



Encourage a  
Mixed-use Core



Continue to encourage dense, walkable, mixed-use development and public realm improvements to foster a core where more people live, work, and gather.

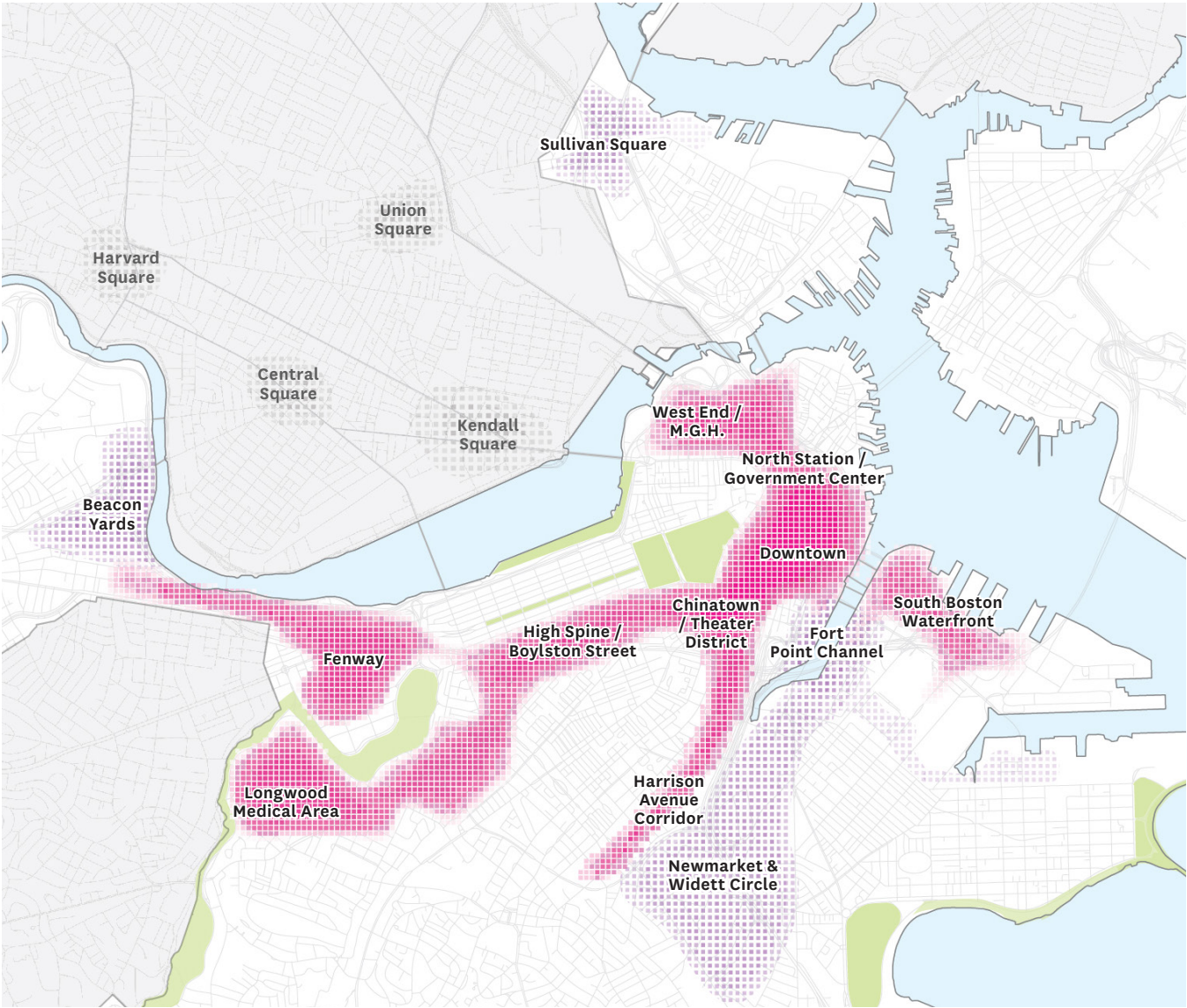
170 Today, Boston’s core is the anchor of the city’s economy. The core has traditionally been defined by its role as a commercial job center and its dense, high-rise building fabric, which includes most of Boston’s high-rise districts. Over the next decade it can add more residential uses in addition to expanding its traditional commercial uses.

The core has evolved significantly over past decades, expanding from its original footprint. The boundaries and uses of the historic downtown—the city’s original commercial core—have evolved over centuries to meet the changing needs of the city’s residents and workers. In the mid-twentieth century, the boundaries of the core expanded west with the development of the Prudential Center and Hancock Tower, and urban renewal reshaped the fabric of the historic downtown. This “High Spine” of taller buildings enabled new growth to support established neighborhoods and created a model for contextually-sensitive high-rise development that guides planning today.

