning and PLAN:  
Downtown  
Amendments  
Jan 8, 2025**



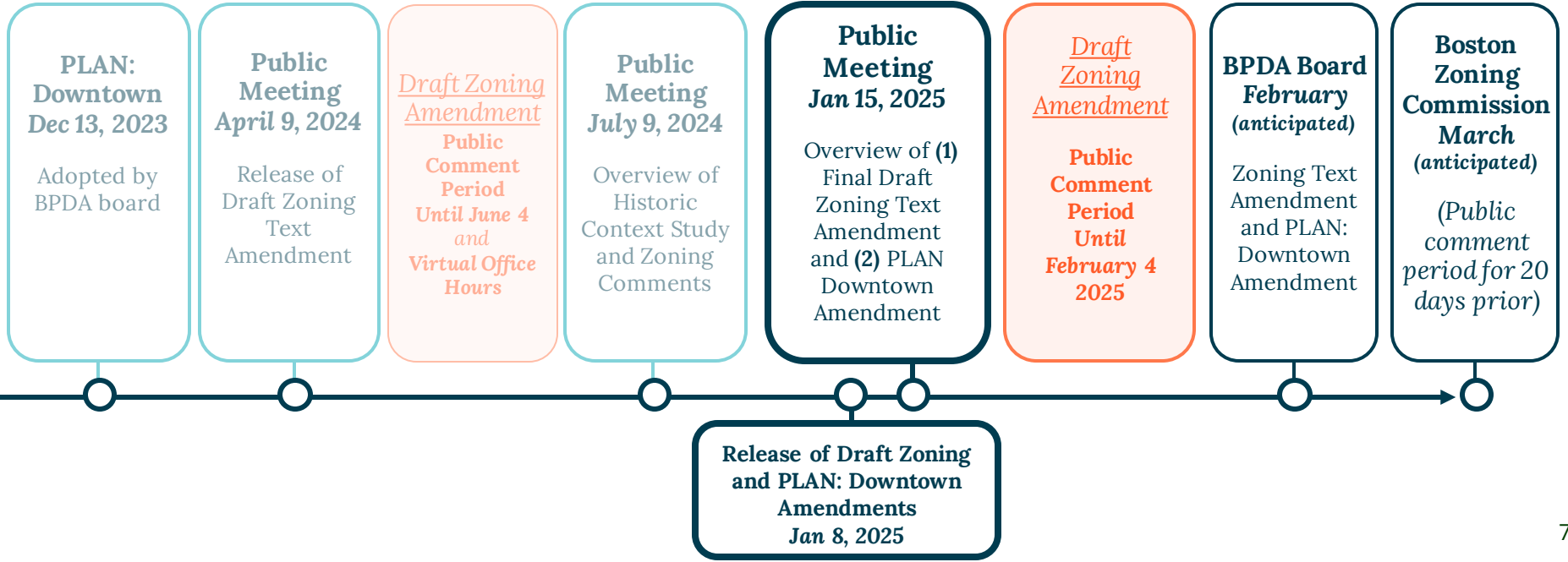
**Andrew Nahmias**, Senior Urban Designer  
**Alexa Pinard**, Assistant Deputy Director of Design Review  
**Kathleen Onufer**, Deputy Director of Zoning

# PROCESS SO FAR



The zoning and PLAN: Downtown updates are based on feedback received on Downtown zoning and planning since the draft zoning amendment was released on April 9, 2024.

WE ARE HERE





# KEY THEMES & UPDATES



Updates to the April 9, 2024 zoning draft and PLAN: Downtown **respond to the following key concerns:**



**1** Comprehensive approach to critical corridors Downtown and focus on residential growth



**2** Prioritizing adaptive reuse and preservation of historic facades particularly for new development along Washington St corridor



**3** Ensuring Linkage works while embracing Downtown's role as an office and entertainment destination

Downtown today does not need another high-rise office or apartment building or even a lab. - Nancy

"I am concerned with the spot zoning allowing height on the Bromfield/ Washington street corner and Pi Alley garage sites up to FAA and Shadow Law limits" ~ 43 Downtown residents

"This Plan should ensure that preservation is the standard and expected course of action across all of downtown." - Boston Preservation Alliance

Only a handful of locations, including have the potential to host truly dynamic redevelopments for our district and Boston overall—projects that could deliver hundreds of desperately-needed housing units.... - DBA

"Do not allow thinly veiled concerns about high-rise residential views hold sway on an important policy question." - James, Downtown area resident





# ENSURING A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO CRITICAL GROWTH CORRIDORS DOWNTOWN

---

1

# KEY CORRIDORS FOR RESIDENTIAL GROWTH AND ADAPTIVE REUSE

**Washington St corridor is a key spine to Downtown**, a major gateway to transit services and edge to significant historic buildings and facades making it a:

1. Significant area to support housing growth
2. Critical area to prioritize the retention of historic facades and adaptive reuse of historic buildings



Downtown Crossing key transit hub and view corridor



Historic facades in the Ladder Block



Shopper's Plaza key transit access surrounded by historic facades, and taller residential development



Adaptive reuse of historic facades and theaters

*"Cities are safer, wealthier, more dynamic, and all around better off when there are more people. Zoning for and encouraging more housing in downtown Boston will be an unmitigated positive for current and future residents." - James*



# PLAN DOWNTOWN: NEW HOUSING FOCUS GROWTH AREA



As a critical area for residential growth and adaptive reuse, the update to PLAN: Downtown introduces a housing focus growth area:

