

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Released:

**MARCH
2025**

Chief of Planning:

KAIROS SHEN



Planning Department

CITY of BOSTON



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
ZONING, COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN	3
PROJECT AND DESIGN REVIEW PROCEDURES AND OUTCOMES	14
REAL ESTATE	18
POLICIES AND PROGRAMS	21
HIRING TRENDS & EMPLOYMENT DEMOGRAPHICS	26
FINANCIAL REPORT	28



INTRODUCTION

In April of 2024, the City of Boston established a Planning Department for the first time in 70 years, restoring planning as a core function of city government through the approval of [*An Ordinance Creating the Planning Department in the City of Boston.*](#)

In addition to creating the Department and a pathway for the transfer of staff, the ordinance codified the purpose of the Department as creating comprehensive plans for Boston's built environment, a predictable zoning code and development process, urban design standards, and planning for the best use of publicly-owned land. The majority of Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) staff transitioned into jobs with the City of Boston and became employees of the new Planning Department in July. This document fulfills the ordinance's directive that the Planning Department submit an annual report on trends, new initiatives, hiring, and the Department's progress toward specific goals including resiliency, affordability, and equity.

The Planning Department's initiatives advance resiliency, affordability, and equity across Boston in different ways. For all of these initiatives, we have worked with the community to hear how residents would like their neighborhoods to grow, and how that growth can make streets safer, expand public spaces, and improve connectivity in our city. We have diversified our engagement methods to bring in new voices through low touch methods like surveys to reach more people. Through the work of the Planning Advisory Council, we are also working to improve transparency and accountability with the public, demonstrating progress the City is making in delivering on comprehensive plans and major capital projects.

1. ZONING, COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING, AND URBAN DESIGN

SQUARES + STREETS SMALL AREA PLANS

In 2024, the Planning Department launched three [Squares + Streets](#) Small Area Plans in [Roslindale Square](#), [Cleary Square](#), and [Fields Corner](#).

Squares + Streets plans identify places that can accommodate residential growth in neighborhood commercial areas. More housing near transit and the goods and services that people rely on will cut down on car trips and introduce new residents to patronize local businesses, supporting resiliency and boosting economic activity. Increasing the availability of housing options in our neighborhood centers will also increase our housing stock across the City and support housing affordability.

In February 2025, the BPDA Board adopted the Roslindale Square: Squares + Streets Small Area Plan. This plan offers significant opportunities for new, diverse housing options and invite new residents who will support a thriving Roslindale Square.



NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS

In 2024, the Planning Department launched the [Allston-Brighton Community Plan](#) to develop a shared vision for future neighborhood growth in close collaboration with the Allston-Brighton community.

The plan is based on the [Allston-Brighton Needs Assessment](#) which identified needs such as more accessible and affordable housing and convenient public open space.

[The Beacon Park Yard Regional Framework Plan](#), which began in 2023, is currently developing a community vision to explore and refine opportunities that will be unlocked by the replacement and redesign of the Allston Interchange. This community vision will be guided by regional, City, and local perspectives to imagine the future of Beacon Park Yard.

Both of these efforts in the Allston-Brighton neighborhood are aimed at supporting affordability by creating better access to various types of housing. In addition, equity is a major focus of the Beacon Park Yard Plan. One of the primary goals of this plan is to reconnect the neighborhood to the Charles River promoting public accessibility.





by-right permit
applications have
increased by

30%

The Planning Department has written
recommendations for zoning relief for
more than