Institutional anchors in Longwood Medical Area and

along Huntington Avenue spurred the growth of neighborhoods that are regional and national centers for education, health care, and culture. Over the past decade, the rapid growth of the knowledge economy has led to the development of new places to live and work in the South Boston Waterfront.

As the city plans for its future, the areas and neighborhoods of the commercial core can continue to evolve to meet pressing needs for housing and the city’s growing twenty-first-century economy. To accommodate this type of growth in a way that makes the core more vibrant, accessible, and livable, Boston will need new policies and strategies to guide investment. These policies—including continued dense mixed-use development, transit investment, public realm improvements, and transformative infrastructure investments—can support the core as a place with quality jobs, housing for a variety of incomes, and culture and open spaces that reflect the diversity of Boston’s residents and attract workers and businesses.



**Boston will achieve its vision for the core by developing a plan for the Shawmut Peninsula in 2100, collaborating with institutional landowners, and encouraging growth that expands the boundaries of the core.**

Boston will develop policies and collaborations that are appropriate for different areas of the core. In the Shawmut Peninsula, a plan for 2100 can guide historic preservation, strategic growth, and public realm investments that support an active mixed-use area.

In other areas with consolidated ownership—such as the areas owned by medical and educational institutions—public-private collaboration can support shared objectives.

Additionally, the traditional commercial core can expand to accommodate housing and jobs, and bring jobs closer to established neighborhoods. Like the High Spine in the 20th century, growth in areas like Beacon Yards and Fort Point Channel will continue to expand the boundaries of the core.



This is what we aspire to achieve.

Encourage Job Growth.

New development will catalyze job creation and strengthen existing and emerging job centers, whether the hub of cultural uses on the Avenue of the Arts or the institutions of the Longwood Medical Area.

Encourage Housing Growth.

New housing for a variety of incomes will help to reduce housing-price pressure on existing residents, encourage population growth that increases activity on nights and weekends, and enable more Bostonians to have walkable commutes.

Create a Destination.

Open space, arts and culture, and public-realm improvements will make the core a destination for residents, workers, and visitors alike.

Preserve Historic Architecture.

The buildings of Boston’s core reflect centuries of growth and design. Investment in these buildings will ensure that the character of these buildings is preserved while uses in some buildings evolve to meet new needs. For example, some older commercial buildings with available space that no longer meet the needs of traditional office tenants could become new spaces for start-ups, housing, or artist live/work space.



Encourage Development that Responds to the Existing Context.

New development will be carefully planned and appropriately scaled, with a focus on creating denser development in some areas and creating walkable communities throughout the core.

Provide Resources for a Growing Population.

Job centers will evolve to meet the needs of a growing residential population. As commercial core neighborhoods add residents and more jobs, they will need more of the amenities and features that make Boston’s neighborhoods livable: a range of open spaces, schools, grocery stores, and places for community gathering.

Prepare for Climate Change.

Community preparedness, building adaptation, and infrastructure investment will be prioritized and layered together to prepare Boston’s core for climate change. In the dense environment of the commercial core, protections will be designed to provide multiple benefits wherever possible, such as improved open spaces and public realm.



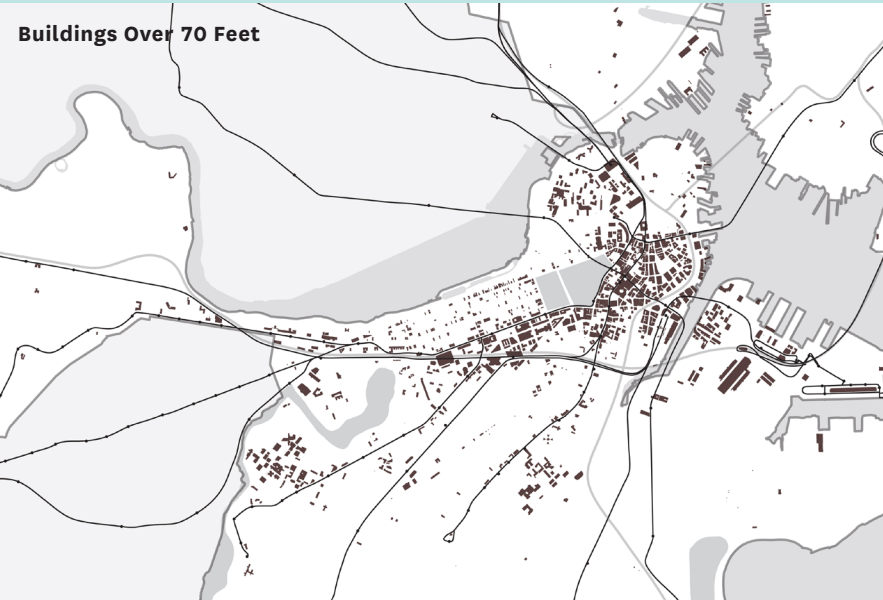
The neighborhoods of Boston’s core are well positioned to evolve and meet the needs of the twenty-first-century city.