## GROWTH AREA: HOUSING FOCUS

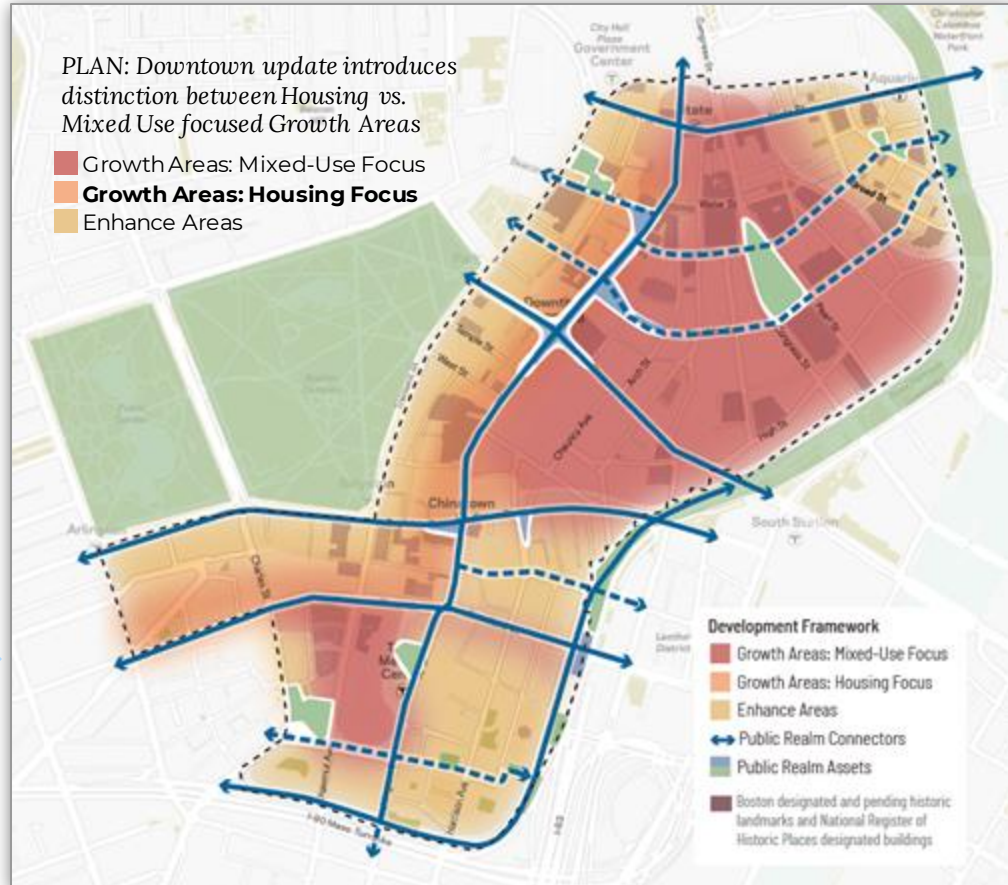
Encourage adaptive reuse, preserve historic facades, and ensure taller buildings provide needed residential growth.



2023 Development Framework

PLAN: Downtown originally only identified two types of areas: “Enhance Areas” and “Growth Areas”

- Growth Areas
- Enhance Areas



PLAN: Downtown Development Framework Update

# PLAN DOWNTOWN: NEW HOUSING FOCUS GROWTH AREA



As a critical area for residential growth and adaptive reuse, the update to PLAN: Downtown introduces a housing focus growth area:

## GROWTH AREA: HOUSING FOCUS

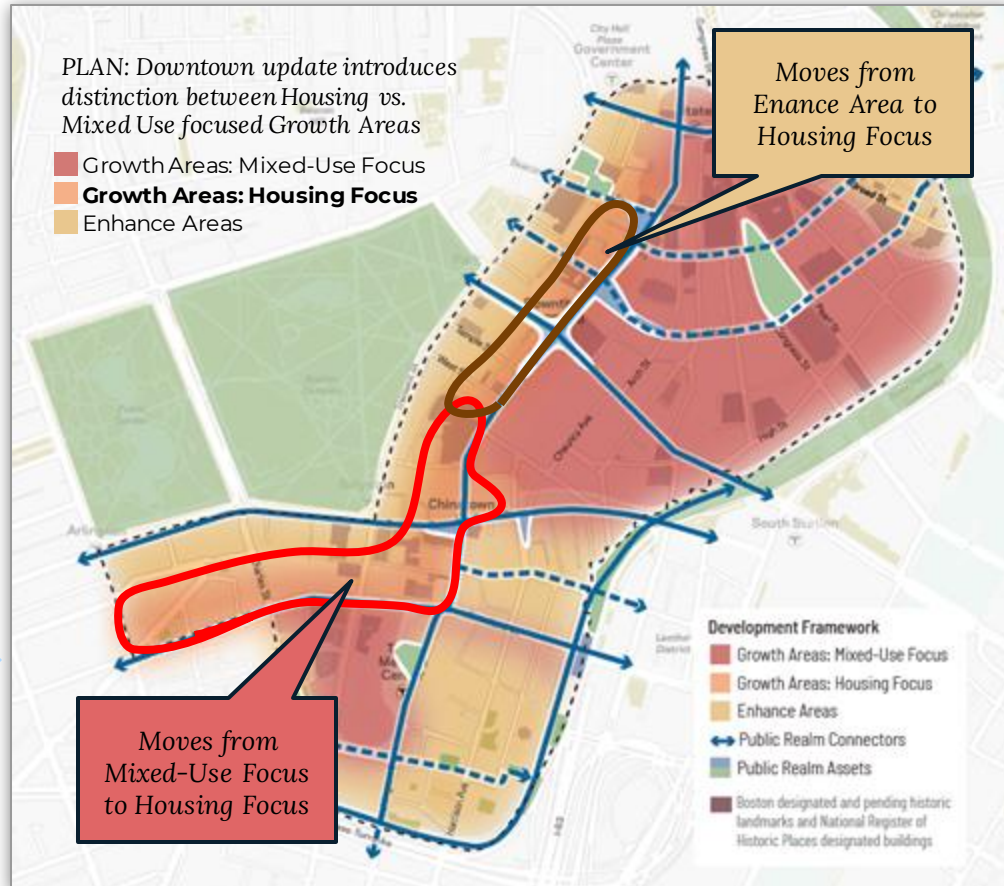
Encourage adaptive reuse, preserve historic facades, and ensure taller buildings provide needed residential growth.



2023 Development Framework

PLAN: Downtown originally only identified two types of areas: "Enhance Areas" and "Growth Areas"

- Growth Areas
- Enhance Areas



PLAN: Downtown Development Framework Update



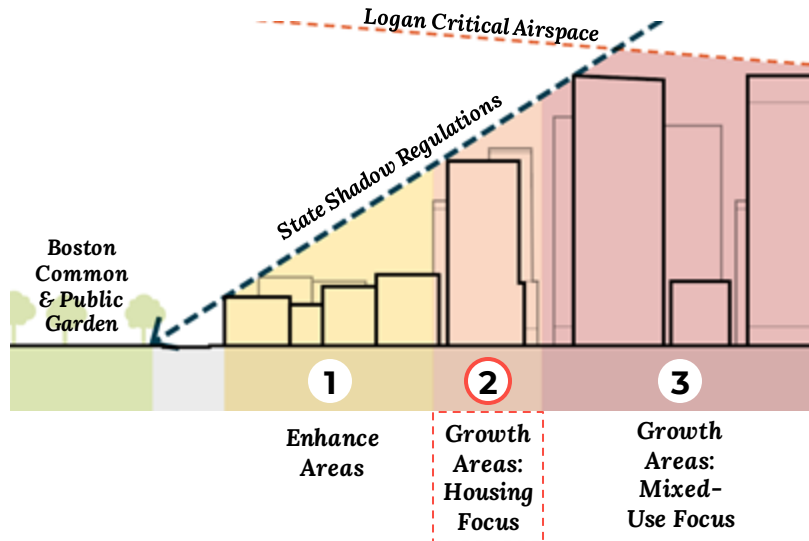
# TRANSITIONING FROM HIGH AREAS TO THE BOSTON COMMON



The new growth area forms an additional transition zone between existing taller areas and lower-scale historic areas closer to the Boston Common and Public Garden.

