



REVIVE AND REIMAGINE: A STRATEGY TO REVITALIZE BOSTON'S DOWNTOWN

CITY *of* **BOSTON**

October 2022

Letter from the Mayor

Dear Friends,

Downtown Boston is the economic and cultural engine for our City, Eastern Massachusetts, and all of New England. An area of just 1.5 square miles, before the pandemic, its historic squares and tower-lined streets were some of the busiest in Boston. And while businesses have gradually started to return, lasting changes to office culture have made clear that we need to reimagine the role that this beautiful part of our city plays. Today, we have an opportunity to rethink downtown as a space where people from all over come together to collaborate, create, live, and play.

With appreciation to our colleagues at the Boston Consulting Group and several City departments, this report presents a vision for downtown as a truly inclusive, round-the-clock neighborhood filled with new homes, diverse businesses, world-class public spaces, vibrant nightlife, and a thriving arts and culture scene. While many of the strategies outlined in this report will take years, including a sustained focus on new housing, others are already well underway—from the new City Hall Plaza and unprecedented City investments in cultural activity, to rental assistance for emerging businesses and PLAN: Downtown.

So, get excited—there will be so many opportunities to get engaged as we chart a new course for our future. See you downtown!

In service,

Mayor Michelle Wu



The recommendations in this report were jointly produced by the Mayor's Office, Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion, and the Boston Planning & Development Authority

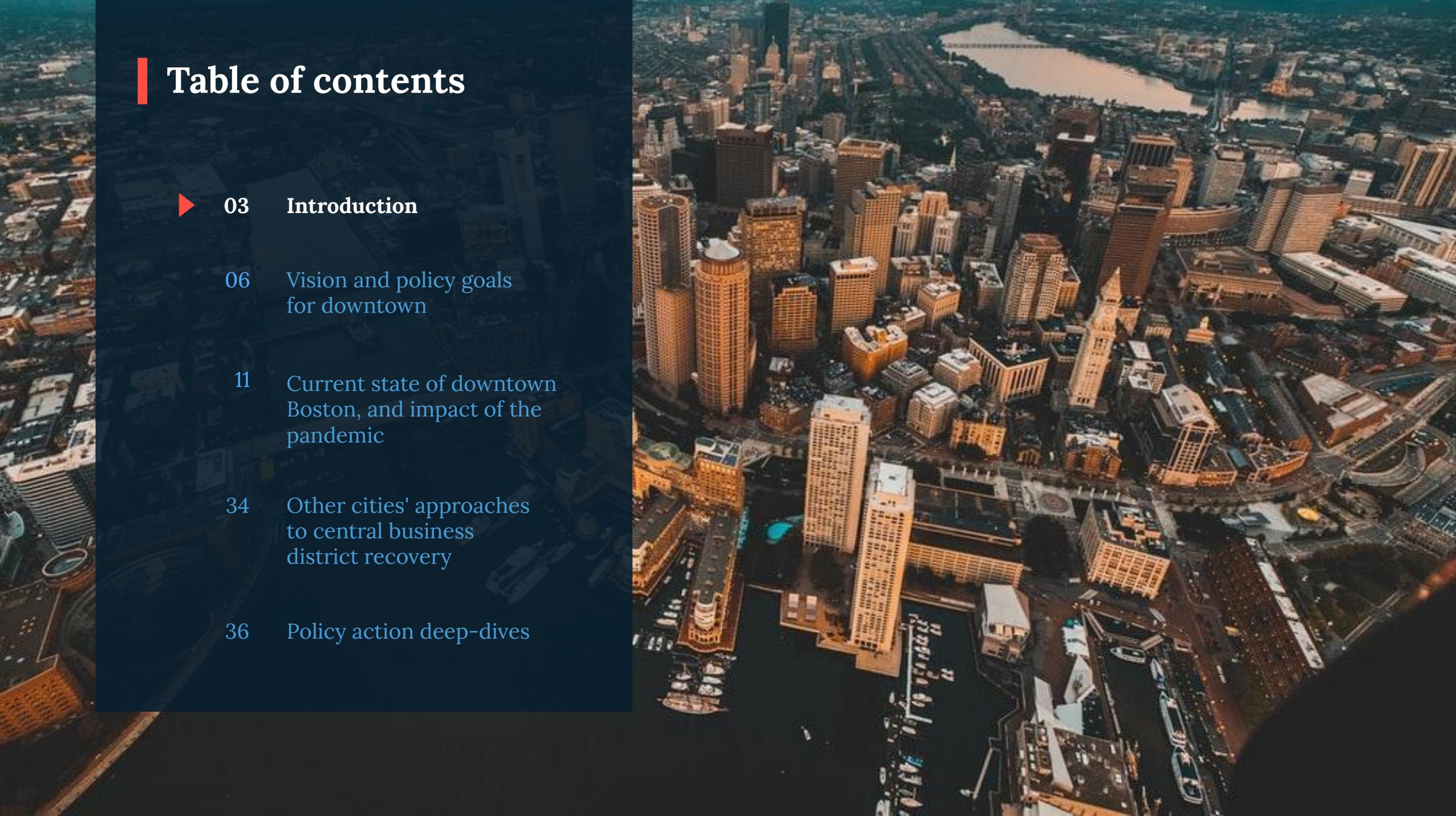


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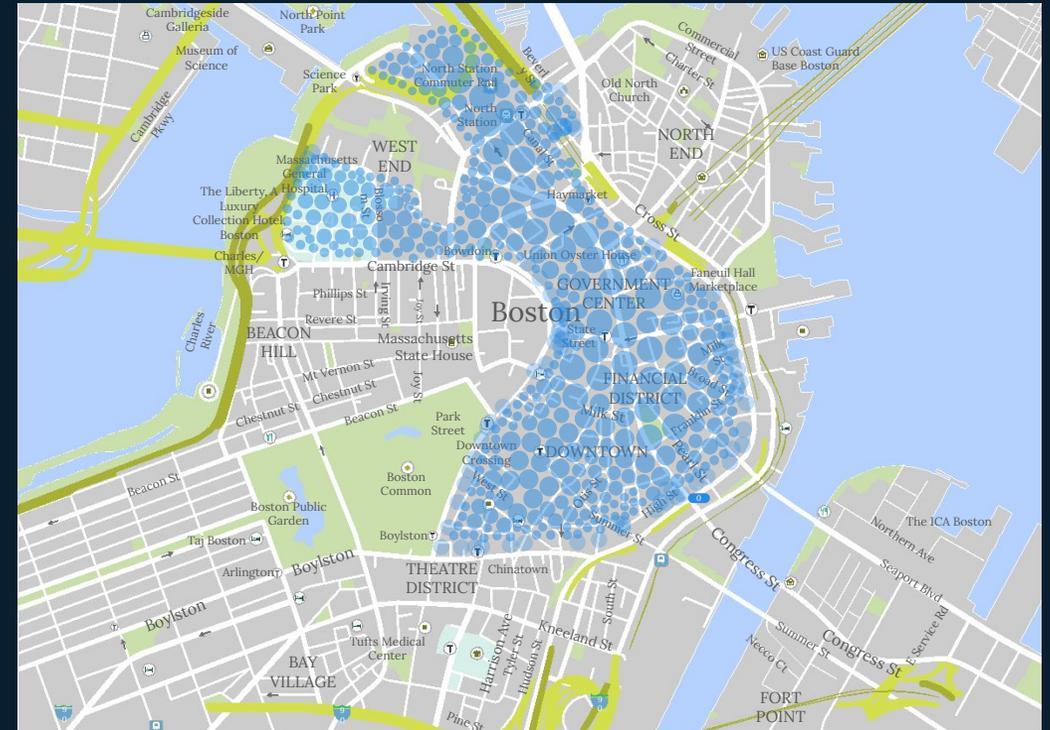
This **scope** of this report is reflective of two primary considerations:



The **geographic focus** is a subset of Boston's central business district with high commercial real estate density. This geographic area was chosen due to its likely outsized impact from the decline in office work. **Throughout this report, we refer to this area as "downtown."** The City is committed to ensuring equitable revitalization, and many policy actions outlined in this report will extend across Boston's neighborhoods.