**More people are living in, and will live in, Boston's core.** The number of residential units in Downtown has increased by 25 percent—more than 3,000 units—since 2014, demonstrating a trend toward mixed-use development that is happening in many areas of the core.<sup>8</sup> By 2030, Boston will add more than 53,000 housing units, approximately a quarter of which could be accommodated in the core, and 20 million square feet of new space to work, approximately a third which could be accommodated in the core.

**High-rise construction is expanding.** From Boylston Street to North Station, Boston now has multiple high-rise districts with commercial buildings more than 70 feet tall. The expansion of areas where high-rise construction is appropriate and financially viable will enable Boston to add new housing and jobs using less of its limited land and adding density close to transportation.



"Residential towers that are dedicated to 'workforce housing' downtown. This would encourage those who work downtown to also live downtown, i.e., increase the amount of people who walk to work."  
Jamaica Plain resident via online postcard



**High-rise construction** is defined in Massachusetts as any building taller than 70 feet in height above grade (this can include both seven-story buildings and buildings like the Prudential Tower). The commercial core is home to many of the city’s high-rise buildings. Construction at such a height triggers additional safety measures and different materials, which bring additional cost. High-rise construction is financially feasible only in certain parts of the city where the market can support such costs. As the city has grown, areas that can support high-rise development have spread, to the west in Fenway and around Boston University and to the south in the Harrison Avenue/Albany Street area and the South Boston Waterfront.



**Boston's High Spine**  
The High Spine is a planning and architectural rationale that guided high-rise growth along Boylston and Huntington Avenues between Back Bay and the South End. Conceived in the 1960s when tall towers were relatively unprecedented in the city, the High Spine provided a framework for encouraging sensitive and strategic dense development, including the Prudential Center and the Hancock Tower, alongside historic residential neighborhoods. The High Spine creates a distinctive skyline that orients residents through the city. Importantly, it encourages growth in an area where there is significant transit access and where growth can provide needed amenities for the adjacent residential neighborhoods as well as for new residents and workers in the area.

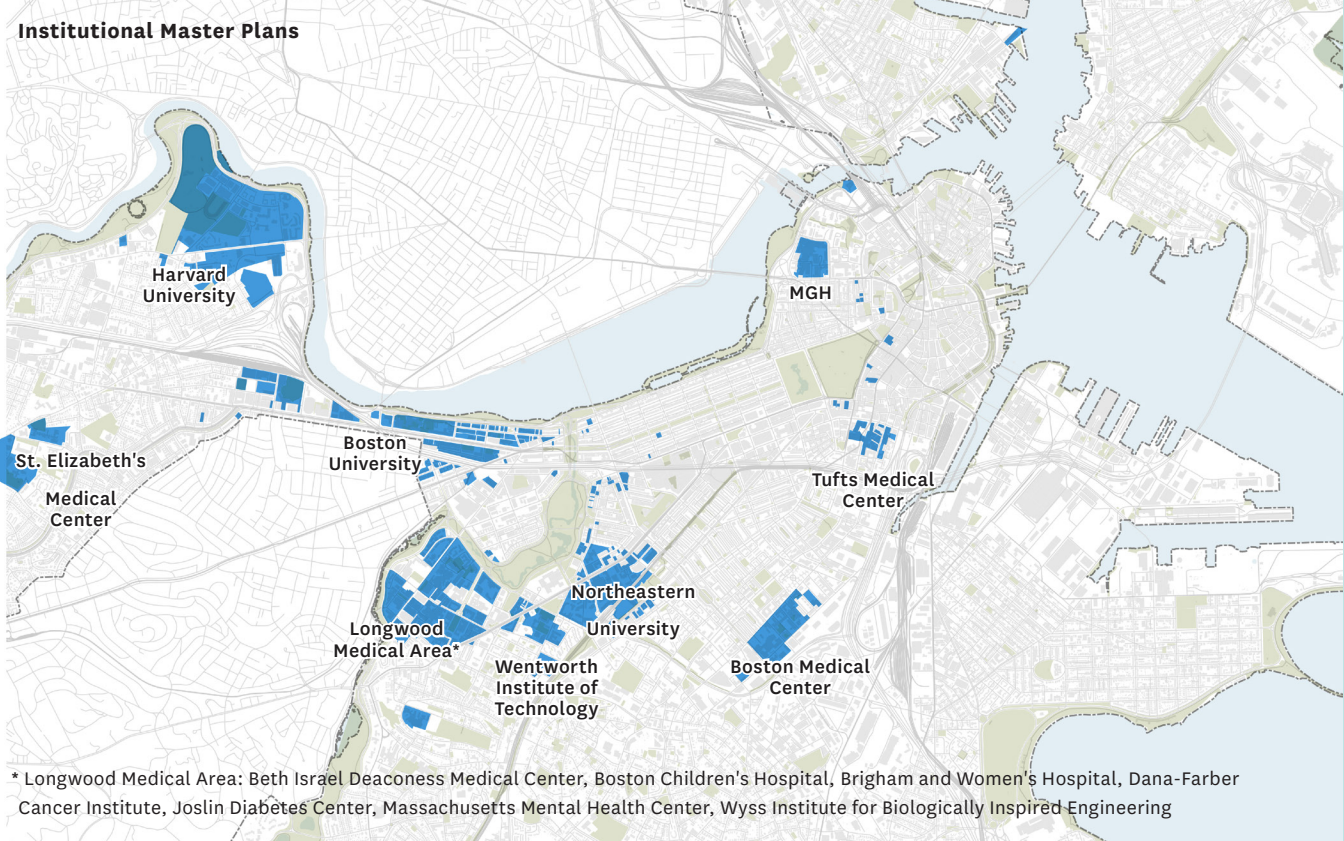
The approach to growth embodied by the High Spine—transit-oriented, high-rise development that is sensitive to the surrounding context and provides amenities for adjacent neighborhoods—has informed the development of other high-rise corridors in the city. In Fenway, a similar approach to growth transformed an auto-oriented edge into a lively high-rise district. Along Harrison Avenue, new, mixed-use buildings are filling gaps in the urban fabric between the South End and Route 93.

