



REQUEST FOR IDEAS

CO-CREATING BOSTON'S FUTURE-DECKER

Envisioning the future of multifamily housing in Boston's neighborhoods.

ISSUED BY:

Mayor's Housing Innovation Lab
Boston Society for Architecture

ALL INQUIRIES:

future-decker@boston.gov

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**We would like to offer our sincere gratitude to our funders
for their commitment to supporting our work.**

The Boston Foundation
The Kuehn Charitable Foundation

1. OPENING LETTER

Dear past, present, and future Bostonians,

This Request for Ideas (RFI) is an open call to anyone who is interested in seeing how new and familiar types of homes might respond to Boston's current and future housing needs. We are particularly interested in ideas that prioritize affordability, livability, and promote holistically healthy neighborhoods. No idea is too small and we want to know what you think.

The City of Boston has a longstanding housing affordability challenge that will take many approaches to solve. Moreover, the Boston Society for Architecture (BSA) has been supporting efforts by the City's Housing Innovation Lab (iLab) to explore opportunities for different types of housing models through the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) pilot, Compact Living Policy and the first Housing Innovation Competition in 2016. Today, the BSA and the iLab are continuing this collaboration by thinking of ways to create more housing options with buildings that enhance the unique histories and communities that exist in Boston's neighborhoods.

This year we are interested in addressing a new housing challenge: how can innovative models for housing on small sites help to provide more options for residents? By drawing inspiration from the iconic triple- or three-decker, a housing type that at its inception was created to serve the needs of families and individuals, we can imagine new ways of addressing the complex housing challenges the city and its residents face today. We are asking for your collaboration in creating housing that supports our citywide goals of making Boston a more equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist city for all residents. Help us collaboratively design homes and communities that allow people to thrive and have choices about where they live. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

The Boston Society for Architecture and the Housing Innovation Lab

2. OVERVIEW

The Boston Society for Architecture and the City of Boston's Housing Innovation Lab are launching a second Housing Innovation Competition in the Spring of 2021 titled, **Co-Creating Boston's Future-Decker**. Individuals and teams are invited to imagine new housing models that can be built on small, infill¹ sites. We suspect that multifamily housing, like the triple-decker, can help bridge a gap between small- and large-scale development in Boston. This type of middle-scale² housing not only helps provide diverse and affordable housing options for residents, but also helps create more sustainable and accessible neighborhoods in the city. Yet, this type of housing is not as easily built in our city due to zoning barriers, as well as high construction costs and land costs, among other barriers.

We invite any and all who are interested in helping to address this challenge to respond to this RFI by submitting ideas. We have created two tracks by which participants can submit their work, depending on whether it is a **Short Response** (Track I) or a **Long Response** (Track II). We recognize that competitions of this nature often prioritize the voices of professionals in the field of housing, but we also know that true change can only come from the collective and holistic imagination.

We also want to hear from you! Whether you have a sentence, an image or a robust vision, we welcome your participation in co-creating Boston's future-deckers!

I. BACKGROUND

In 2020, the BSA and the Housing iLab led an exploration with residents, students, architects, artists, and many others to learn about the role that triple-deckers have played in the lives of Boston residents. Mostly built between the 1880's and 1930's, triple-deckers provided deeply affordable housing opportunities for a wide variety of working and middle class families. Today, these wooden stacked apartment buildings have come to shape the very fabric of Boston's neighborhoods.

Through community conversations and workshops, we learned about what parts of triple-deckers most resonated with residents, like informally using shared spaces for community building or using decks to engage with their streets at a distance. During the pandemic, people's relationships to their homes naturally changed. While some residents noticed the benefits of living only a floors away from their neighbors, others came to use their decks in new ways, including as home office spaces. We took this research and created [Past, Present, and Future-Decker](#), a virtual exhibition that ran through the fall of 2020 on the BSA website. Through exhibition programs we were able to hold more conversations about how housing and the process of building housing can be made to be more

¹ **Infill:** Usually located within an urban area, infill locations look to fill the few vacant lots that exist between other existing buildings in the area.