## STATE SHADOW REGULATION HEIGHT LIMITS

The transition in height from low to high is reinforced by State Shadow Regulations that limit shadows on the Common and Public Garden.



## EXISTING LOW TO HIGH ZONES



# ZONING AMENDMENT: INTRODUCING SKY-R DISTRICT

## SKYLINE DISTRICTS

enable job growth, new housing, entertainment and cultural destinations, and a vibrant mix of uses while encouraging the preservation of historic areas.

The Skyline District contains 3 districts:

- **SKY-District**
- **SKY-LOW District**
- **SKY -R District**



**SKY-LOW DISTRICT** are areas of cohesive historic buildings dating to prior eras of downtown. **Historic Overlays** within this district set smaller height and form regulations specific to the scale of the historic area.

155' building height

## New SKY-R District



**SKY-R DISTRICT** is distinguished by areas of high mixed use activity with sensitive historic resources. Regulated to incentivize larger-scale residential development and advance historic preservation through appropriate adaptive reuse and additions to existing historic buildings and facades.

155' building height  
(500'\* for 60% residential use)

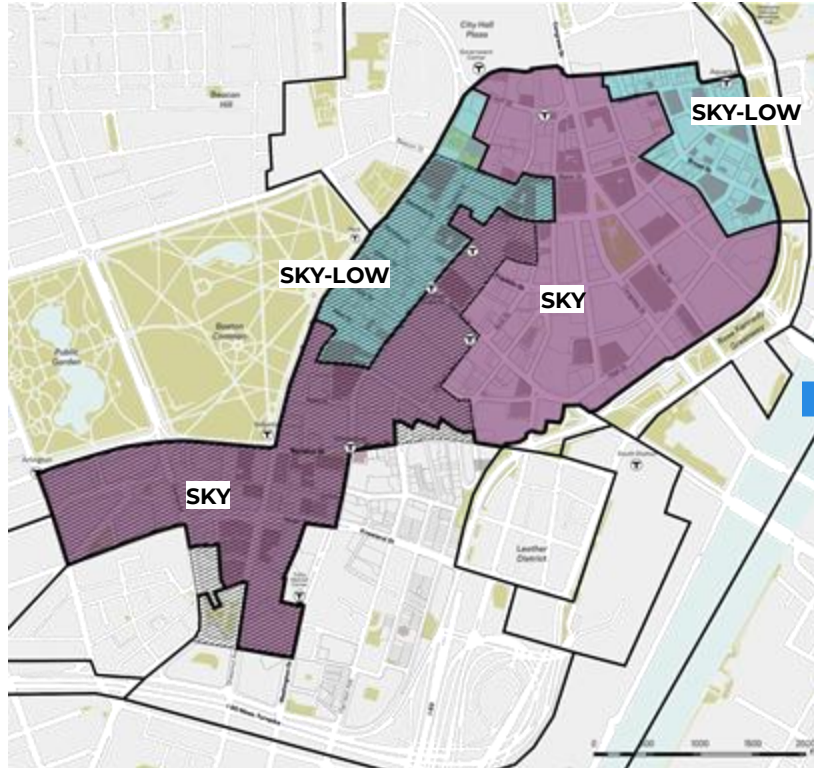


**SKY-DISTRICT** is characterized by the city's most significant job, housing, and entertainment density and accommodates future growth near major transportation assets.

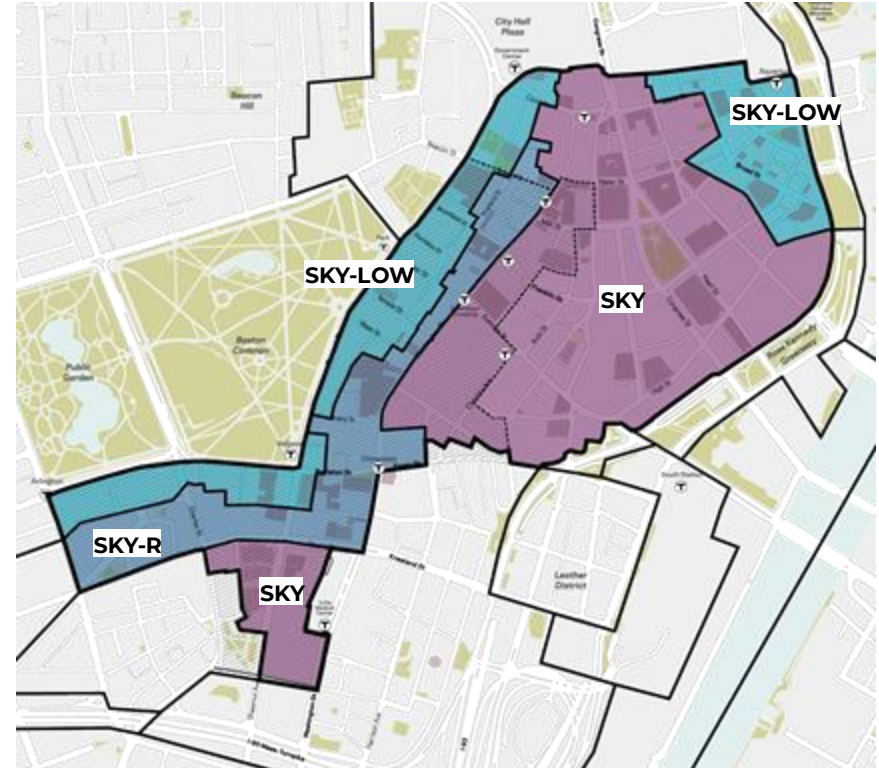
\*State Shadow Regulation/Critical Airspace height limit

# UPDATED DISTRICT MAP

The district map update maps SKY-R along key areas to prioritize housing growth and adaptive reuse.