800 REQUESTS



ZONING REFORM IMPACTS

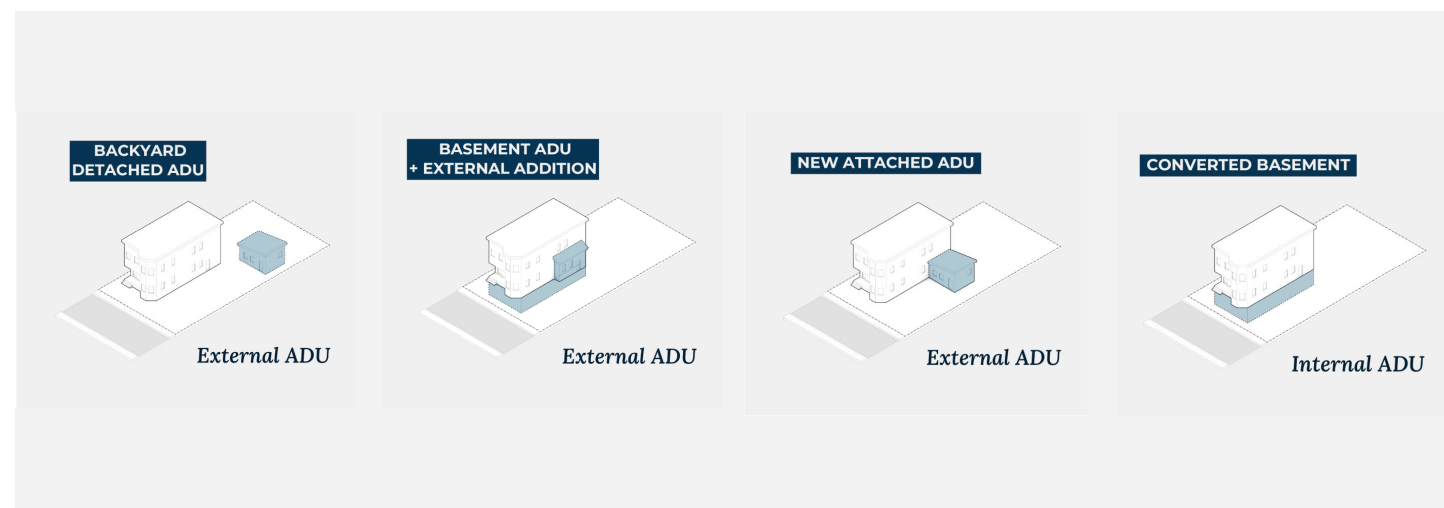
To help identify the impacts of zoning changes, the Planning Department launched the PLAN: Mattapan [Zoning Reform Impact Tracker](#) in December 2024 on Analyze Boston, the City's open data portal.

The dataset is a cross-departmental effort, requiring resources and data from the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) and data engineering from the Citywide Analytics team. The dataset updates daily and includes the City's first-ever measures of by-right development, abandoned building permits, and public tracking of proposed and permitted accessory dwelling units (ADUs).

Very early data indicates that the 2024 Mattapan rezonings are having a positive impact - in the area where zoning changes occurred, by-right permit applications have

increased by 30%. Ultimately, less reliance on the Zoning Board of Appeal means property owners have one less hurdle to permitting a project, saving them both time and money, and providing neighbors with a predictable set of zoning rules.

Over the last year, the Planning Department has also written recommendations for more than 800 requests for zoning relief before the Board of Appeal. Each recommendation carefully analyzes the broader planning context of the case and provides case-specific zoning analysis.



ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADUS)

ADUs, and the [City's ADU financial assistance program](#), support the Planning Department's equity goals.

ADUs allow families to build generational wealth by altering their homes to increase their value and generate additional income. The Planning Department first pursued making ADUs more accessible to build through zoning in Mattapan, which has the highest percentage of Black homeowners in the City.

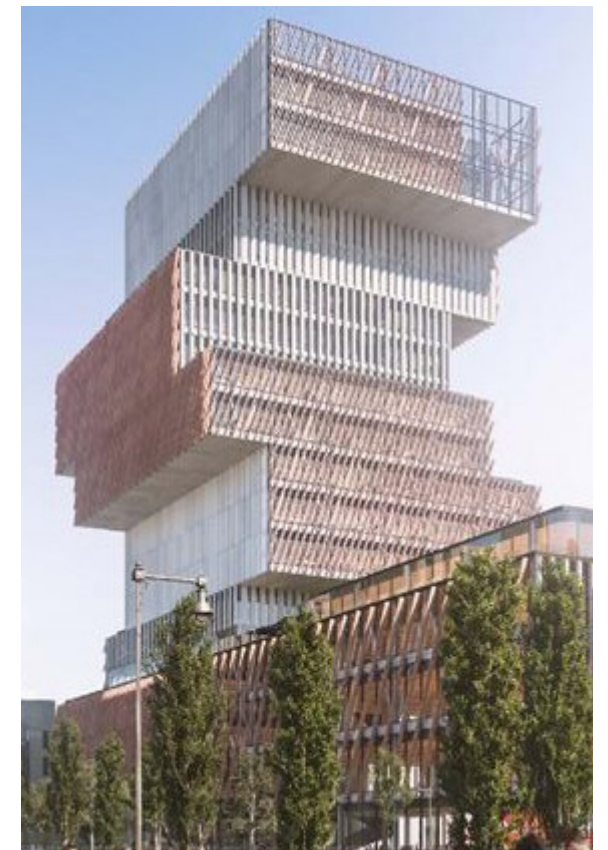
The Planning Department released the [ADU Guidebook](#) in November to provide homeowners with practical guidance and inspiration for adding an ADU to their property. The ADU Guidebook features realistic, buildable designs tailored to Boston's neighborhoods providing a useful resource to help all residents plan and build ADUs.