The **policy focus** of this report is centered on actions that the City has direct control over; while the State continues to be an important partner and advocate on a broader range of policy and community topics, this goal of this document is to **identify and communicate highly actionable revitalization steps** that the City can take.



Focus area encompasses district bounded by Tremont / Cambridge Street, Essex Street, and the Greenway, incorporating key areas of West End (e.g., MGH, North Station)

Introduction

Walk the streets of downtown Boston and you'll see signs of its pivotal role throughout this city's economic and cultural history. Downtown is home to some of Boston's oldest landmarks, from the Old South Meeting House, to the Old State House, to Faneuil Hall. It hosts the greatest concentration of businesses and workers. And it remains the city's most connected, most heavily-trafficked neighborhood, with nearly 50,000 pedestrians traversing its streets each day.¹

As COVID-19 has brought challenges and change to Boston and beyond, downtown has felt these impacts more than many of the city's other neighborhoods and commercial hubs. With a daytime population and physical space heavily biased toward offices, downtown has felt the reverberations of changing working norms acutely. Foot traffic downtown remains on average 55% below 2019 levels², driven by a loss in office workers who may not return in full force. These impacts resonate far beyond office towers—impacting downtown's retail, culture, and hospitality ecosystems, shifting transit patterns, and highlighting disparities that have been systemically present in the area.

These challenges present a unique opportunity to revitalize our city center, and to **reimagine a thriving downtown where current and new residents, workers, and visitors can come together to live, work, and play in new and exciting ways**. As we approach Boston's 400th anniversary in 2030, this work serves as the welcome mat for new visitors and guests.

We don't intend to return to the way things were before the pandemic, but to instead push beyond the status quo and realize a new, more equitable, more exciting future for downtown Boston.

To craft this report, our team first constructed an analytical baseline to understand how the pandemic affected foot traffic, economic activity, and 'people outcomes' downtown. We also benchmarked other leading, global cities. The six primary goals and thirty-three associated policy levers presented in this report are informed by high-impact actions and innovative policies successfully implemented elsewhere. They are aimed at driving economic recovery for the downtown region with a focus on equity, resilience, and new opportunity.

The Mayor's Office, the Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion, and the Boston Planning & Development Agency are dedicated to pursuing actions that engage all citizens, workers, and visitors of Boston, stimulate diverse economic opportunity, and revitalize our city center. By issuing this report, we commit to working with Boston residents to understand which of these levers will have the greatest impact downtown. We plan to roll out similar policy efforts city-wide.

Thank you for reading this report and being part of the conversation – **we look forward to working with you to make this plan a reality.**

1. Source: Unacast footfall data, 2022



Vision

A thriving downtown where current and new residents, workers, and visitors connect, live, work, and play in new and exciting ways

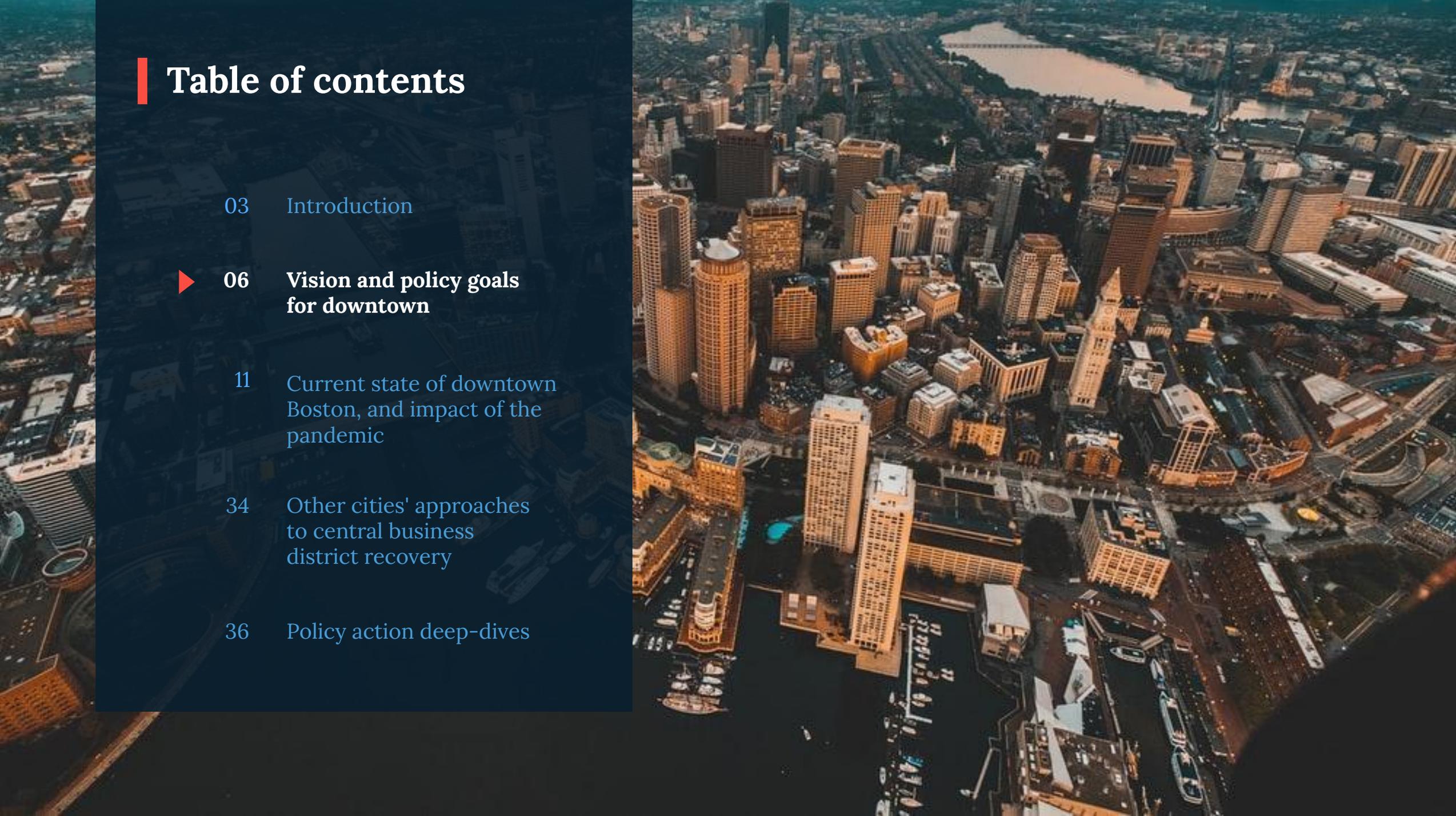
An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely Boston, showing a dense cluster of skyscrapers and buildings. A river flows through the city, with a bridge visible in the background. The image is used as a background for the document's cover page.