*Draft map April 10, 2024*



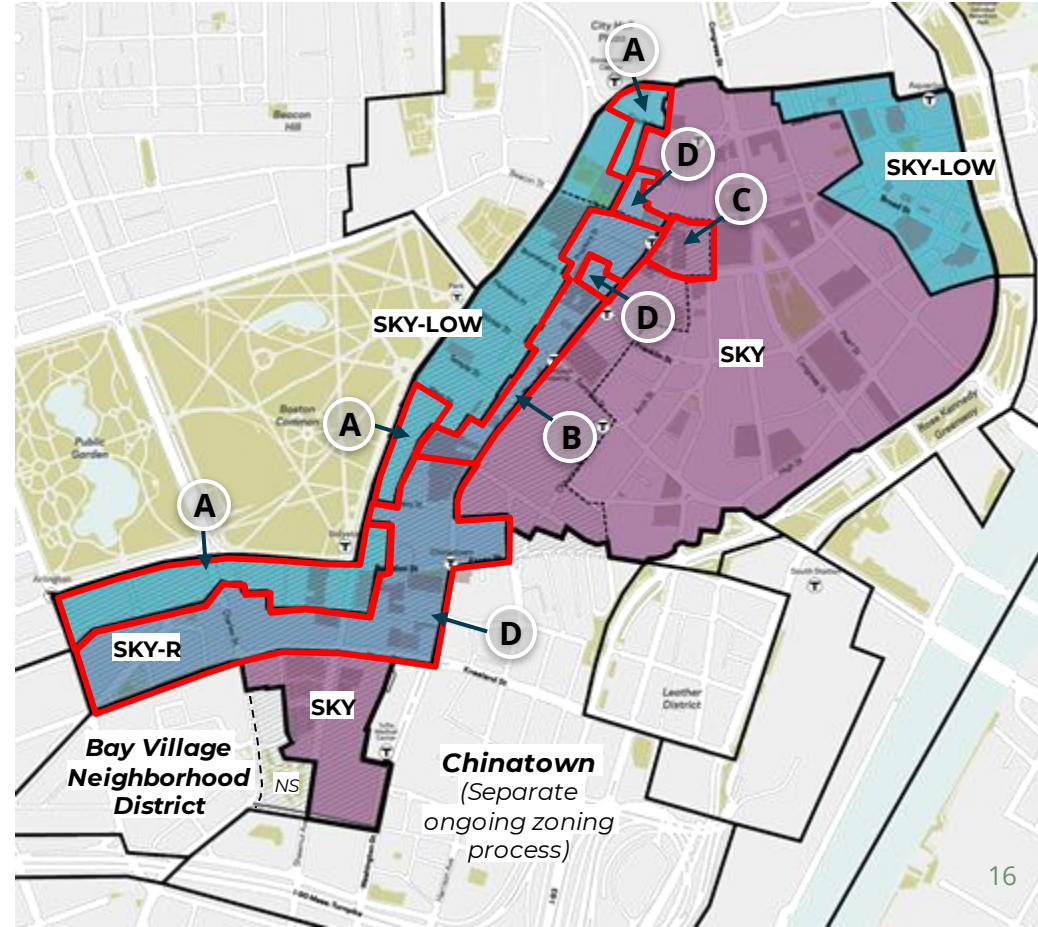
*District map update*



# UPDATES TO APRIL 2024 DRAFT DISTRICT MAP

## Overview of changes:

- A** Extends SKY-LOW along the Common and Public Garden to maintain small historic scale [*Lowers height limit and floor plate max*]
- B** Moves areas from SKY-LOW to SKY-R to enable residential development along west side of Washington St. [*Raises height limit for residential projects*]
- C** Moves developed and landmarked sites into SKY
- D** Moves areas from SKY into SKY-R, lowering permissible height and prioritizing residential development
- E** Align Adult Entertainment District with parcel boundaries and remove from Chinatown District