The Planning Department launched a companion zoning initiative, known as [Neighborhood Housing](#), with the goal of making the construction of ADUs, as illustrated in the Guidebook, possible without zoning relief. This zoning will also expand the types of housing and housing alterations allowed to be built in Boston citywide, further supporting housing affordability by making it easier to build housing and add to the City's supply. The first phase is focused on areas of the city with the largest lots and most potential for a variety of ADUs, including Hyde Park, West Roxbury, Roslindale, and parts of Dorchester and Jamaica Plain.

NET ZERO CARBON ZONING INITIATIVE

In support of building a more environmentally resilient City, the Planning Department's Zoning Reform Team amended the zoning code to include Net Zero Carbon (NZC) Zoning.

NZC Zoning introduces a net zero emissions standard for projects with 15 units or more, a minimum of 20,000 square feet, or additions of a minimum of 50,000 square feet or more to existing buildings. Moving forward, projects will demonstrate compliance with this standard during Article 80 Review. In addition, Small and Large Projects, as defined in Article 80, will be required to report on embodied carbon. Large Projects will also be required to conduct an embodied CO₂e emissions life cycle assessment analysis. NZC Zoning allows us to make significant strides toward the City's carbon neutrality.



DESIGN VISION

In 2024, Planning Department Urban Design staff launched a new citywide [Design Vision](#) to support a built environment that expresses both the uniqueness and diversity of the neighborhoods of Boston.

This vision champions the transformative power of sustainable, walkable, and supportive communities. Moreover, it highlights how design can support social, mental, and physical health while improving resiliency, affordability, and equity. The Design Vision builds on the existing work of the City’s many departments currently planning and designing for the future of Boston. These ideas will inform future design guidelines for housing, retail signage in neighborhood centers, and complete streets, as well as ongoing Planning Department initiatives such as Squares + Streets and Article 80 Modernization.



WHATS NEXT?

Downtown and Neighborhood Block Activations

The Design Vision’s five-year implementation roadmap is structured around a series of short- and mid-term project, policy, and process recommendations aimed at advancing the Design Principles and Ideas with key stakeholders. After five years, a process of reflection, evaluation, and planning will refine initiatives, assess progress, and set priorities for the next phase.

Planning staff are currently working on program activation for blocks on Winter Street in Boston’s downtown and up to 10 locations in Boston neighborhoods. The goal is to revitalize and activate these blocks as a pilot for the Boston Design Vision. These pilots will demonstrate proof of concept for neighborhood safety and pedestrian experience improvements, attract neighborhood residents and tourists, and create a vibrant, family friendly seasonal atmosphere for visitors of all ages. The Downtown pilot will increase vitality along Winter Street through programming, while enhancing safety, comfort, and connectivity in the area.

These tactical activation pilots are targeted for implementation in mid-August and will run for up to 8 weeks.

Planning Academy

The Planning Department recently issued a request for proposals for support to launch a Planning Academy, which was one of the recommendations that came out of the Design Vision. The Planning Academy is envisioned as an 8 week course, launching in fall 2025, that will demystify how planning, urban design, zoning, development, and real estate impact peoples’ everyday lives and provide introductory knowledge to support community members in shaping their neighborhoods. By broadening awareness of the Planning Department’s work and educating members of the community about planning and development, the Planning Academy aims to equip people with new skills to advocate for community priorities.

DOWNTOWN ZONING

Downtown rezoning to implement [PLAN: Downtown](#) is currently underway. A draft of new Skyline districts was first released in April 2024, and has undergone multiple public comment periods and additional study of historic context and resources.

The proposed zoning establishes incentives for new housing, and introduces form- and performance-based criteria to ensure new development creates great streetscapes and public realm.



CHINATOWN ZONING

The Planning Department released the [Draft Chinatown Zoning Amendment](#) and [Draft Chinatown Design Guidelines](#) on November 19, 2024. The proposed zoning promotes affordable housing, emphasizes the significance of small businesses and cultural spaces, and highlights Chinatown's unique character.



GREENING WHILE GROWING

In late 2024 the Urban Design division, in collaboration with the Parks Department, launched [Greening While Growing](#).