² **Middle-Scale Housing:** Housing that consists of building types that exists somewhere in the middle of small- and large-scale housing development, such as three-deckers, row houses, and townhouses.

affordable, more sustainable, and more focused on racial equity.

As we take the learnings from this work and the work we did with other partners throughout 2020, we are excited to move into the next phase of this effort: this Request for Ideas (RFI).

3. OUR GOALS

A Request for Ideas (RFI) is us simply saying “we don’t have all the answers,” and are asking for help. At this very early stage of our process that help will come in many different shapes and sizes, all of which will inform the second phase of the competition.

Through this RFI, we want to identify projects that help us achieve the following goals:

- 1. Promote Affordability through Innovation** To promote affordability and make Boston accessible for all, by providing housing for low-, moderate-, and middle-income households, all of whom find it difficult to find housing they can afford. We want to explore innovative and replicable ways of designing, permitting, financing and building to help make housing more affordable.
- 2. Diversify the City’s Housing Stock** The City’s overarching goal is to add 69,000 new units of housing in Boston by 2030 - by working with many partners - and to achieve this we must ensure that there is a range of housing options that can cater to the diverse needs of Boston’s residents.
- 3. Create Equitable, Sustainable and Healthy Neighborhoods** We want to continue to support the creation of walkable neighborhoods that center climate, economic, and social equity, thus improving the quality of neighborhoods for all.
- 4. Co-Create & Make Connections** We want to engage with community members early and often in the development process and foster deeper connections with all of those involved with and impacted by housing development. In doing so, we hope to facilitate a more accessible and transparent development process that can lead to housing that is welcomed in the neighborhood where it is created.

At the end of the RFI submission period we will review all of the ideas submitted and compile them into a digital catalogue and host a showcase event. In addition to this process, we will gather the ideas from the RFI to help craft a more robust Request for Proposals (RFP) to be released at the end of 2021, for a (yet-to-be-selected) city-owned lot. The RFP will be a competitive process asking for development proposals with the goal of building a pilot project.

4. SITES

For this RFI, we have identified a total of [13 sites](#) within the Department of Neighborhood Development's (DND) inventory that are located in the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Mattapan, Dorchester, and Hyde Park. These sites were selected based on the following factors:

- **Size:** ranging from 3,000 to 8,000 square feet,
- **Location:** all of the sites are located near accessible modes of transportation, and offer a range of challenges and opportunities,
- **Zoning:** the sites range from 1 Family-3Family, which are not always representative of the existing building types in the surrounding, and
- **Neighborhood Context:** the thread that connects all of the selected sites is the presence of both new and old triple-deckers.

These can become the sites of imagination for how to develop *future-deckers* and have the ability to collectively tell a story of how replicable housing models can stitch together the fabric of our city. As participants, you are encouraged to address both the challenges and opportunities of introducing housing on **1 or more sites**. [All sites are listed in Appendix 1.](#)

Additionally, we know that there may be other sites beyond DND's inventory that could be fit for this competition. These can be publicly owned or privately owned sites, and can extend to other neighborhoods as well. If there is a site, or a set of sites, that you believe could provide better opportunities for residents, we invite you to include them in your response!

5. RESPONSES

There are [2 tracks](#) for submitting your ideas.

1. TRACK I: SHORT RESPONSES

1. **Input:** we have created a [short form](#) to make it easier for you to share any input or feedback.
2. **Proposal:** submit your responses by emailing future-decker@boston.gov. Please be sure to put "RFI Track I Response" in the subject of your email.

2. TRACK II: LONG RESPONSES

1. **Introduction:** introduce yourself (**1 page**)
Please tell us more about why you are submitting a proposal and a bit about your background. This should include your name, name of collaborators, and type of organization or group.

2. Site Selection: tell us where (1 page)

Provide a list of the site or sites you are interested in. Please provide commentary for each selected site indicating why it is interesting to you. You can focus on one site or a cluster³ of sites and you might also identify sites where an idea could be replicated.