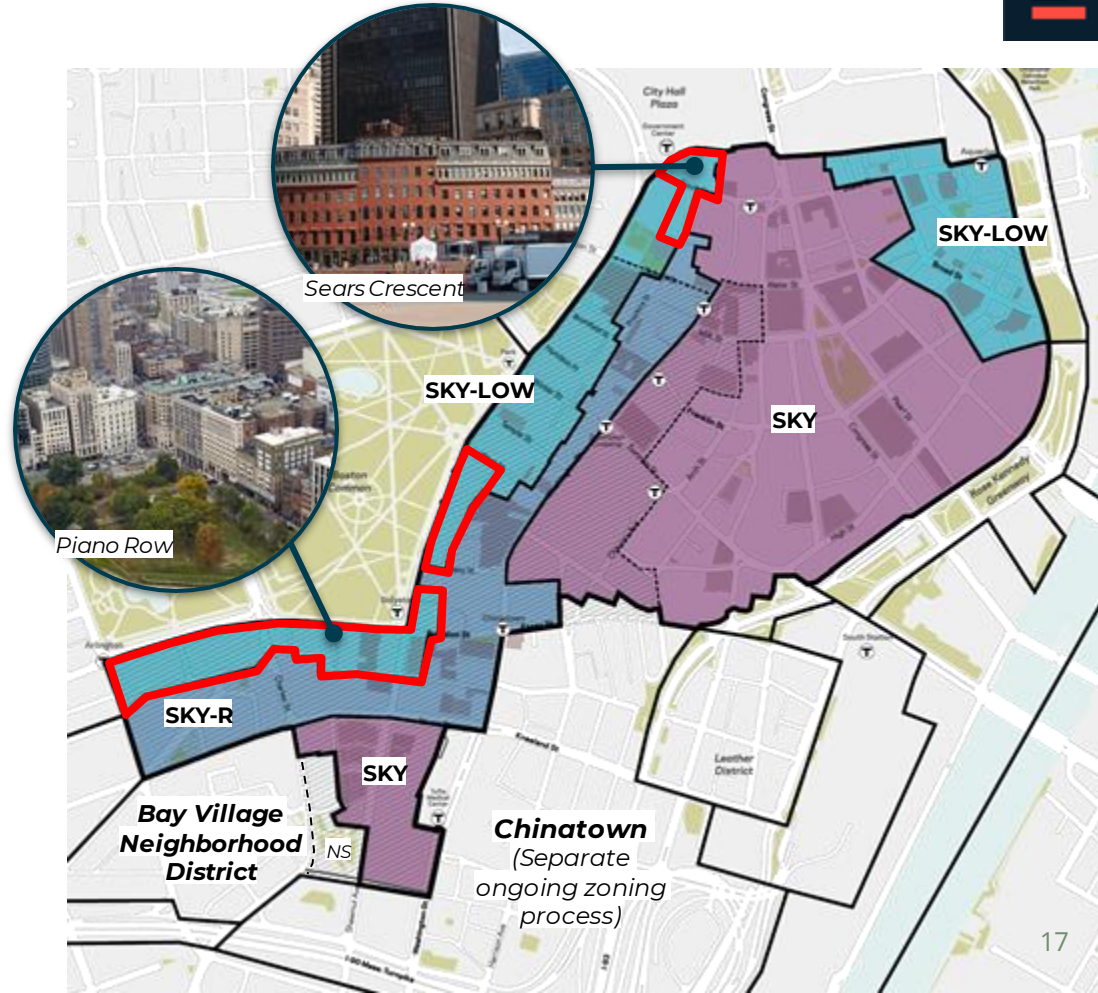




# UPDATES TO APRIL 2024 DRAFT DISTRICT MAP

## Overview of changes:

- A** Extends SKY-LOW along the Common and Public Garden to maintain small historic scale [*Lowers height limit and floor plate max*]
- B** Moves areas from SKY-LOW to SKY-R to enable residential development along west side of Washington St. [*Raises height limit for residential projects*]
- C** Moves developed and landmarked sites into SKY
- D** Moves areas from SKY into SKY-R, lowering permissible height and prioritizing residential development
- E** Align Adult Entertainment District with parcel boundaries and remove from Chinatown District



# UPDATES TO APRIL 2024 DRAFT DISTRICT MAP

## Overview of changes:

**A** Extends SKY-LOW along the Common and Public Garden to maintain small historic scale [*Lowers height limit and floor plate max*]

**B** Moves areas from SKY-LOW to SKY-R to enable residential development along west side of Washington St. [*Raises height limit only for residential projects*]

**C** **INCREASE IN HEIGHT FROM PREVIOUS DRAFT**  
*(+ ~195'~345' depending on location and State Shadow Regulation limit)*

**D** lowering permissible height and prioritizing residential development

**E** Align Adult Entertainment District with parcel boundaries and remove from Chinatown District

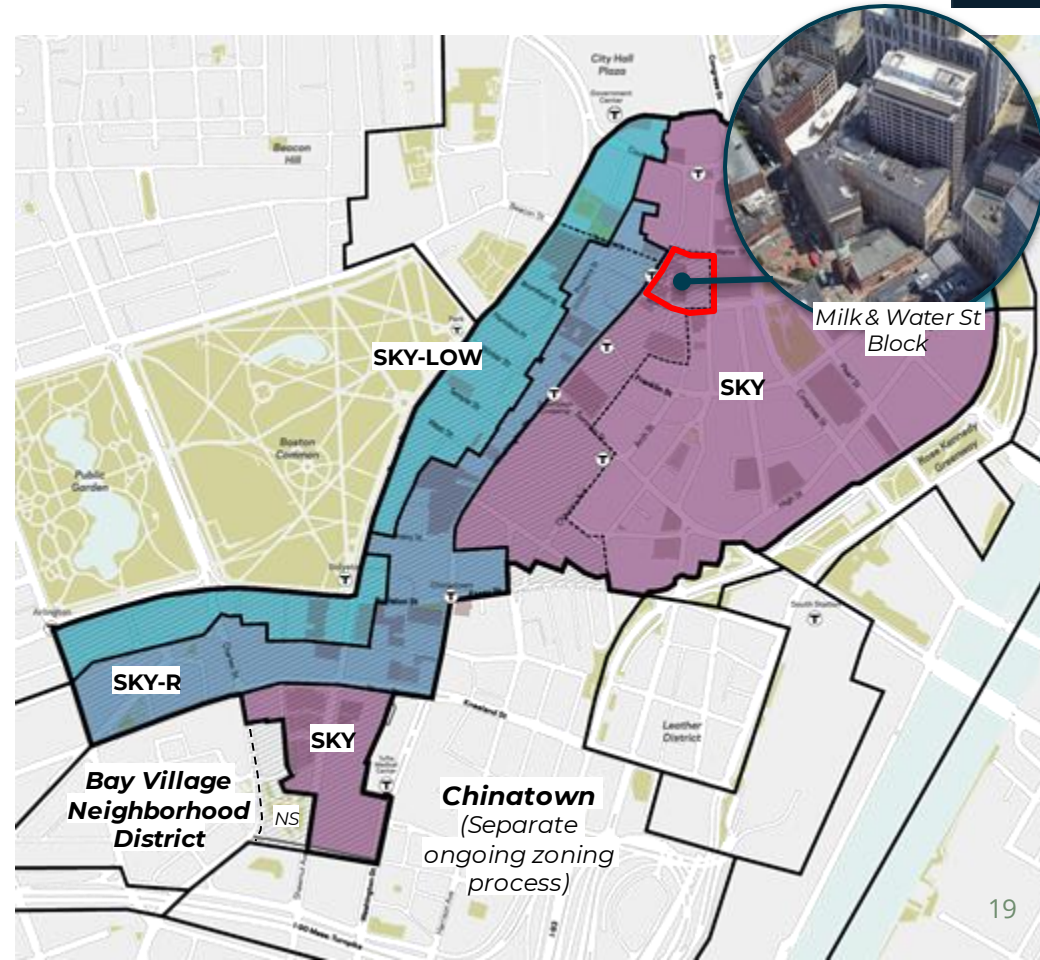




# UPDATES TO APRIL 2024 DRAFT DISTRICT MAP

## Overview of changes:

- A** Extends SKY-LOW along the Common and Public Garden to maintain small historic scale [*Lowers height limit and floor plate max*]
- B** Moves areas from SKY-LOW to SKY-R to enable residential development along west side of Washington St. [*Raises height limit for residential projects*]
- C** Moves developed and designated landmarked sites into SKY
- D** Moves areas from SKY into SKY-R, lowering permissible height and prioritizing residential development
- E** Align Adult Entertainment District with parcel boundaries and remove from Chinatown District