This framework aims to expand the City's network of public spaces, foster better connections, and fill the gaps in the City's existing open space network. This process will analyze public open space and planned development of Privately Owned Open Space (POPS). The City's growth projections and Boston Design Vision findings will inform this study. This plan will support the growth and creation of high-quality open spaces that are inclusive, equitable, resilient, and accessible.





2. PROJECT AND DESIGN REVIEW PROCEDURES AND OUTCOMES

ARTICLE 80 MODERNIZATION TO IMPROVE THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

In September 2024, Planning Department staff released draft recommendations on how to reform Boston's development review process to make the process more responsive to the city's needs of today, identifying specific actions to promote inclusive growth. The recommendations include: expanding community participation by creating new ways for engagement in addition to public meetings, and getting feedback earlier in the process; clearly defining mitigation and community benefits, including standard metrics for contribution; and creating a more holistic and coordinated review process among city departments.

These recommendations will help to create a new culture around development that is rooted in predictability, consistency, transparency and timeliness, making the process more equitable overall.

WHATS NEXT?

This year, staff will begin implementing operational and zoning changes that incorporate and respond to the public's comments on the draft recommendations (described above). These changes will create a more predictable and consistent review process.

As part of this effort, the Planning Department plans to take action to implement high-consensus improvements.

They include:

- Improving the way we work as the Planning Department by introducing procedural enhancements (such as prioritized feedback on predictable timelines) that community members and project proponents will see immediately
- Introducing modernized methods of community engagement to involve more community members from across the City
- Drafting targeted zoning changes to Article 28 (BCDC) and Article 80 (Development Review)
- Prioritizing citywide coordination to ensure a more cohesive and effective development review process from all City Cabinets

The Planning Department will also continue to study and update recommendations in areas that require additional consensus, including:

- Development review thresholds and timelines
- Community Advisory Teams (CATs)
- Setting predictable mitigation expectations

DESIGN REVIEW

The Urban Design division this year streamlined operations to make design and development review processes more efficient and effective in yielding better design outcomes. The team integrated MOH design review staff within urban design for more efficient and cohesive Affordable Housing review. The team also operationalized improvements to the Boston Civic Design Commission. These changes made meaningful improvements to the annual output of the commission, resulting in fewer delayed projects on the way to the BPDA Board. The commission issued final recommendations for 31 projects in 2024.