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VISION & GOALS

“A thriving downtown where current and new residents, workers, and tourists connect, live, work, and play in new and exciting ways”



Ensure the [continued vibrancy of office space downtown](#), working with both companies and building owners to maintain and grow building occupancy



Expand [housing](#) downtown



Expand the [daily use of downtown beyond work](#) by bolstering downtown's cultural, art, retail, services, and hospitality ecosystems



Support connectivity and mobility downtown via [multi-modal transportation infrastructure](#) and protected infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists

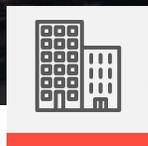


Enhance [economic opportunity](#) downtown by supporting women, BIPOC, and other underserved populations; and by strengthening the small business and creative community



Grow Boston's footprint as a global [tourism](#) hub

City actions for downtown economic revitalization (1 of 2)



Ensure the vibrancy of office space downtown

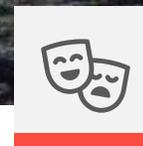
- 1 Ramp-up proactive **outreach to firms** to help them locate or grow downtown
- 2 In “upper floors,” create **low- or rent-free spaces** for startups, nonprofits, M/WBEs
- 3 Set up a fund, team, or entity to engage business and philanthropic communities to secure affordable **space for arts and culture institutions** downtown and beyond
- 4 Continue **Boston Together Again** programming to bring the Boston community together while encouraging office workers back downtown
- 5 Collect and **track economic indicators** to inform City policy interventions

- Planning already underway and/or existing City initiative
- Proposed new actions
- Planned citywide initiative or pilot with potential for expansion



Expand housing downtown

- 6 Support **conversions of class B/C office space** into new uses including residential/student housing
- 7 Continue **PLAN Downtown**, which will update zoning considerations to further advance housing for Boston residents across all levels of affordability
- 8 Fast-track **zoning for developments with a significant amount of affordable housing**
- 9 Continue the city’s **multiple affordable housing options** and programs



Expand daily use of downtown beyond work

- 10 Update **‘retail’ definition in zoning code** for first floor retail space to include newer use cases (e.g., daycare, co-working spaces, maker-retail etc.)
- 11 Create spaces, events, and programs to expand **nightlife** downtown, ideally to attract new populations and demographic/socioeconomic groups
- 12 Attract, grow and make visible **creative economy businesses** downtown
- 13 Strengthen **industry-specific promotional programs** (e.g., Restaurant Week)
- 14 Explore **new spaces for temporary pop-ups**
- 15 Identify and execute active uses for **city-owned public space** including City Hall Plaza
- 16 Fund new **events and programming** to draw new audiences downtown
- 17 Review **business fine schedules, inspections, and enforcement** data systems
- 18 Continue **PLAN Downtown**, which seeks to promote dense, mixed-use development to support living, working, and leisure activities

City actions for downtown economic revitalization (2 of 2)



Support connectivity and mobility downtown via multi-modal transportation infrastructure and protected infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists

- 19 Advocate and partner with the **MBTA** to address critical safety and reliability challenges
- 20 Pilot “**pedestrianization**” of certain streets
- 21 Study **logistics movements** to optimize deliveries and aid pedestrianization
- 22 Make permanent **streetscape infrastructure** changes for expanded public realm
- 23 Form a working group to address **areaways** for more extensive sidewalk updates

- Planning already underway and/or existing City initiative
- Proposed new actions
- Planned citywide initiative or pilot with potential for expansion



Enhance economic opportunity downtown by supporting underserved populations, small businesses, and the creative community

- 24 Launch a **multi-million dollar commercial subsidy program** targeted to support underserved businesses and fill vacant space.
- 25 Pilot **simplified process to hold special events** to help BIPOC and emerging artists and performers
- 26 Expand **entrepreneurship opportunities for street vendors/food trucks**, currently 70% owned by BIPOC entrepreneurs, by allowing them to operate in more areas and at later times
- 27 Set up a team to foster more **business improvement districts** downtown and beyond
- 28 Continue **PLAN Downtown**, which seeks to promote the retention, growth, and diversity of active ground-floor uses, especially legacy and small businesses
- 29 Continue to prioritize procurements that have impacts on downtown revitalization through a permanent **Sheltered Market Program**, which allows the City to reserve certain contracts for M/WBEs



Grow Boston’s footprint as a global tourism hub

- 30 Re-imagine **Faneuil Hall Marketplace and Quincy Market** post-COVID
- 31 Secure a pipeline of **large events** via a dedicated team, fund, or contract vehicle
- 32 Create a downtown-specific **marketing campaign** to encourage visitation
- 33 Continue the **All-Inclusive Boston** tourism campaign promoting the diverse stories and attractions of the city to encourage more visitation, both locally and globally

Priority actions for downtown economic revitalization



Ensure the vibrancy of office space downtown

- 1 Ramp-up proactive **outreach to firms** to help them locate or grow downtown
- 2 Continue **Boston Together Again** programming to encourage office workers back downtown



Expand housing downtown

- 3 Support **conversions of class B/C office space** into new uses including residential/student housing
- 4 Relaunch **PLAN Downtown**, to update zoning considerations to further advance housing for Boston residents across all levels of affordability



Expand daily use of downtown beyond work

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Support connectivity and mobility downtown

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Enhance economic opportunity downtown

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Grow Boston's footprint as a global tourism hub

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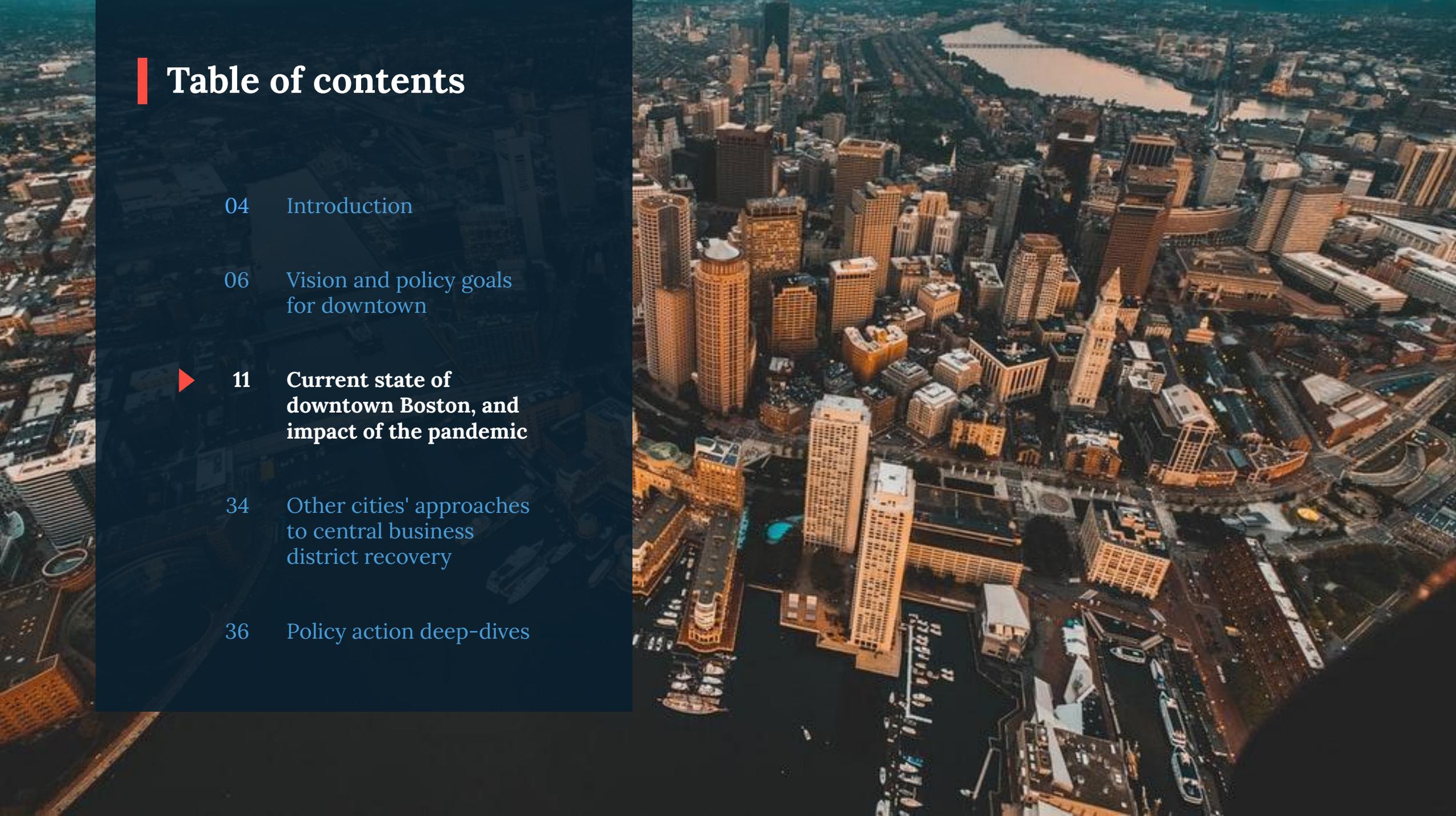