3. Proposal: submit a proposal to future-decker@boston.gov of no more than **8 pages** and please be sure to put “RFI Track II Response” in the subject of your email. The proposal should also include:

i. Project Narrative. What you are proposing and why you believe it meets our goals as a City, as well as the needs of the communities involved in your concept.

ii. Project Concept. Your idea in full. The most compelling concepts include a combination of any the following:

1. Conceptual Design/Drawings
2. Innovative Finance Models
3. Innovative Construction Methods
4. Zoning Alternatives

iii. Project Barriers. Briefly describe the key barriers to the creation of your project.

iv. Permission: In your response, please let us know if you would like your ideas to be shared with a wider public or audience.

Other considerations: design that complements the context/streetscape, levels of affordability in rental and ownership units, parking allowance, green space, use of innovative materials and methods. We know that there is not a single solution to this development challenge and we welcome any and all creative ideas and approaches!

3. TIMELINE AND PROCESS

Submission

05/24/21: RFI made available. Questions about RFI may be submitted to future-decker@boston.gov

07/02/21: Submissions due to future-decker@boston.gov by 5pm EST. While we will continue to accept ideas that are shared beyond this period, we will mainly showcase those that are submitted by July 2nd.

Programs During the RFI Period (All events held virtually through zoom)

5/26/21: Information Session and opportunity to ask questions with iLab and BSA staff from 5:30pm-7pm EST.

6/09/21: Network with individuals and groups from around Boston and connect with designers and housing advocates from 5:30-7pm.

6/16/21: Sketch Night! Talk through your idea with a designer while they sketch it out in real time. Drop-in anytime from 6-7:30pm (break-out room style).

Post-RFI (exact dates subject to change)

7/29/21: RFI Submission Summary and Ideas Showcase Released

8/23/21: Competition Brief outlining the next phase released

³ **Cluster of sites:** a group of sites positioned or occurring closely together.

6. RESOURCES FOR APPLICANTS

We recognize that competitions are often geared towards those with prior experience and with access to resources. Thus, in an attempt to make it easier for anyone to participate in this RFI, we are providing a few resources to help support applicants. Below is a list of what we aim to offer through this first phase of the Housing Innovation Competition:

1. **Technical Assistance:**

With the support of the Berkshire Bank Foundation, the BSA can offer a small amount of funding to support organizations and groups that will be better able to participate with some support. The maximum allocation for any one group is \$1,000. The funds can be used for things like: internet access, translation services, printing, materials, childcare or other resources that are often overlooked but would help to enable a group to submit an idea for the RFI.

If you are interested in this funding, please contact us at future-decker@boston.gov with the subject line: Technical Assistance and let us know what you would like to use the funding for.

This opportunity will be on a first come first serve basis.

2. **Connecting with Designers:**

The Boston Society for Architecture recently launched the Community + Collaborative Design Initiative to create partnerships with designers and community groups throughout Boston. Through this project we will be able to connect you with volunteer designers to help create visuals for your idea for this RFI. If you would like to learn more about this initiative, please visit the [BSA website](#). If you are interested in connecting with a design team, please email us at future-decker@boston.gov.

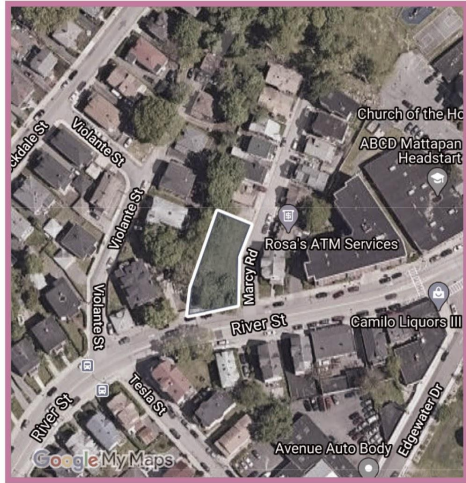
3. **Networking Events:**

During the open RFI period, we will be hosting a short series of events where interested participants can meet with other individuals and groups to begin to form teams for this phase. The three events include an information session, a networking event and a sketch night, where we will bring together both traditional and non-traditional applicants to ideate and become better acquainted with each other.