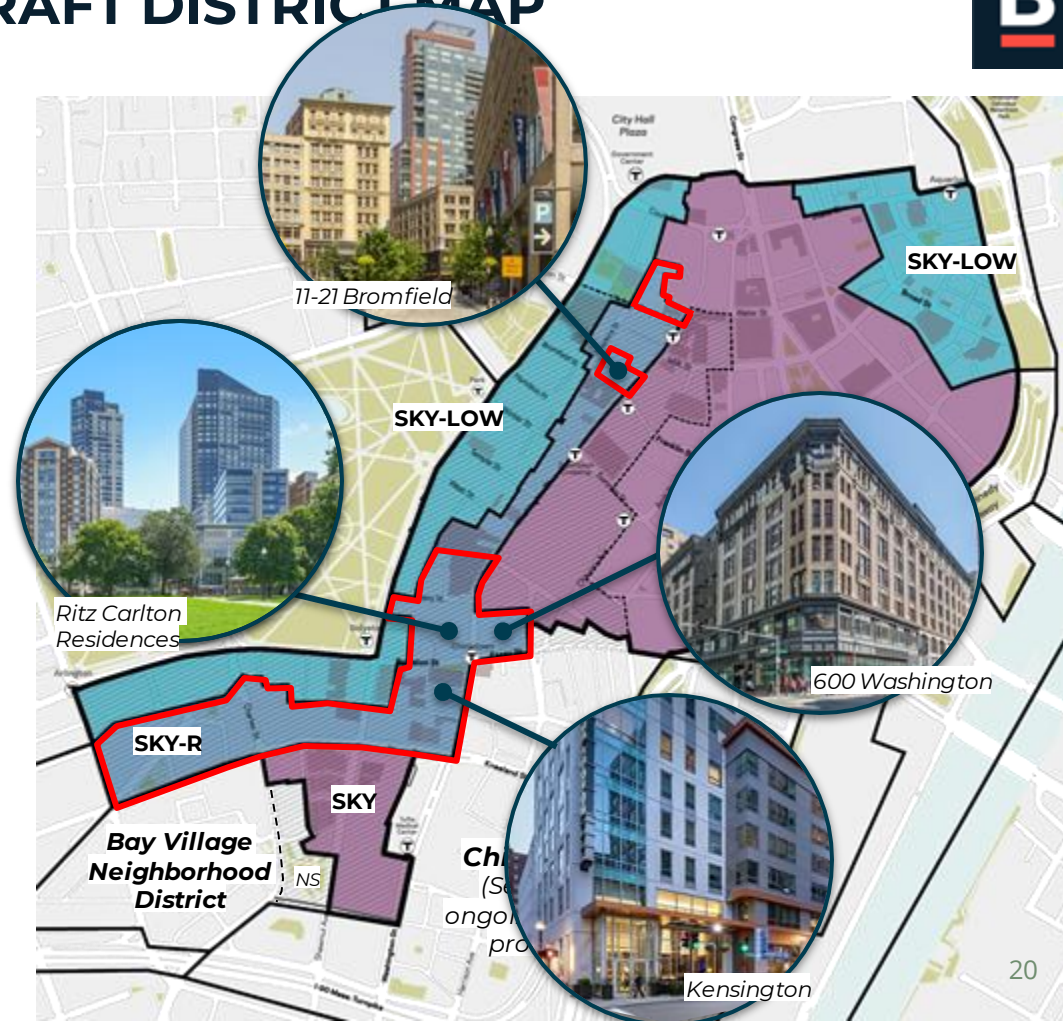


# UPDATES TO APRIL 2024 DRAFT DISTRICT MAP



## Overview of changes:

- A** Extends SKY-LOW along the Common and Public Garden to maintain small historic scale [*Lowers height limit and floor plate max*]
- B** Moves areas from SKY-LOW to SKY-R to enable residential development along west side of Washington St. [*Raises height limit for residential projects*]
- C** **DECREASE IN HEIGHT FROM PREVIOUS DRAFT**  
*(- ~200' depending on Shadow Regulation Limit)*
- D** Moves areas from SKY into SKY-R, lowering permissible height and prioritizing residential development
- E** Align Adult Entertainment District with parcel boundaries and remove from Chinatown District

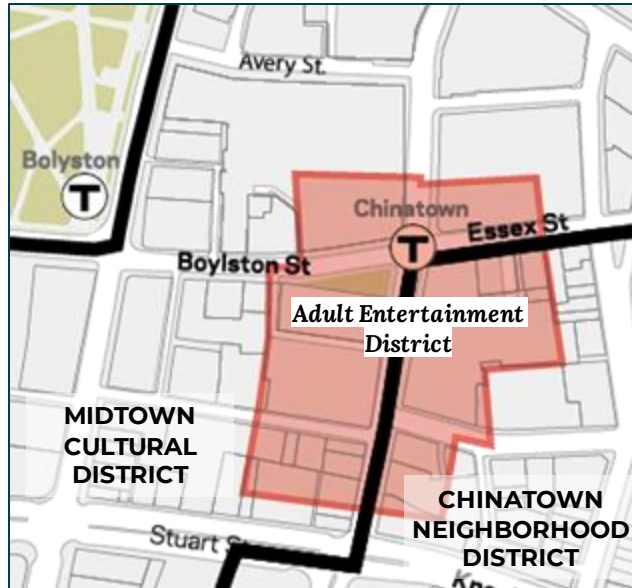




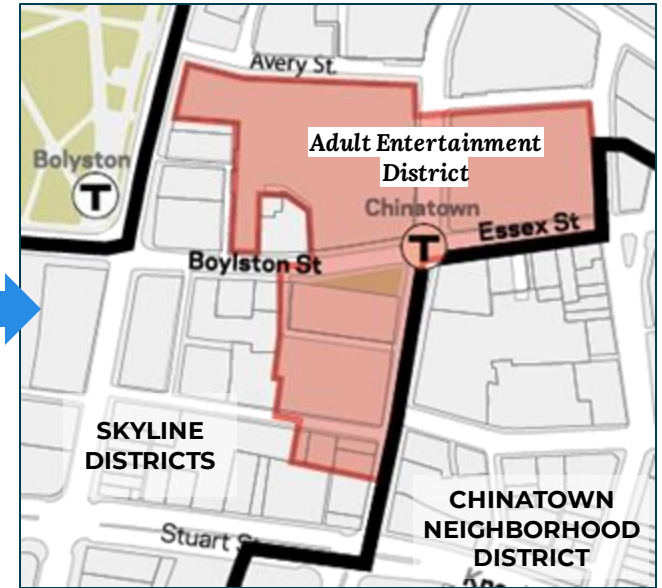
# UPDATED DISTRICT MAP

Adjust the boundary of the **Adult Entertainment District** to align with parcel boundaries and removes the District from the Chinatown Neighborhood District because there are no adult entertainment establishments there today.