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7 key findings about downtown Boston Current state and impacts of the pandemic

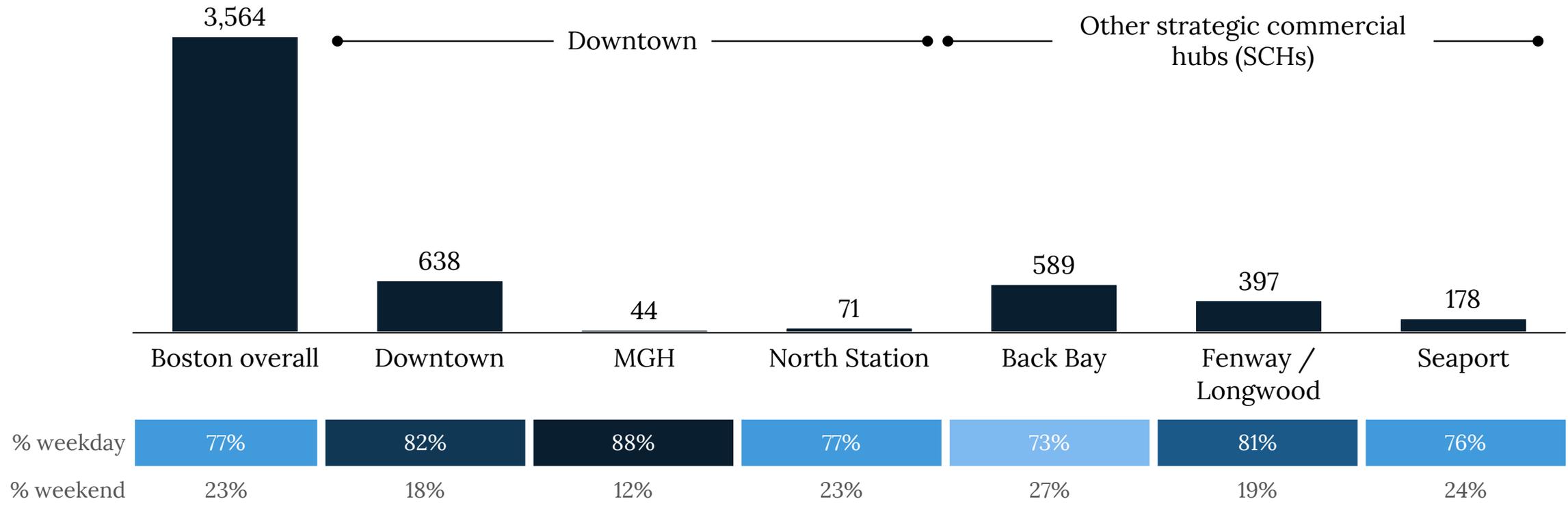
- 1 Pre-pandemic, downtown was the **most foot trafficked neighborhood**; both its pedestrian traffic and physical space was heavily biased toward offices
- 2 Currently, downtown foot traffic remains **~40-55% below pre-pandemic levels**, although **strong weekend recovery** is a potential indicator of downtown resiliency
- 3 **Economic activity downtown remains ~20-40% below pre-pandemic levels in hard hit industries** (e.g., accommodation, retail, restaurants); this decline is more severe than elsewhere in Boston
- 4 **Demand for office and retail space remains to be seen**; while rents reached 5-year highs pre-pandemic, vacancy rates are rising, and office occupancy remains at ~30%
- 5 **Residential real estate is one potential bright spot**, as residential vacancies have returned to pre-pandemic levels and rents are increasing; however, **lack of residential development may continue to heighten demand**
- 6 **BIPOC business owners and workers were already under-represented** downtown compared to the rest of the city pre-pandemic and likely have been particularly hard-hit
- 7 An estimated **50% of downtown's workers hold jobs that could be done remotely**, based on their industry; if ~50% of those workers choose to work 2 days a week from home, downtown would experience a **daily decline of ~10-25% of its office workers**

1

Pre-pandemic, downtown was the **most foot trafficked neighborhood; both its pedestrian traffic and physical space was heavily biased toward offices**

Pre-pandemic, downtown was the busiest Boston neighborhood

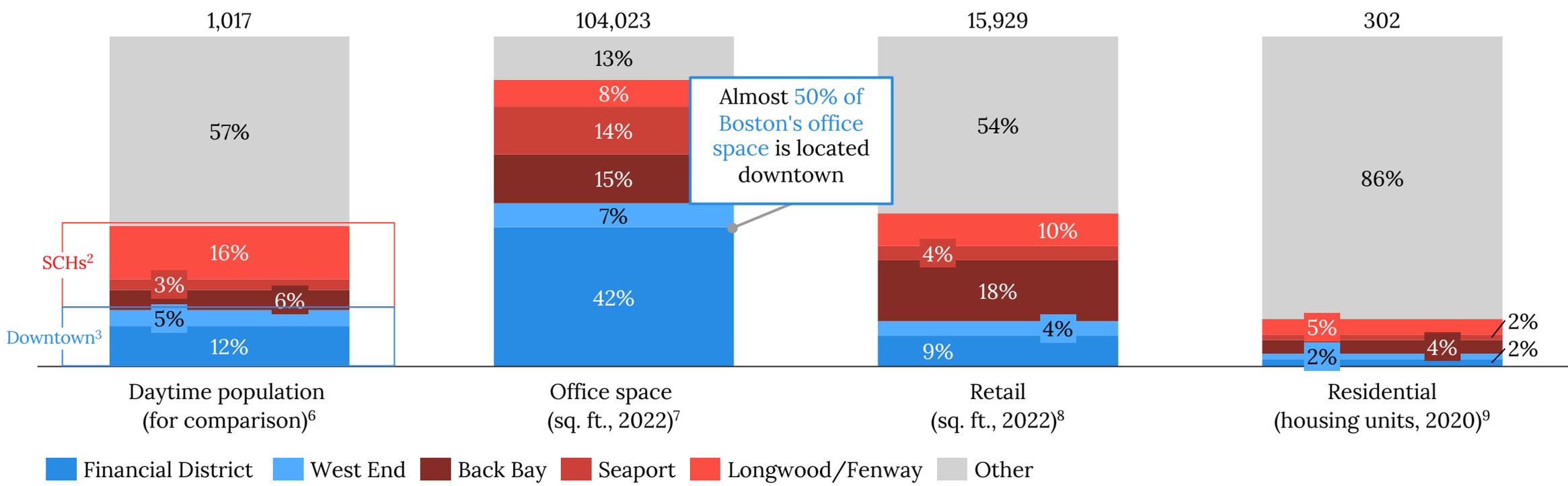
Average weekly footfall by neighborhood, 2019 (k)³



Source: Unacast footfall data, 2019

Compared to Boston's other strategic commercial hubs⁴, the downtown district⁵ dedicates the largest amount of space to offices

Total daytime population and inventory of space by use and neighborhood (k, %)⁶



Source: Experian population data, 2021; CoStar inventory data, 2022; Census, 2020; BPDA Research Division Analysis