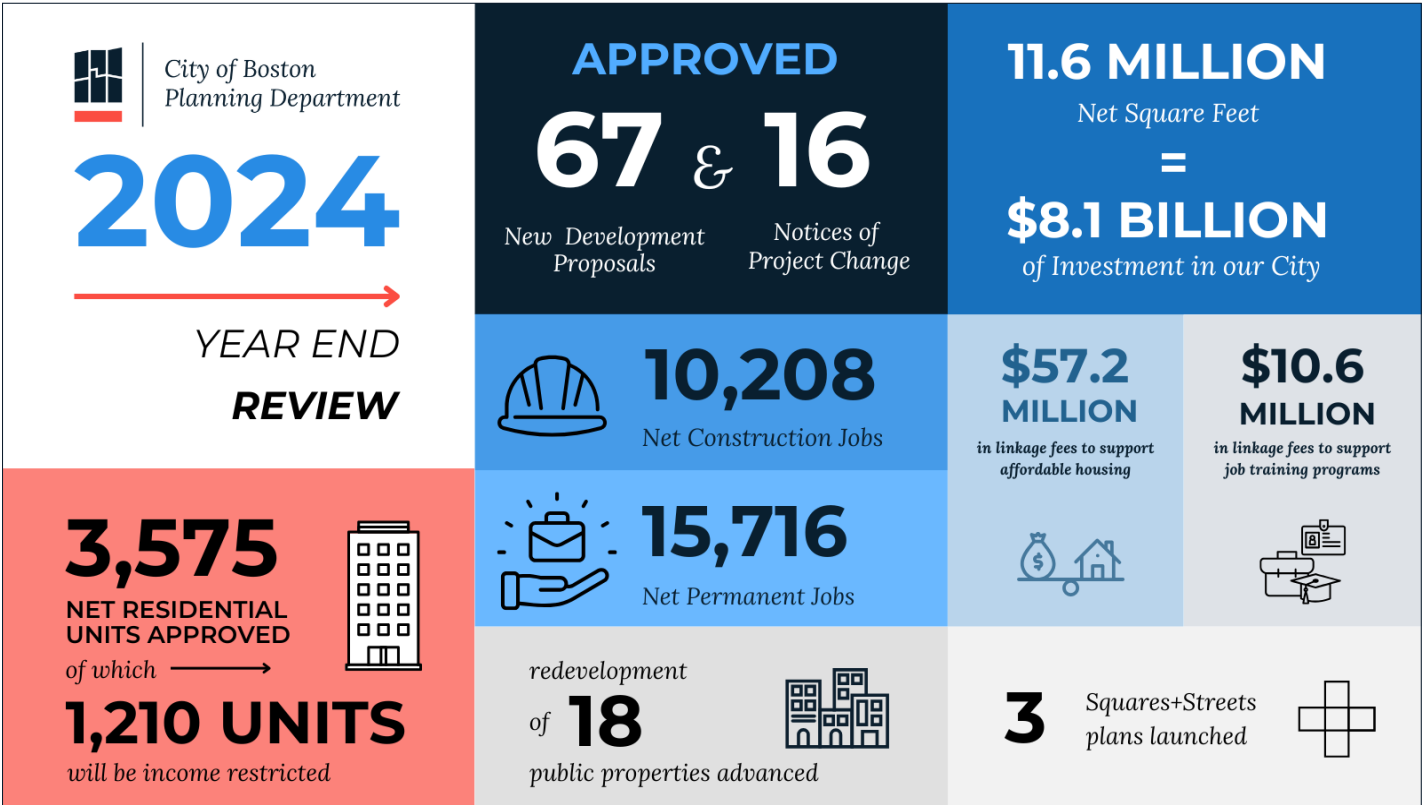


DEVELOPMENT REVIEW OMBUDSMAN

The Ombudsman role was created in 2023 to reduce the time it takes for BPDA Board-approved projects to be fully permitted and built. Since its creation, the Ombudsman has helped to successfully advance 20 Article 80 projects toward receiving building permits, including a total of 920 housing units, 453 of which are income-restricted.

WHATS NEXT?

The Ombudsman is working to identify and implement long-term process improvements (such as establishing best practices, policies, and prioritization frameworks) to guide the post-Board permitting process. As an early process improvement, the Planning Department is nearing completion on a brand new tracking system, which will help staff to not only track timelines from project filing to permit issuance, but also proactively identify possible bottlenecks in the process.



PROJECT REVIEW

Over the year, staff advanced 67 new development proposals and 16 notices of project change amounting to 11.6 million net square feet worth \$8.1 billion of investment in Boston. This includes 3,575 net residential units, of which 1,210 or approximately 34 percent, will be income-restricted. This year's approved projects are estimated to generate 10,208 net construction jobs and 15,716 net permanent jobs. The department hosted 182 Article 80 community engagement meetings.

LINKAGE FEES, MITIGATION, AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

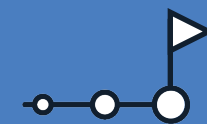
Development proposals approved in 2024 are expected to contribute \$57.2 Million in linkage fees to support affordable housing and \$10.6 Million in linkage fees to support job training programs. The Planning Department this year also disbursed \$9,739,623 in community benefit and mitigation funds from project escrow accounts managed by the Developer Compliance unit and Finance division.

3. REAL ESTATE

DISPOSITIONS

The Real Estate division within the Planning Department continued their stewardship of BPDA property in 2024. To fulfill their objective of using public land for public good, the Real Estate division continued to work closely with Boston communities.

In 2024, the Real Estate division advanced 18 projects through the disposition process. These parcels, which amount to 769,622 square feet of underutilized, BPDA-owned land throughout multiple neighborhoods in Boston, will enable uses such as community gardens, affordable housing, mixed-used development, marine industrial, and public open space. Of the 18 projects, nearly 400 new units of affordable housing will be created. About 60 percent of all advanced projects in 2024 were located in Roxbury, and more than half of those projects will create more open space and community gardens, promoting equity and resilience in our city.



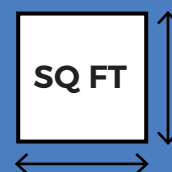
18

Projects advanced into new stages of the disposition process



400

New units of affordable housing will be created



769,622

square feet of parcels



60

percent of projects located in Roxbury and more than half of those will create more open space and community gardens

COASTAL RESILIENCE

The Coastal Resilience Delivery team was created in 2023 as part of the Planning Department's Real Estate division to help create a more resilient city. The goal of this team is, in coordination with the Office of Climate Resilience, to accelerate the design and implementation of coastal resilient infrastructure to protect the City from coastal flooding and sea level rise.