4. **Relevant Webpages:**

- [Past, Present, Future-Decker Virtual Exhibition \(2020\)](#)
 - This virtual exhibition depicts the history of Boston's triple-deckers and showcases collective visions of Boston's Future-Deckers.
- [Boston Zoning Viewer](#)
 - The Zoning Viewer is a web application and mapping tool that provides assessing and zoning information for parcels throughout the City of Boston.
- [Building Housing](#)
 - A digital platform that shows a full inventory of projects and parcels managed by the City of Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development.

APPENDIX 1: SITES



569 RIVER ST (TOTAL OF 1 SITE)

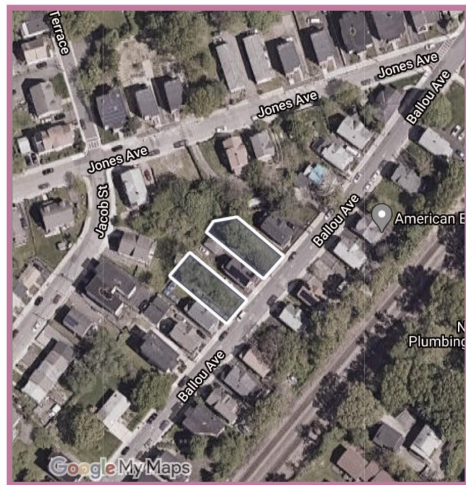
Neighborhood: Mattapan

Zoning: 2F-4000

Size: 6,984 SF

Council District: 5

Parcel ID: 1801709000



65, 71 BALLOU AVE (TOTAL OF 2 SITES)

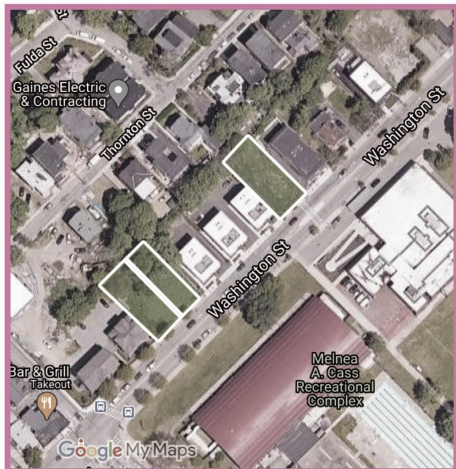
Neighborhood: Mattapan

Zoning: 3F-5000

Size: 4,125 SF, 4,064 SF

Council District: 4

Parcel ID: 1403768000



2751, 2775, 2777

WASHINGTON ST (TOTAL OF 3 SITES)

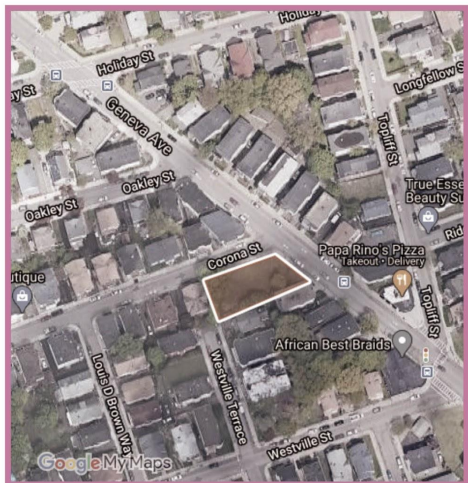
Neighborhood: Roxbury

Zoning: 3F-4000

Size: 5,509 SF, 4,144 SF, 5,376 SF

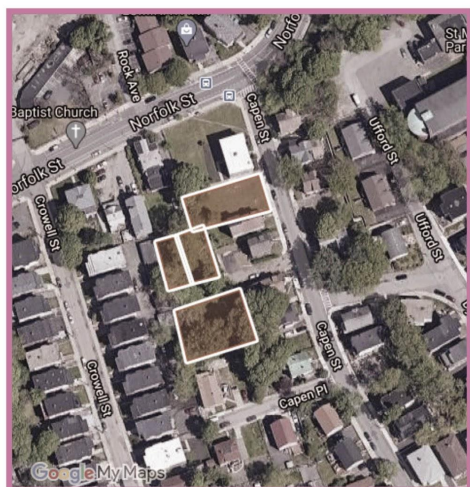
Council District: 7

Parcel ID: 1100237000, 1100236000, 1100231000



379 GENEVA AVE (TOTAL OF 1 SITE)

Neighborhood: Dorchester
Zoning: 2F-5000
Size: 7,647 SF
Council District: 4
Parcel ID: 1500843000