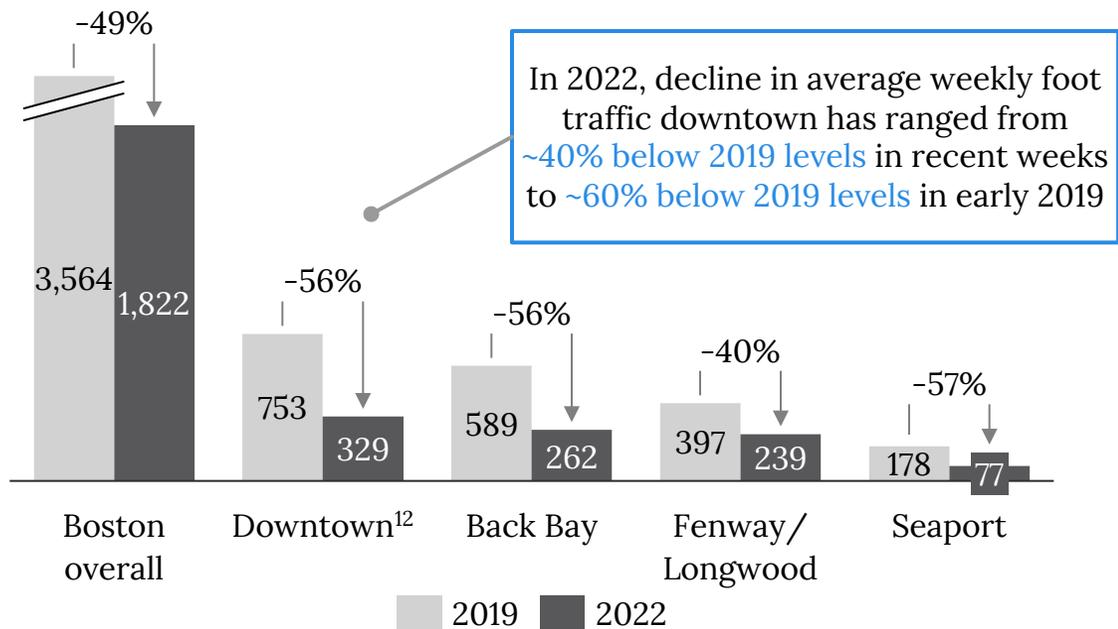


Currently, downtown foot traffic remains ~40-55% below pre-pandemic levels, although strong weekend recovery is a potential indicator of downtown resiliency

From 2019 to 2022, footfall decline has been greater downtown than in Boston overall, with the Financial District seeing the greatest loss

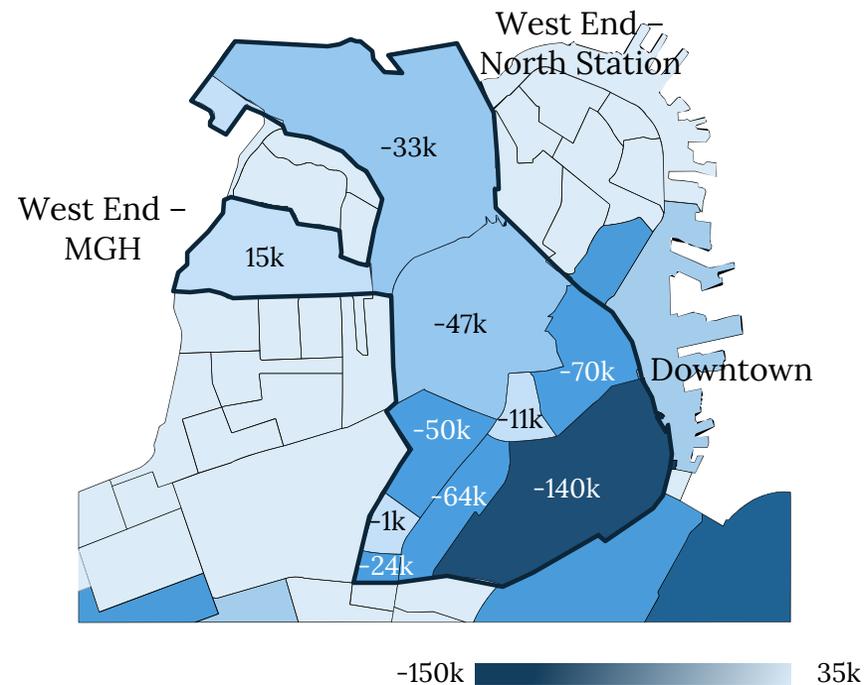
Footfall¹⁰ decline has been more significant downtown than in Boston overall

Average weekly traffic by neighborhood, 2019 v. 2022 (k)¹¹



Within the downtown district, the decline in foot traffic has been more significant in the Financial District

Change in weekly foot traffic, 2019 to 2022 by block group (k)¹¹

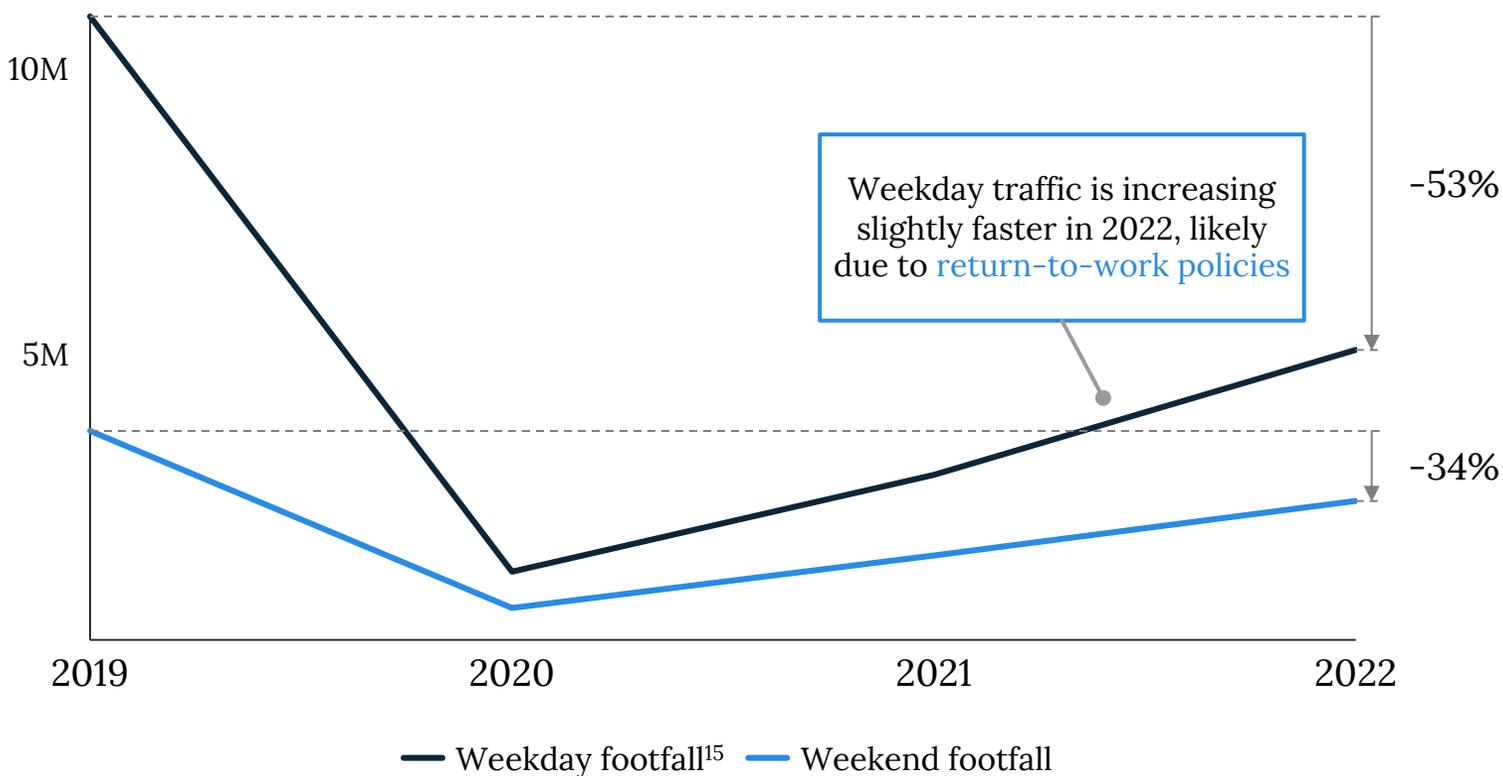


Source: Unacast footfall data, 2019-2022; Spectus mobility data, Spectus collects first-party data from anonymized users who have opted-in to provide access to their location data anonymously, through a GDPR-compliant framework; To preserve privacy home and work locations are aggregated to the census-block-group level; BPDA Research Division Analysis