Existing boundary



Proposed boundary



The Adult Entertainment District applies to parcels even if they partially overlap. There are no adult entertainment establishments in the Chinatown Neighborhood District.

# SKY-R DISTRICT: LAND USE REGULATIONS



Encourage growth along the key commercial corridor, while being sensitive to impacts on historic fabric.

## CONDITIONAL USES *(require review)*

Limited to SKY-LOW height and must be evaluated on a case-by-cases basis to ensure the sites appropriately advance historic preservation and adaptive reuse.

- Retail Store - Extra Large (>50,000sf)
- Entertainment/Events - Extra Large ( $\geq 10,000$  capacity)
- Light Manufacturing or Trade Establishment

## FORBIDDEN USES *(cannot be built)*

- Research Laboratory

### Draft Article 8 - Use Regulations

	SKY-LOW	SKY-R	SKY
Entertainment/Events - Large	C	A	A
Entertainment/Events - Extra Large	F	C	C
Office - Large	C	A	A
Research Laboratory	F	F	C
Retail Store - Extra Large	C	C	A
Light Manufacturing or Trade Establishment	F	C	C
Accessory Keeping of Laboratory Animals	F	F	C

Projects with less than 60% residential use are limited to 155' building height (same as SKY-LOW)

# SKY-R DISTRICT DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS



**SKY-R utilizes dimensional regulations that ensure new residential development enhances the public realm and tall buildings respect the surrounding historical context.**

## SKY AND SKY-R REGULATIONS

- Ground Floor Active Use (min percentage of Building Width)
- Blank Wall of facade (max)
- Lower Building Lot Coverage for lots over 25k sf

## NEW REGULATIONS FOR SKY AND SKY-R

- Maximum length of building facade (200')

## NEW REGULATIONS SPECIFIC TO SKY-R

- Building Floor Plate (max sf) at and above the Stepback Height
- Average Building Floor Plate
- Stepback (min.)
- Higher height threshold for buildings

## Draft Article 31 SKY-R Building Form Standards

<b>Building Height</b> in feet (max) for a Proposed Project with <b>less than 60% of gross floor area of a Residential Use</b>	155'*
<b>Building Height</b> in feet (max) for a Proposed Project with greater than or equal to <b>60% of gross floor area of a Residential Use</b>	500' or State Shadow Law Limit, whichever is lesser
<b>Stepback (min) along 70% (min) of all Frontages</b> at and above the Stepback Height (155' or <i>height of adjacent historic building, whichever is lower</i> )	10'
<b>Length of building facade (max)</b> at and above Stepback Height	200'
<b>Building Floor Plate (max sf)</b> at and above Stepback Height	15,000 sf
<b>Average Building Floor Plate (sf)</b> at and above Stepback Height	14,000 sf



# SKY-R DISTRICT DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS

**Dimensional regulations enable height for projects that are predominantly residential and include form regulations to ensure new development respects surrounding historic context.**

## HEIGHT

Encourages predominantly residential projects, while limits other uses to lower scale.

- 155' building height (same as SKY-LOW)
- 500' for 60% residential use

## STEPBACK (MIN) ON ALL FRONTAGES

Ensures tall buildings relate to their context and minimize impacts, like wind, on the public realm

## BUILDING FLOOR PLATE (MAX SF):

Ensures tall buildings maintain smaller upper story floor plates.

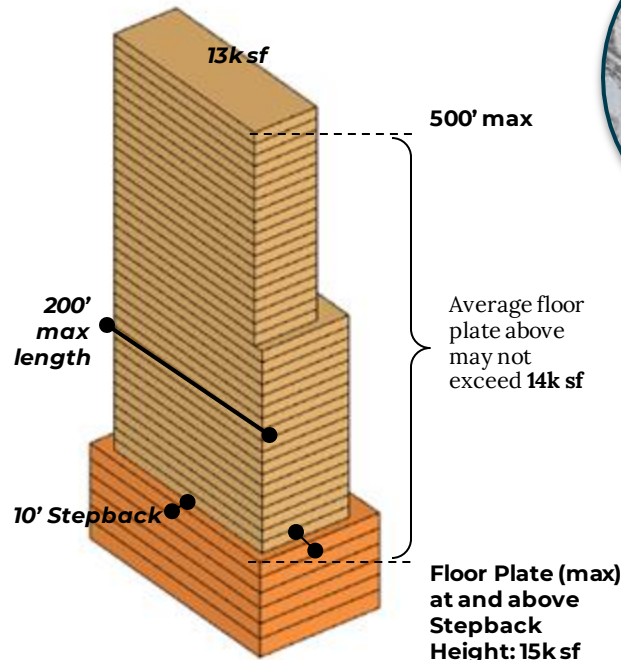
## AVERAGE BUILDING FLOOR PLATE:

Encourages additional upper-story setbacks to break down form.

## BUILDING LENGTH (MAX)

Prevents long high-rise structures.

**Project with greater than or equal to 60% of GFA of a Residential Use**



*Upper story setbacks emphasize historic facades and align with adjacent context* 24



# **PRIORITIZING ADAPTIVE REUSE & PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND FACADES**

---

**2**



# PRIORITIZE ADAPTIVE REUSE AND ADDITIONS

Ensure existing structures that do not conform to the proposed dimensional requirements can still be enlarged or altered as long as the dimensional non-conformity (such as building lot coverage) is not increased and the addition conforms to zoning requirements.

The new provision (Section 31-4) creates an **“incentive” to reuse existing buildings** as new ground-up new construction that would be required to adhere to new “stricter” dimensional standards.