As the city continues to grow, dense development will be an important tool for providing space to work and live that Boston needs to support its economy, expand the tax base, and increase affordability. The High Spine can serve as an urban design framework for the development of new contextually sensitive high-rise buildings in the commercial core.



Many of the areas and neighborhoods of the core are characterized by single or consolidated private ownership, such as educational or medical institutions. From the maritime and shipping industry of the South Boston Waterfront to universities and cultural institutions along Avenue of the Arts and the medical and educational cluster in Longwood, these areas continue to be anchors of Boston’s core, boasting a mix of jobs and unique sectoral strengths. As the neighborhoods of the core evolve, the distinct sectoral strengths of these areas should be supported by new growth.

Significant areas of the core are occupied by institutional uses. Collaboration with these institutions will be critical to the growth and evolution of the core



Core districts have a similar spatial composition to the neighborhoods but opposite daily rhythms. Each district has its own primary retail streets, center, and distinct identity, from the Financial District to Government Center. Many of these areas have the opposite daily pattern of the existing predominantly residential neighborhoods: They are traditionally commercial areas animated by daytime activity but quiet in the evening hours.

Many areas that house Boston’s economic anchors are vulnerable to climate change. Many of Boston's job centers and critical infrastructure are on the water and are exposed to flooding that will be exacerbated by extreme weather. As sea levels rise over coming decades and storms become more frequent, more areas of the commercial core will face flooding risk.