Foot traffic recovery has been faster on weekends, indicating resilience of non-office spaces downtown

Weekday foot traffic in 2022 is 53% below its 2019 baseline, while weekend traffic is only 34% below baseline

Downtown¹³ footfall 2019 - 2022¹⁴

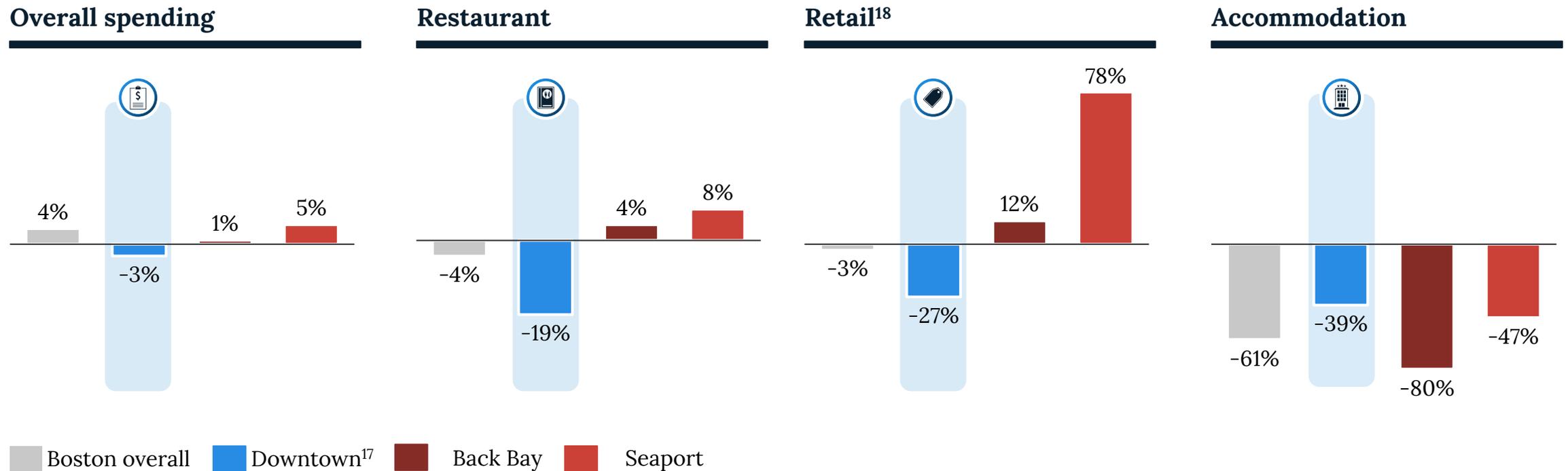




Economic activity downtown remains ~20-40% below pre-pandemic levels in hard hit industries (e.g., accommodation, retail, restaurants, tourism); this decline is more severe than elsewhere in Boston

In-person spending downtown remains below pre-pandemic levels, while spending in Boston has recovered