While encouraging building retention, the new dimensional regulations still **enable allow flexibility for additions to existing buildings.**

*Continued use/adaptive reuse of our existing buildings is the most impactful climate action we can take, and that upgrading an existing building is more affordable than new construction. - Boston Preservation Alliance*



*Some existing lots are close to 100% lot coverage, but could be potential adaptive reuses sites.*



*Ground-up new construction would be limited to the proposed 85% lot coverage, unless the existing building is maintained and additions and alterations do not increase non-conformity*





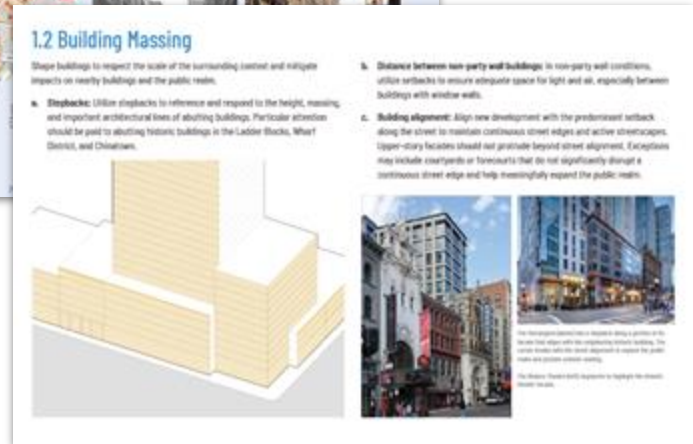
# DESIGN GUIDELINES



**Update to PLAN: Downtown includes additional design guidance for historic areas, prioritizing adaptive reuse, particularly of historic facades, and tall buildings.**

**Projects should foremost prioritize the adaptive reuse of existing buildings** to maintain not only the area's historic fabric and character but also lower embodied carbon and significantly further sustainable development. For building additions, alterations, and new construction the update includes:

- **New Historic Context chapter** (initially released for public comment July 2024) adds site specific guidance for each character area Downtown
- Guidance on conducting **Context Analysis in consultation with the Office of Historic Preservation as a part of project design and submissions**
- **Additional guidelines for building massing and tall buildings** to respect the scale of the surrounding context and mitigate impacts.



# DESIGN GUIDELINES

**Provides clear guidelines to be enforced through the Article 80 process for minimizing the impact of tall buildings, respecting adjacent context and scale, and ensuring adequate separation between buildings.**

## TALL BUILDING SEPARATION DISTANCE STANDARD

Tall buildings on the same block, on separate lots, and across right-of-ways, parks, and open spaces **should be separated by a minimum of 60'**, measured from the exterior wall of the building face, excluding balconies.

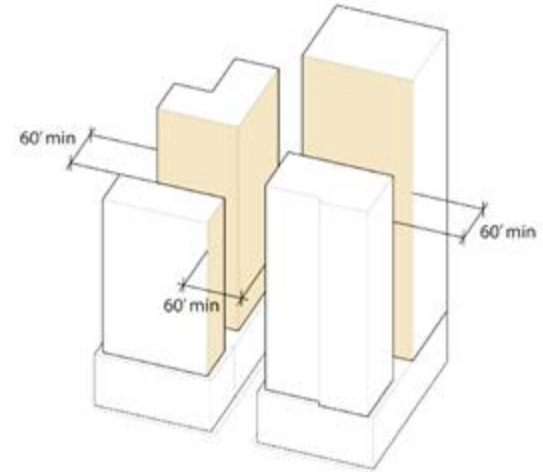
*The Tall Building Separation Distance design guidelines replaces the smaller Tower Separation Distance requirement in the April 9, 2024 zoning draft.*

### 1.3 Tall buildings

Tall buildings should provide visual interest at various scales and mitigate height using set-backs, stepbacks, and other massing changes and architectural elements.

- Impact and wind analysis:** Test impacts on the local environment at the design stage, ensuring tall buildings minimize impacts such as high wind speeds at the street level.
- Stepbacks:** Introduce stepbacks from parks, open spaces, neighboring properties, and key streets to maximize access to light and air between adjacent buildings and reduce visual and physical impacts on the public realm and neighboring historic buildings.
- View corridors:** Shape tall buildings with particular attention to views from elsewhere in the City and the street level, framing open spaces, key view corridors, and historic buildings and spaces.
- Material and facade articulation:** Utilize materials that have impact from a distance while also providing scale, pattern, and jointing up close, particularly on the ground floor and base of the building.
- Mechanical penthouses** should be treated as integral elements to the overall design, concealed as much as possible within the typical facade treatment.

- Tall building separation distance:** Tall buildings on the same block, on separate lots, and across right-of-ways, parks, and open spaces should be separated by a minimum of 60', measured from the exterior wall of the building face, excluding balconies.



**ENSURING LINKAGE WORKS WHILE  
EMBRACING DOWNTOWN'S ROLE AS AN  
OFFICE AND ENTERTAINMENT  
DESTINATION**

3



# ENSURE OFFICE AND ENTERTAINMENT IN DOWNTOWN



**Adjust Article 80 thresholds to ensure a conditional use is no longer required to ensure Linkage and change Office-Large and Entertainment-Large from a Conditional Use to Allowed Uses.**

Previously, ensuring the function of linkage payments for Development Impact Uses (including Office-Large) required zoning relief, or a conditional use to function. The redrafted language ensures linkage by requiring all Development Impact Uses over the linkage threshold to undergo Article 80 review.

By ensuring the functionality of Linkage and based on their importance to Downtown, the updates change **Office-Large (>50,000) and Entertainment-Large from Conditional Use to Allowed Uses** (in SKY & limited in height in SKY-R)

## NOTE ON LARGE HOTELS AND RESEARCH LABS

- **Large Hotels would stay Conditional Uses** (SKY Districts and limited in height in SKY-R) and **Research Labs Conditional** (Only SKY) to allow evaluation of site-specific impacts, particularly related to loading and pick-up/drop-off activity that may impact this pedestrian-first environment.

*Draft Article 8 Use Table*

	SKY-LOW	SKY-R	SKY
<b>COMMERCIAL USES</b>			
Entertainment/Events - Large	C	A	A
Entertainment/Events - Extra Large	F	C	C
Hotel - Small	A	A	A
Hotel - Large	C	C	C
Office - Small	A	A	A
Office - Medium	A	A	A
Office - Large	C	A	A
Research Laboratory	F	F	C
Retail Store - Extra Large	C	C	A



# NEXT STEPS

# PROCESS SO FAR



The zoning and PLAN: Downtown updates are based on feedback received on Downtown zoning and planning since the draft zoning amendment was released on April 9, 2024.

WE ARE HERE





# THANK YOU!

---

## PLAN: DOWNTOWN WEBSITE:

- [Downtown Draft Zoning Amendment](#)
- [Draft Downtown Zoning Map](#)
- [PLAN: Downtown Amendment](#)

SUBMIT COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ZONING AND  
PLAN: DOWNTOWN AMENDMENT VIA THE  
[FEEDBACK SURVEY](#)