Team members oversee the community engagement, design, benefit cost analysis, pursuit of grant funding, and construction necessary to realize district scale coastal resilient solutions needed for the following projects:

- [Charlestown Navy Yard Flood Mitigation Planning & Feasibility Project](#)
- [Long Wharf Flood Mitigation Planning & Feasibility Project](#)
- [Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park Flood Mitigation Planning & Feasibility Project](#)
- [Resilient Fort Point Channel Infrastructure Project](#)
- [Dorchester Resilient Waterfront Project at Tenean Beach / Conley Street](#)
- [Border Street Resilient Waterfront Project](#)



WHATS NEXT?

Over the next year, the Real Estate division will continue to advance projects in support of the Planning Department’s goals around affordability, resilience, and equity.

Projects that are expected to break ground over the next year include:

- [Fort Point Channel Resilience Improvements](#)
- [Parcel R1 in Chinatown](#)
- [Boston Water and Sewer Commission Parking Lots Phase 1 in Roxbury](#)
- [Parcel 8 in Roxbury](#)

Additionally, there are a number of projects that are tentatively designated to various development teams on publicly-owned land that will advance over the upcoming year. One of the most notable projects is the [Austin Street Parking Lots redevelopment](#) which, when completed, will generate more than 600 majority affordable new units of housing, and will also deliver community benefits identified as part of PLAN: Charlestown including sports fields, a community center, and a daycare facility.

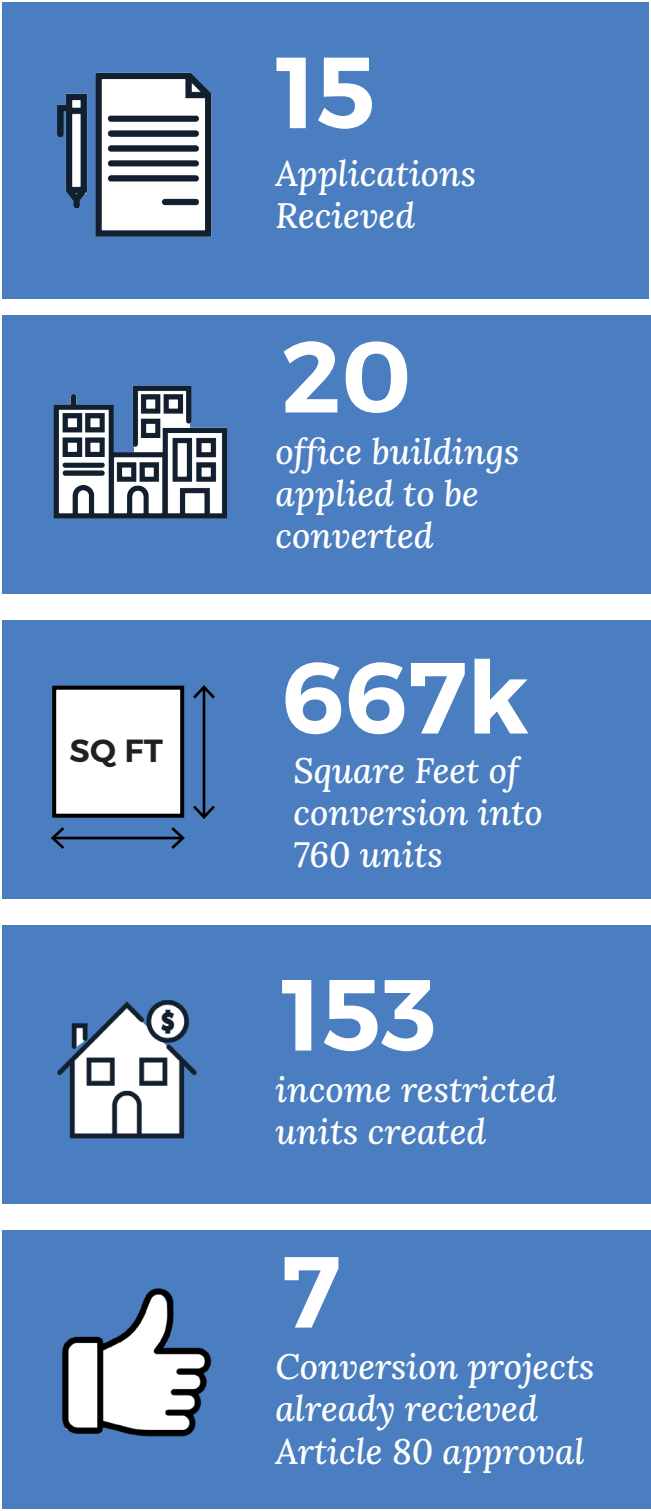
4. POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

OFFICE TO RESIDENTIAL CONVERSION PROGRAM

In October 2023, the city launched a tax abatement [program to support conversion of older commercial office space into residential units.](#)

As of early 2025, the Planning Department has received 15 applications to convert 20 office buildings. These applications represent the conversion of 667,000 SF into 760 units, including 153 income-restricted units. Of the 15 applications, seven conversion projects have already received Article 80 approval, and one is under construction.