In-person spending Feb – April 2022 compared to Feb – April 2019 (%)¹⁶

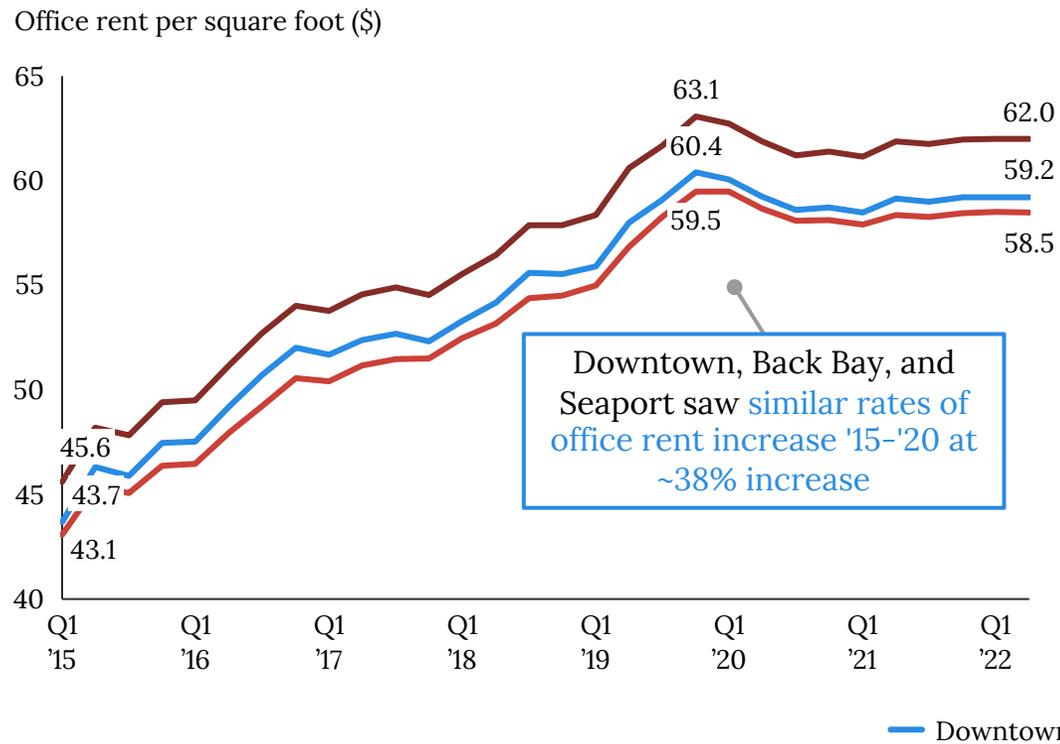


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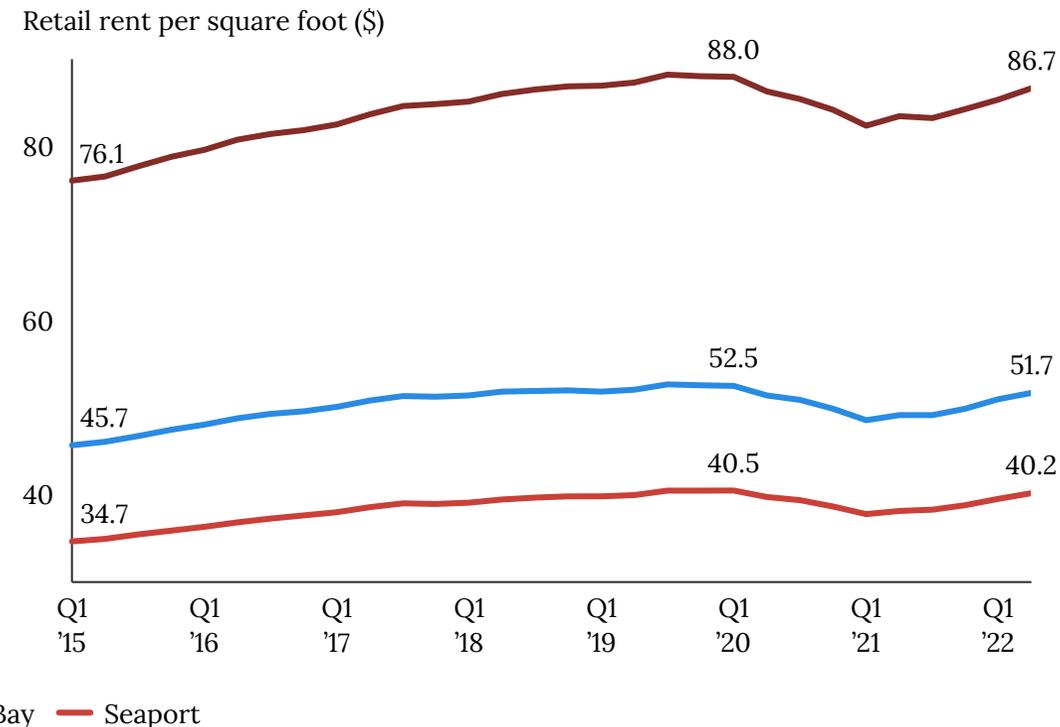
Demand for office and retail space remains to be seen; while rents reached 5-year highs pre-pandemic, vacancy rates are rising, and office occupancy remains at ~30%

Office and retail rents showed ~5-year record highs in 2019, but office rents have largely stagnated since the pandemic

Office rental rates reached record highs pre-pandemic, with ~38% increase from 2015 across neighborhoods
Office market rent per square foot by neighborhood, Q1 '15 – Q2 '22 (\$)²⁰



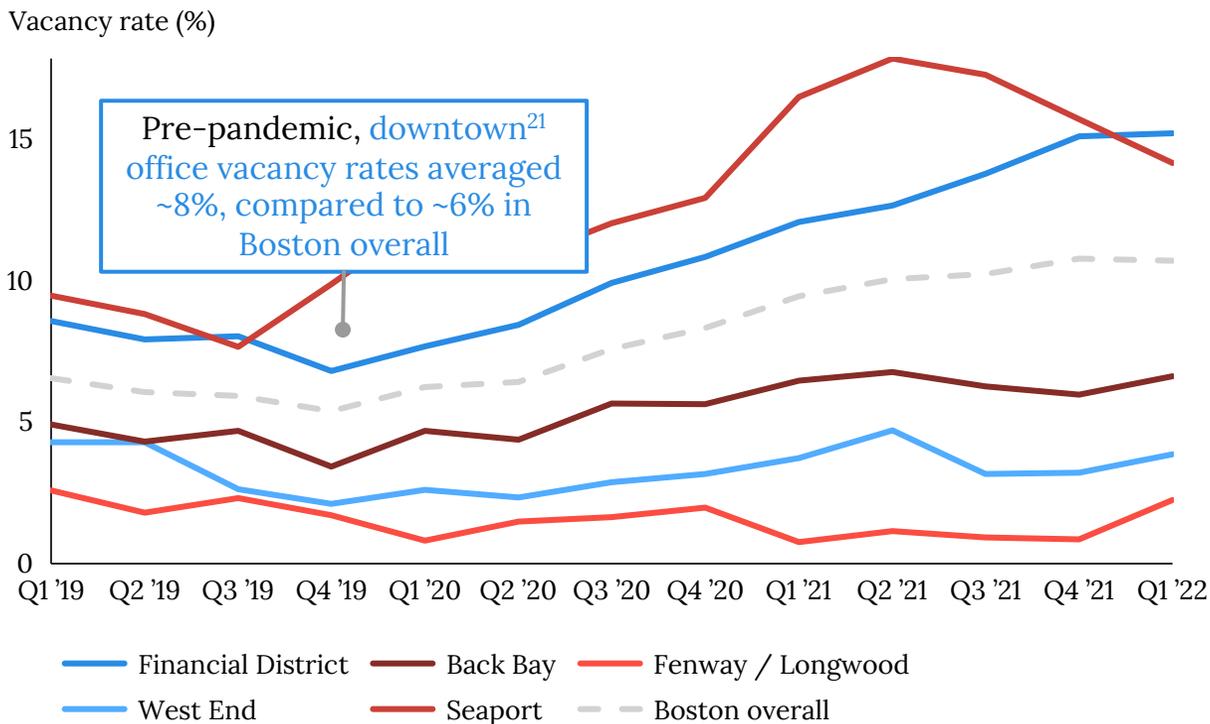
Retail rental rates remained more consistent, with Back Bay at much higher rates than other SCHs
Retail market rent per square foot by neighborhood, Q1 '15 – Q2 '22 (\$)²⁰



While demand for office space remains to be seen, office vacancy downtown continues to rise

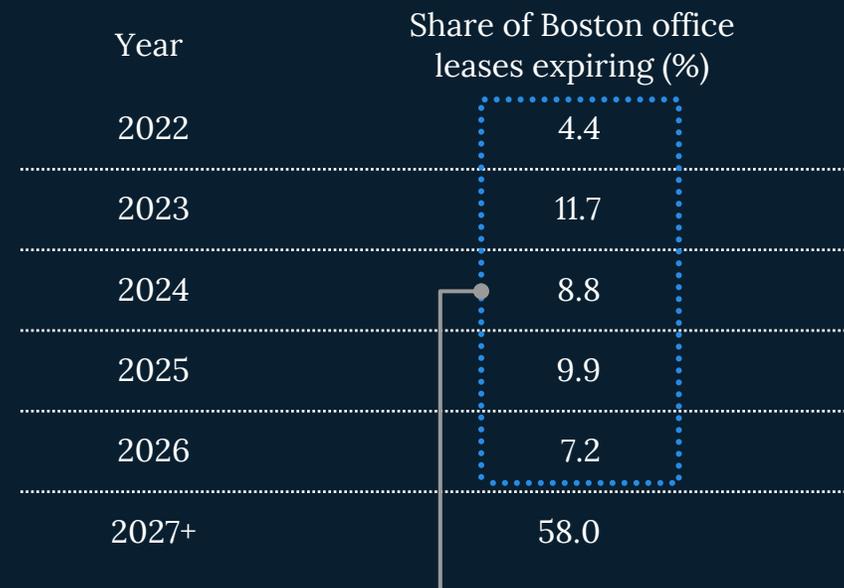
Downtown office vacancies were higher than Boston overall pre-pandemic, and have continued to rise