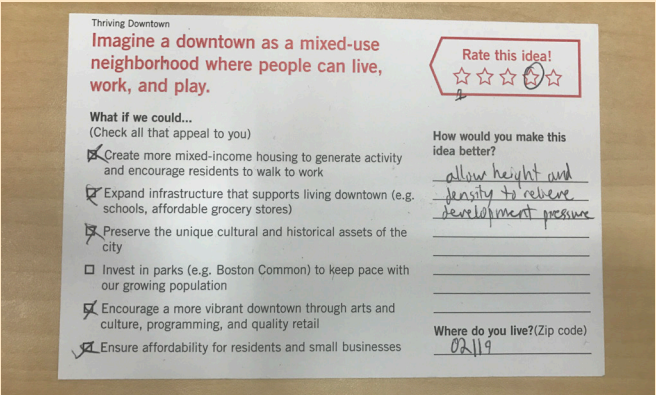




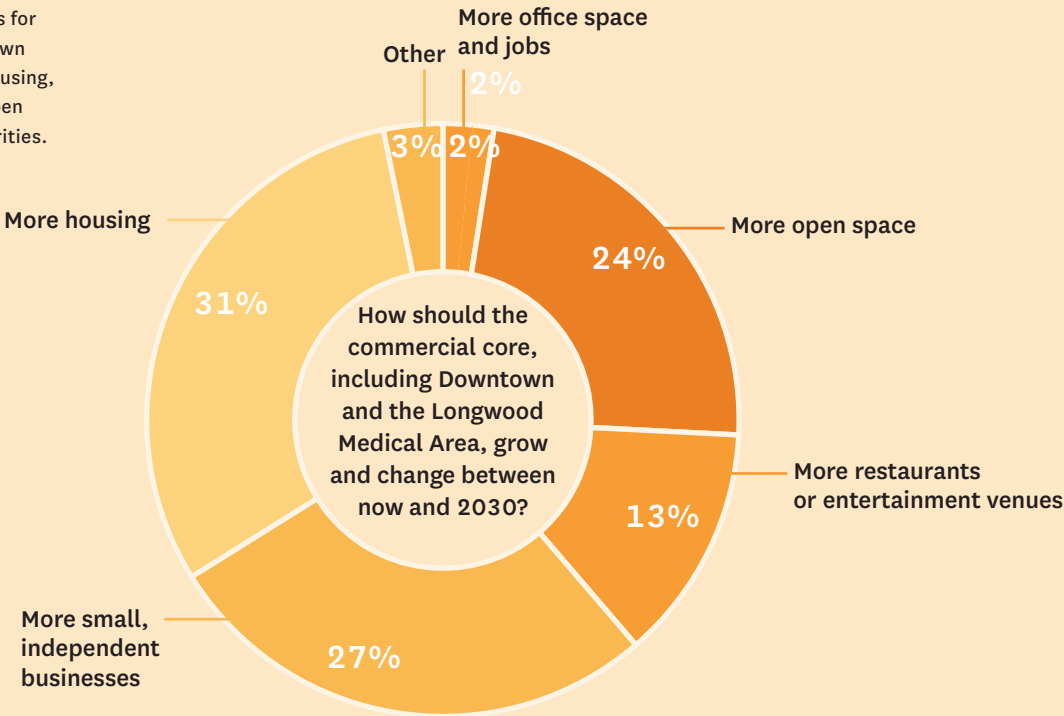
Residents expressed ideas for how to make the core more mixed-use.

Bostonians from different parts of the city had ideas about how to make Downtown and other areas of the core more vibrant places to live, work, and play. Many people called for more housing to be built at different income levels and highlighted the need for the services and amenities that support residential neighborhoods, such as schools, libraries, and grocery stores.

At workshops in Summer 2016 residents responded to emerging ideas, including "Thriving Downtown."



Attendees at the Imagine Boston Forum in March 2016 were asked to rank ideas for how the core should grow and change by 2030. Housing, small businesses and open space were the top priorities.



178

**Stephanie Fletcher**  
Mar 02, 2016

Downtown Boston needs another public school.

Places to work

5 Supporters

Share

**Laura Tomasetti**  
Mar 03, 2016

Thanks for submitting this idea. We need one in Beacon Hill/Back Bay!

No Supporters yet

Share

**Ashley Mahanama**  
Mar 04, 2016

The Seaport area in particular is very child friendly (and becoming more so) but parents move out before school age.

No Supporters yet

Share

**Charles Denison**  
Mar 14, 2016

Franklin St has a lot of wasted space here. This would be a great opportunity to create a new plaza with cafe seating!

Places to play

4 Supporters

Share

**Matthew Barison**  
Mar 23, 2016

Agreed. Big opportunity, like NYC did in Times Sq.

No Supporters yet

Share

More than 1,000 ideas were added to an online and mobile mapping tool in Spring 2016.