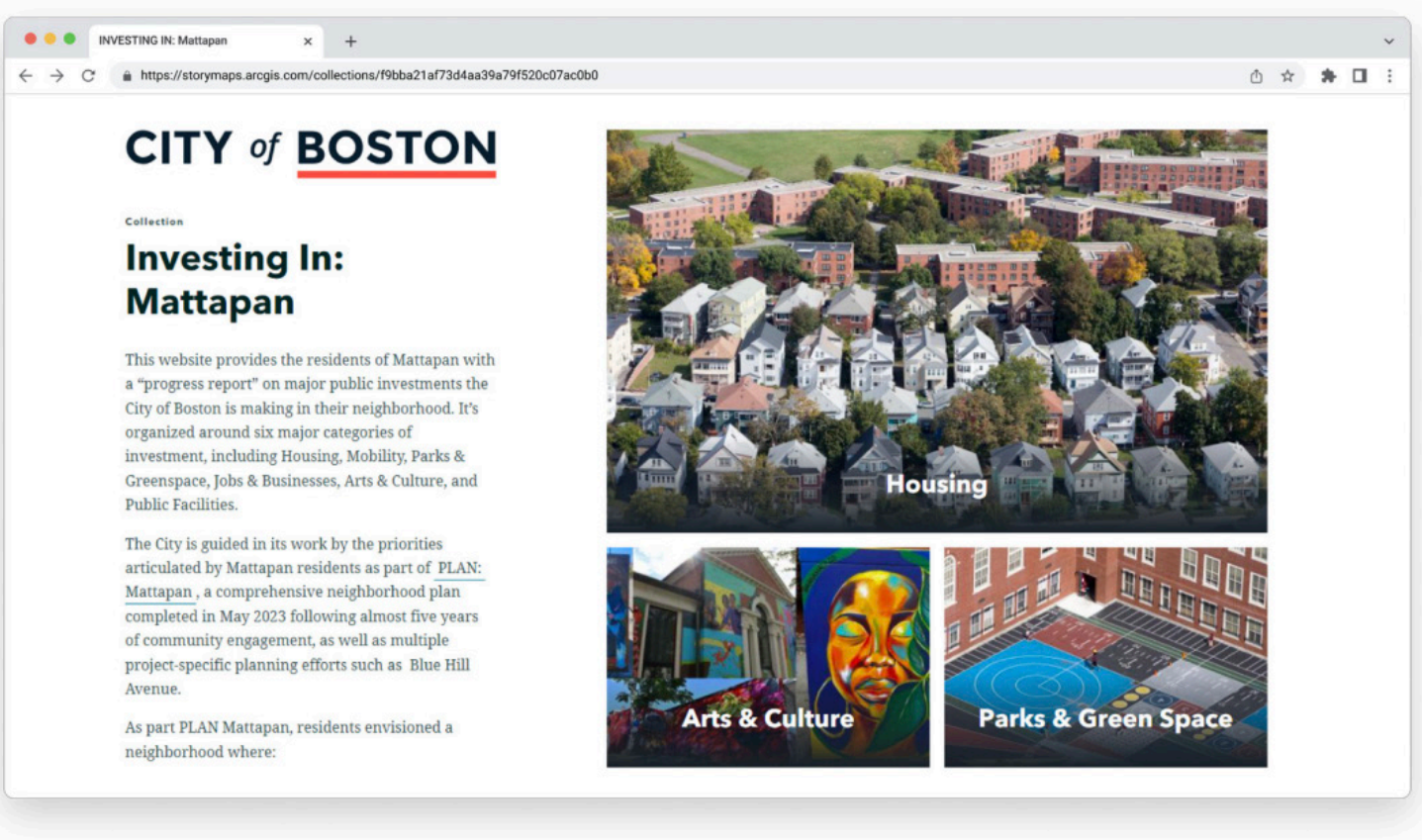
Incentivizing the conversion of underutilized office buildings supports resilience and sustainability in our Downtown because it encourages the adaptive reuse of historic structures. The program requires adherence to the new Inclusionary Zoning requirements, and that the buildings meet the state’s Stretch Energy Code as required. The conversion of 20 older, less energy efficient office buildings Downtown will make a meaningful impact on our resiliency goals. Increasing housing Downtown will promote vibrancy in our region’s economic hub by bringing more people to that area of the city and thus creating more support for businesses. By removing hundreds of thousands of square feet of vacant office space from the inventory, it has the added benefit of helping stabilize the post-Covid office market, as well as the commercial tax base. In addition, the program was recently named a top-25 finalist for the Ivory Innovations award, a national competition for innovation in housing affordability.



PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The Planning Advisory Council (PAC) established a system to track plan implementation for the built environment. To date, this system has been used to track the implementation of three neighborhood plans, PLAN: Mattapan; PLAN: Charlestown; and PLAN: East Boston across cabinets.

The PAC creates public progress reports on plan implementation to provide an overview of how the City invests its resources to expand housing, improve mobility, support jobs & businesses, enable thriving arts & culture, and improve public facilities, parks and open spaces, and coastal resilience. Progress reports for [Mattapan](#) and [Charlestown](#) are public.



ANTI-DISPLACEMENT

The PAC is creating Boston’s first anti-displacement strategy to mitigate residential, commercial and cultural displacement.

In 2024, it released two important reports from the Discovery Phase: Laying the Foundation: Community Anti-Displacement Priorities, and the Existing Anti-Displacement Toolkit & Progress Report which are directly informing Boston’s first citywide Anti-Displacement Action Plan.

WHATS NEXT?

Planning will create and implement a new Displacement Disclosure for projects subject to Article 80 review as part of the Anti-Displacement Action Plan. Project proponents would be required to submit a Displacement Disclosure, documenting existing conditions including any potential direct displacement of current residential, commercial or cultural tenants, confirming tenants have been notified of the proposed project and made aware of their rights and resources. Proponents would then be requested to work with directly impacted tenants to develop a Tenant Relocation Plan, and work with relevant City departments to provide any necessary support. This would be reviewed by City staff and inform the overall mitigation strategy for projects with direct displacement impacts prior to approval of the proposed project by the BPDA Board.



HOUSING ACCELERATOR FUND

In 2024, the City announced a \$110M equity investment fund to spur the creation of new rental housing by closing financing gaps for projects that have already been approved by the BPDA Board but have been unable to start construction.

All invested funds are anticipated to be returned with a small yield. Leadership from Planning, the Mayor’s Office of Housing, and the Finance Cabinet appeared before the City Council in January, 2025 to request funding for this program, and the Council allocated the funds that same month. The Housing Accelerator Fund will be a source of funding for the MassHousing BILD/Momentum Fund program, which will allow for a preferred equity investment into high-value rental projects in Boston that help a number of projects fill their financial gaps towards feasibility. A portion of funds will support the development of the mixed-income project at the Boston Housing Authority Bunker Hill site. Separately, the City is piloting a small portion of these funds for a similar approach for homeownership projects, with a possible emphasis on projects in lower-cost neighborhoods.

WHATS NEXT?

The City estimates that the Housing Accelerator Fund could incentivize at least 1,500 units meeting 20 percent inclusionary thresholds into construction by early 2026.





5. HIRING TRENDS & EMPLOYMENT DEMOGRAPHICS

EMPLOYMENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The Planning Department is committed to maintaining and recruiting a dynamic workforce reflective of Boston’s diverse population. The Planning Department has 243 employees. Since July 2024, the Planning Department has hired 18 employees. Planning Department Employment and New Hire demographics are as follows:

OVERALL EMPLOYEES

Employees by Race

RACE	EMPLOYEES
ASIAN	32
BLACK	32
HISPANIC	18
WHITE	138
NSPEC	23
TOTAL	243

Employees by Gender

GENDER	EMPLOYEES
FEMALE	125
MALE	116
TOTAL	243

NEW HIRES *as of March 2025*

New Hires by Race

RACE	EMPLOYEES
ASIAN	6
BLACK	2
HISPANIC	1
WHITE	7
NSPEC	2
TOTAL	18

New Hires By Gender

GENDER	EMPLOYEES
FEMALE	6
MALE	12
TOTAL	18

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

FINANCIAL REPORT

We have attached the FY24 BRA and EDIC Audited Financial Statements which are available on the Planning Department's Website. You can also find previous year's audits as well. It is our practice to post the audits on the website after they have been finalized.

[FY24 BRA Audited Financial Statement](#)

[FY24 EDIC Audited Financial Statement](#)

[FY24 Capital Expenses](#)

[Community Benefits Disbursements](#)