DYER COURT (TOTAL OF 4 SITES)

Neighborhood: Dorchester
Zoning: 3F-6000
Size: 5,979SF 3,281 SF 3,091 SF 8,833 SF
Council District: 4
Parcel ID: 1702081000, 1702084000, 1702085000, 1702086000



18, 22 COLCHESTER ST (TOTAL OF 2 SITES)

Neighborhood: Hyde Park
Zoning: 1F-6000
Size: 6,000 SF 5,979 SF
Council District: 5
Parcel ID: 1809674000, 1809676000

APPENDIX 2: DISCLOSURE

This RFI is for information and planning purposes only and shall not be construed as a solicitation or as an obligation on the part of the City to issue any competitive procurement or award a contract.

The BSA and the City will not award a contract on the basis of responses to this RFI nor otherwise pay for the fee for service of any information submitted, for any vendor presentation, or their use of such information.

All responses to this RFI will be public record under the Massachusetts' Public Records Law, Mass. Gen. L. ch. 66 s. 10, regardless of confidentiality notices to the contrary.

By submitting, the applicant authorizes the BSA and the City of Boston to publicize, refer to, and use their application as they see fit.

APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY

All definitions below pertain to meaning assigned in this document and initiative.

Future-Decker: A new rendition of the triple- or three-decker that provides affordable housing options for current and future residents. Ideally, this would be offered below market rate and would require residents to spend less than 30% of income. This building is also not limited to 3-unit homes.

Conceptual Design: Early phase of a design process that broadly outlines a concept or idea in a visual way.

Multifamily Housing: Buildings with at least two units.

Middle-Scale Housing: Housing that ranges from 3-15 units. Middle-scale housing can be challenging to build in and around Boston for a variety of reasons including: zoning, lot sizes, parking requirements, rising land and building costs, limited financing options and more. This RFI seeks to understand these barriers and potential opportunities better.

Request for Ideas (RFI): An RFI is a document that solicits ideas of participants of all backgrounds, to inform the City's approach for overcoming housing development challenges. It is the beginning of a process that reimagines how we conduct engagement.

Request for Proposals (RFP): An RFP (as referred to in this document) is a document that solicits

proposals for the redevelopment and disposition of property owned by the City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development (“DND”).

Scattered Sites: A cluster of sites that span across streets, blocks, and even neighborhoods. There are opportunities in this RFI to use scattered sites for a single development proposal if that would help to unlock greater efficiencies and/or cost reductions.

Three- or Triple-Decker: Three-story apartment building found in a large part of the Northeast region of the US. They were built primarily in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s and shared common features such as identical floor plans for each unit, front or back porches, wood construction and flat roofs.

Zoning: Local laws that determine, generally, the location, size and use of buildings. Cities and towns are divided into different zoning districts, each with its own rules on what can be built.

Mayor’s Housing Innovation Lab (iLab): The City of Boston’s Housing Innovation Lab, or iLab for short, is part of the Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics. The iLab works to increase affordability by testing innovative housing models and accelerating the pace of innovation in the housing sector.

Boston Society for Architecture (BSA): The Boston Society for Architecture (BSA) is the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects and also encompasses a non-profit community organization, the BSA Foundation. The BSA has over 4,500 members in the architecture, design and associated fields and a small staff dedicated to serving our community.

Housing Innovation Design Fellowship: A two-year co-hosted initiative between the iLab and the BSA to explore opportunities for more affordable housing in Boston through design and policy. This work is led by Wandy Pascoal, Housing Innovation Design Fellow.