179



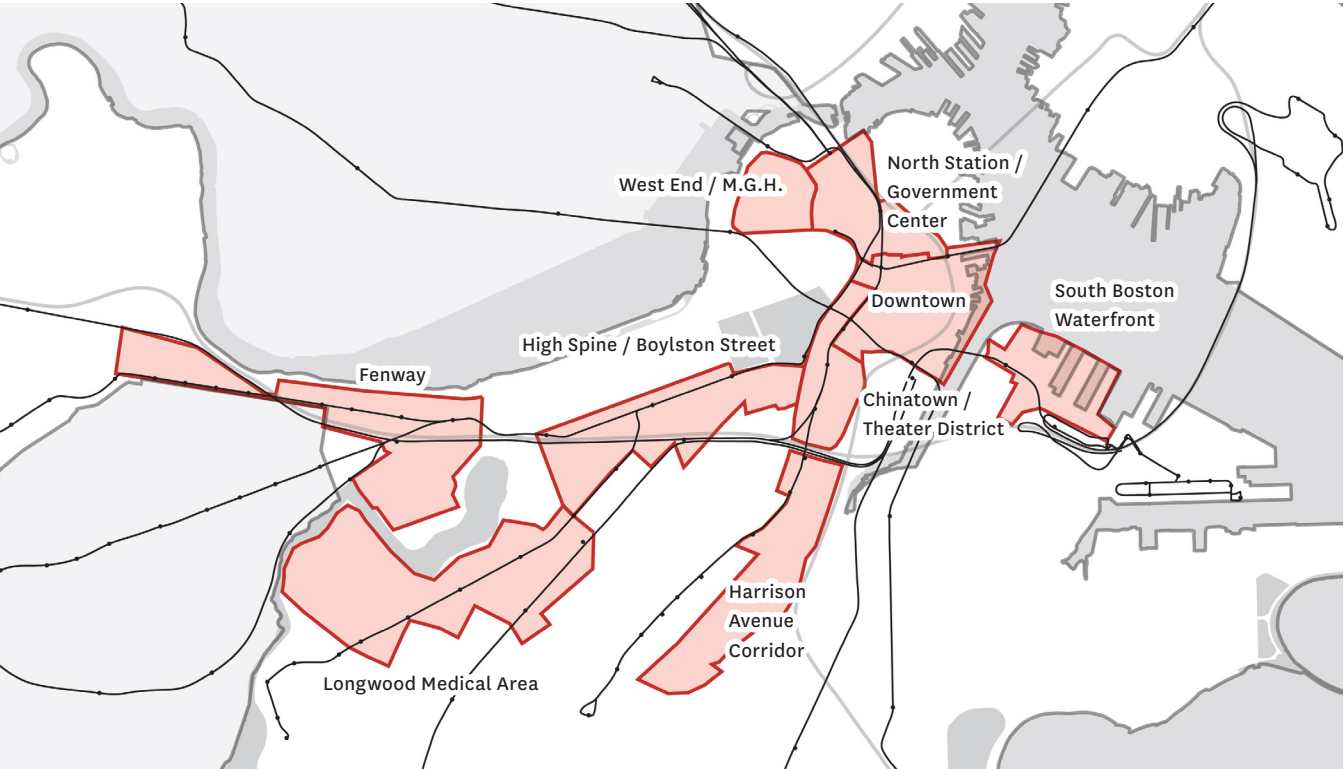
In December 2016 residents joined a Downtown walking tour as part of Imagine Boston Week. The discussion focused on how Downtown can evolve and become more livable, while enhancing the historic fabric of neighborhoods like Chinatown and the Leather District. →





# Neighborhoods of the Core

Boston’s core is composed of distinct neighborhoods, each of which merits a different approach for growth and investment.



Imagine Boston 2030

## Historic Downtown

Downtown’s historic streets, remarkable architecture, cultural anchors, and tall buildings are the site of much of Boston’s economic and political history. Today, this area is beginning to introduce the mix of uses required for daytime and evening vibrancy, including a full-scale grocery store and a growing residential population. Carefully-planned infill development, thoughtful historic preservation, continued retail revitalization, and repurposing of existing buildings could produce new housing and office space in the Downtown, ensuring that the area remains an economic anchor and supports a lively, diverse atmosphere.



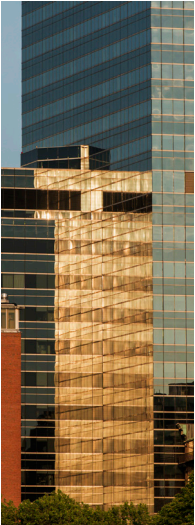
## North Station/Government Center

In North Station/Government Center, midcentury urban renewal replaced Scollay Square’s active commercial center with government uses. This mixed-use district is now being transformed through an activated City Hall Plaza and implementation of transformative large-scale redevelopment like the Hub on Causeway and Converse’s recently opened corporate headquarters at Lovejoy Wharf. In coming decades, significant publicly-owned land has potential to support continued mixed-use growth in the area.

"Create more housing options for families especially in the downtown neighborhoods." Downtown resident via web survey

## West End/Massachusetts General Hospital

As part of the urban renewal policies of the 1960s, a dense residential neighborhood in the West End was replaced with high-rises and institutional uses. In the long term, continued evolution of this area could continue to support high-density residential and commercial uses. Massachusetts General Hospital’s presence can provide an economic anchor around which new industry can grow.



## Chinatown

Chinatown is a vibrant cultural center with a rich history. A cohesive neighborhood as well as a cultural destination, it is home to many restaurants and other small businesses. While new development can enhance the area and add new housing and jobs, in some cases, recent growth has placed pressure on existing residents and retail. Addressing this pressure and preserving the area’s cultural legacy requires strategic preservation and careful infill growth, including affordable housing and commercial space for small businesses and public spaces and amenities that serve the community.





Theater District

The Theater District is a robust center of entertainment activity. In addition to continuing to be an entertainment hub, new mixed-use growth, including residential and commercial uses with active ground-floor retail and cultural uses, can bring a new kind of vibrancy and a lively pedestrian and cultural environment to the area.



Fenway

A multidecade process has transformed the area anchored by Fenway Park from a low-density light industrial and auto-oriented corridor along Boylston Street into an active mixed-use destination. There is continued capacity to provide contextually-sensitive, mixed-income, and affordable housing for people who work in the nearby Longwood Medical Area and Kenmore Square, as well as retail and office space that add to the area’s diversity.



High Spine/Boylston Street

The High Spine that arose along the Boylston Street corridor remains a prominent architectural fixture in the city’s skyline and serves as both a distinctive core of dense commercial activity and a ceremonial landmark, especially during events of international acclaim like the Boston Marathon. There is some capacity for continued development along this corridor, which can support a mix of commercial and residential with ground-floor retail spaces.

Longwood Medical Area

The Longwood Medical Area’s (LMA) educational institutions and hospitals have expanded over the years, firmly establishing the LMA as the epicenter of the regional healthcare sector. With the support of infrastructure investment, new housing can complement the existing academic and hospital uses, and new business and institutional development can support the innovation capacity of Boston’s healthcare and life sciences industries.



South Boston Waterfront

The South Boston Waterfront has emerged as a dynamic neighborhood on land that sat underutilized as surface parking lots for decades. Given its proximity to the financial district, the area has been a primary focus of recent office development in the city, particularly for professional services and financial firms. With new large-scale master-planned projects like Seaport Square, this emerging neighborhood is poised to incorporate continued housing and job growth and become a significant retail and entertainment destination with the support of increased investment in transportation, climate preparedness, public realm, and other neighborhood-serving amenities.



Harrison Avenue

New growth along Harrison Avenue in the South End provides shopping for daily needs, vibrant restaurants, rich arts and cultural opportunities, and housing, and connects Chinatown to Roxbury. The Harrison Albany Corridor was rezoned in 2012 following a community planning process that envisioned the former industrial area as a mixed-use neighborhood, knit closely to the fabric of the historic South End immediately to the north. Recent development has demonstrated a strong demand for housing given the area's proximity to downtown Boston. There is potential for additional development supportive of residential and workforce growth.



“Recent development in Fenway is a great model of how community-based rezoning can preserve existing neighborhood housing and stabilize rents, through creation of additional housing and commercial development, which in turn supports and enriches both the Fenway and Longwood neighborhoods. Transportation infrastructure [should be] kept front and center.”  
**Letter in response to Draft Plan**

“Many historic buildings both downtown and in the neighborhoods are lying fallow- uncared for and neglected but could be repurposed adding authentic vitality to our city.”  
**Mission Hill resident via online survey**





## Existing Plans for the Shawmut Peninsula

The Shawmut Peninsula's mixed-use development, waterfront planning, and public-realm activation are guided by a variety of plans, including:

### WATERFRONT PLANS

- › Downtown Waterfront District Municipal Harbor Plan & Public Realm Activation Plan (2017)
- › Fort Point Channel Watersheet Activation Plan (2002)
- › Boston Inner Harbor Passenger Water Transportation Plan (2000)

### INSTITUTIONAL MASTER PLAN

- › Tufts NEMC Institutional Master Plan
- › MGH Institutional Master Plan
- › Suffolk University Institutional Master Plan

### PUBLIC REALM

- › City Hall Plaza Planning (ongoing)
- › North Station Area Mobility Action Plan (ongoing)
- › A Better City, Inspirational Ideas for Boston's Public Realm (2016)
- › Complete Streets Approach (2013)
- › Greenway District Planning Study (2010)
- › Crossroads Initiative (2004)

### SUBDISTRICT PLANNING

- › Downtown Crossing Plan (2013)
- › Connect Historic Boston (2013)
- › Wharf District | Financial District Edges Study (2004)

## Shawmut Peninsula Vision

Through sensitive growth, investment, and preservation, the Shawmut Peninsula can evolve to meet the needs of future generations.

The Shawmut Peninsula—which includes the Historic Downtown, North Station/Government Center, West End/Massachusetts General Hospital, Chinatown, the Theater District, Beacon Hill, and the North End—has been the economic and cultural hub of Boston and the region for almost four centuries. With unparalleled transit access and significant office space, the Shawmut Peninsula is home to a large share of the city's jobs and, together with the South Boston Waterfront, contributes to approximately half of the total tax revenue that supports Bostonians and neighborhoods throughout the city.<sup>9</sup>

Today, the traditional role of the Shawmut Peninsula as the premier commercial area of the city is shifting as new job centers grow in the South Boston Waterfront, Longwood, Fenway, and in Cambridge.

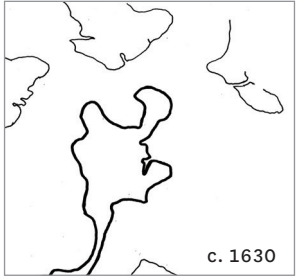
Throughout the Shawmut Peninsula, historic buildings are in need of reinvigoration, and demand for residential growth is increasing.

In turn, retail corridors, open spaces, and cultural assets must evolve to meet the needs of a growing residential population and to retain companies and workers. As the Shawmut Peninsula becomes more mixed-use and active at more hours of the day, a peninsula-wide plan can guide transformative infrastructure investment and ensure that the area's varied neighborhoods become places to work, live, and gather.

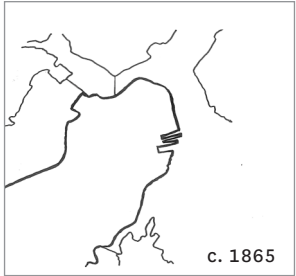
From Downtown Los Angeles to Philadelphia's Center City, long-term visions and targeted development policies are guiding the growth and evolution of historic downtowns and central business districts throughout the country. With a thoughtful mix of historic preservation, office modernization, diverse retail, housing and job growth, and investment in open space, arts, and culture, the Shawmut Peninsula can meet the needs of a next generation of workers, residents, and visitors.



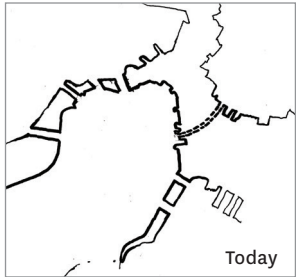
The growth and transformation of Shawmut's Peninsula's shoreline:



Original land mass



Landfill expands the peninsula



Connections are strengthened



Catalytic investments and public action will position the Shawmut Peninsula to thrive over the coming century.

A 2100 plan for the Shawmut Peninsula will...

Land Use & Planning

Guide the long-term development of major sites and districts

Create a vibrant urban waterfront district surrounding Fort Point Channel, through thoughtful investment around the channel, investment in the Northern Avenue Bridge, and programming that helps people enjoy the channel itself.

Transform key parts of the Shawmut Peninsula with potential for growth and improvement. Close collaboration between the City, the community, institutional and public land owners can guide long-term planning to encourage job creation, housing growth, and enhanced walkability on strategic sites. For example, a new framework for parking can unlock areas for housing, office, and open-space development.





Housing

Stabilize housing and reduce displacement

Pursue policies that encourage the production and maintenance of deed-restricted low-, moderate-and middle-income housing

Affordable housing and strategic preservation in Chinatown. Encourage affordable housing and space for small businesses, and strategically preserve historic buildings and spaces to address the pressures of recent growth and preserve the area's cultural legacy.

Economic Development

Continue to make our city attractive by providing amenities for workers, visitors, and the growing residential population

Improve the public realm in the West End, Downtown, and North Station areas. Today, these areas are beginning to introduce the mix of uses required for daytime and evening vibrancy, including grocery stores and residential growth. Streetscape and public realm improvements and retail strategies can ensure that these areas can support lively atmospheres as they diversify and grow.

“Parks like Post Office Square and the Greenway have transformed the downtown area”  
Brighton resident via online survey

Energy & Environment

Partner with federal, state, and private entities to invest in nature-based and hard-engineered flood defenses

Collaborate to create flood defenses that serve as open-space amenities and public realm improvements. The implementation of green and gray infrastructure can leverage value downtown and can protect the peninsula from future flood and other climate-related risks.

Open Space

Invest in diverse public spaces in the commercial core

Restore Boston Common to its full vibrancy

Enhance Boston Common and open spaces in the Shawmut Peninsula. The City will strengthen Boston Common so that it can serve its fourth century of visitors as the shared, iconic public gathering space its founders intended it to be. Throughout the Shawmut Peninsula, improvements to existing open space and public realm aim to serve a growing residential community, support workers, and attract tourists, and bolster connections to Boston's waterfront.

Transportation

Transform existing infrastructure to enable long-term growth and strengthen connections between districts

Take advantage of opportunities to deck over highways in key areas, such as over I-93 or over the Mass Turnpike in Back Bay and at the southern edge of Downtown, to provide new open space and development potential and strengthen connections between neighborhoods.

Upgrade and integrate the regional commuter rail network. Major infrastructure improvements to the tracks, train types and signals can make the commuter rail a more frequent and reliable service, reducing our carbon footprint, supporting expanded communities and helping people connect more easily throughout the region.

Continue to raise the bar for what it means to be America's most walkable city. As the core adds jobs and residents, the percentage of commutes by foot is expected to grow. Investments in the public realm and walkable streets can ensure that Boston's streets are user-friendly for travelers of all backgrounds. As the most transit-accessible area of the city, these investments will benefit those who live in the core and those who come to the core to work or visit.