Office vacancy rates by neighborhood, Q1 '19 – Q1 '22 (%)²²



Demand for office space remains to be seen

Share of Boston commercial office space lease expiration by year, '22-'27²³

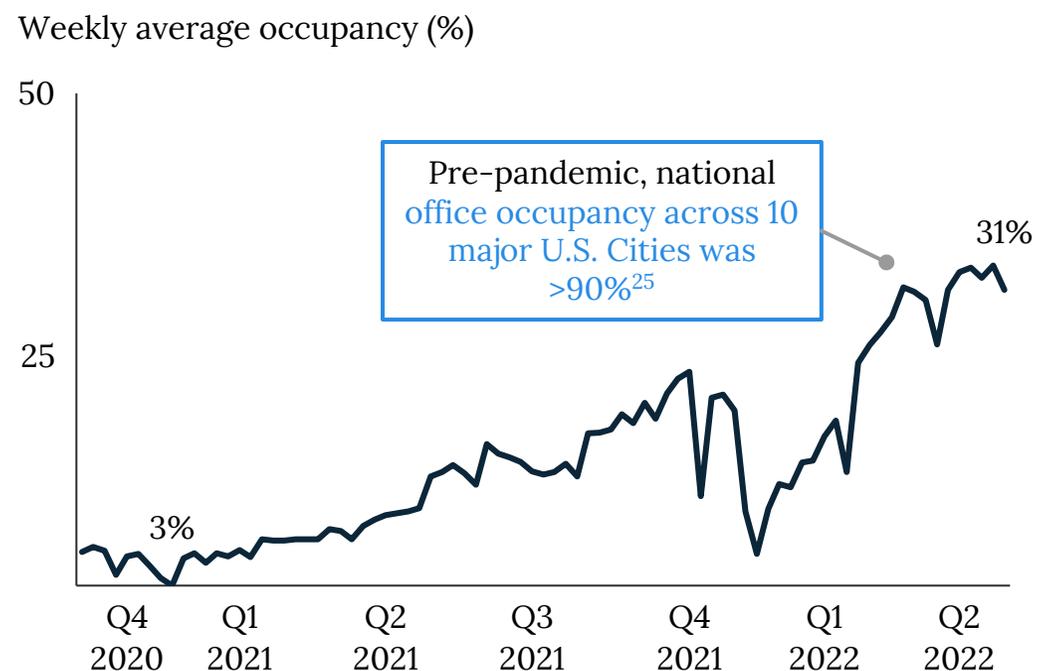


Only ~4% of Boston leases expire in 2022 v. ~12% in 2023; Over 40% of all office leases expire in the next 5 years

Office occupancy remains low as work from home trends continue

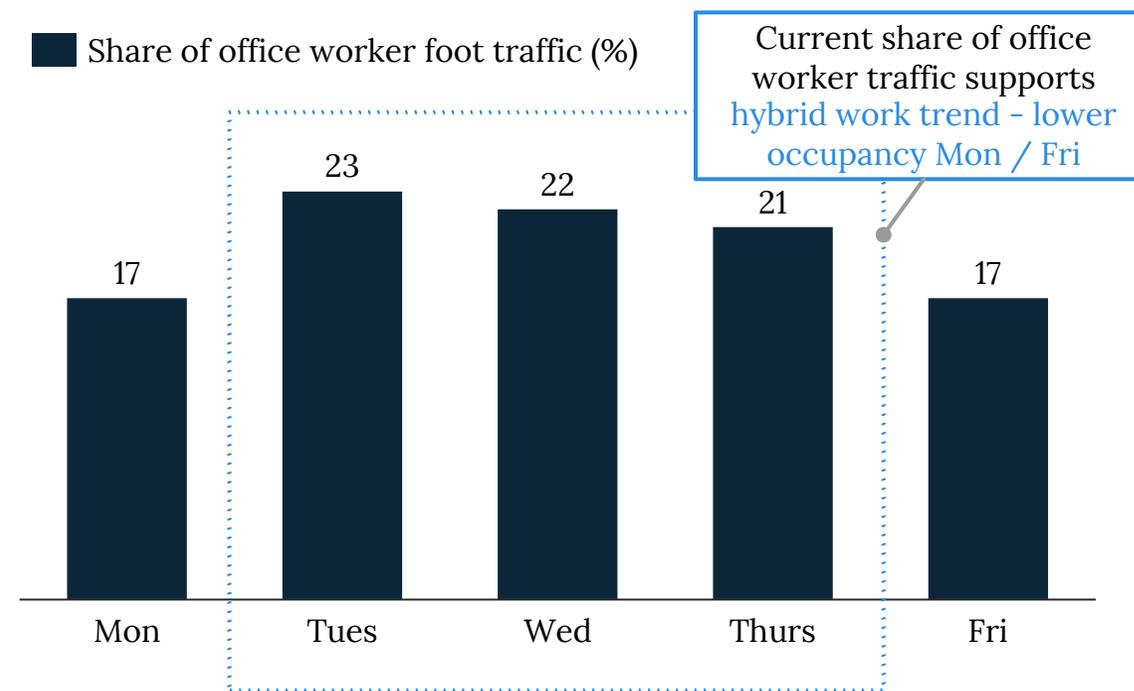
Downtown office buildings remain at ~30-35% occupancy...

Average weekly office lease occupancy downtown, 2020-2022 (%)²⁴



...with occupancy driven by mid-week traffic

Share of weekday foot traffic in the Downtown BID for office workers, '22²⁶

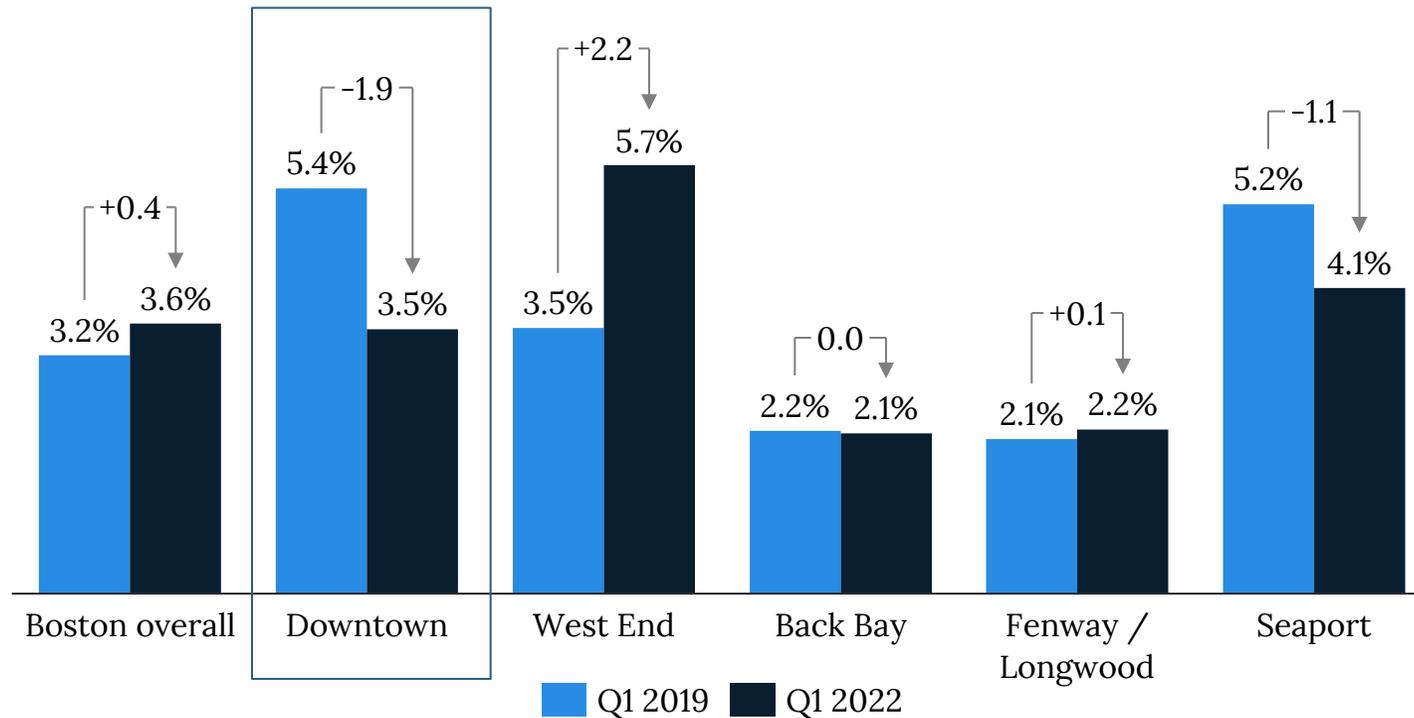


5

Residential real estate is one potential bright spot, as residential vacancies have returned to pre-pandemic levels and rents are increasing; however, lack of residential development may continue to heighten demand

Residential space appears to be in demand downtown, where vacancy rates have fallen below pre-pandemic levels and rent has increased

Residential vacancy rates have declined below pre-pandemic levels; downtown is below Boston's overall average²⁷
 Multifamily residential vacancy rates, 2019-2022 (%)²⁸

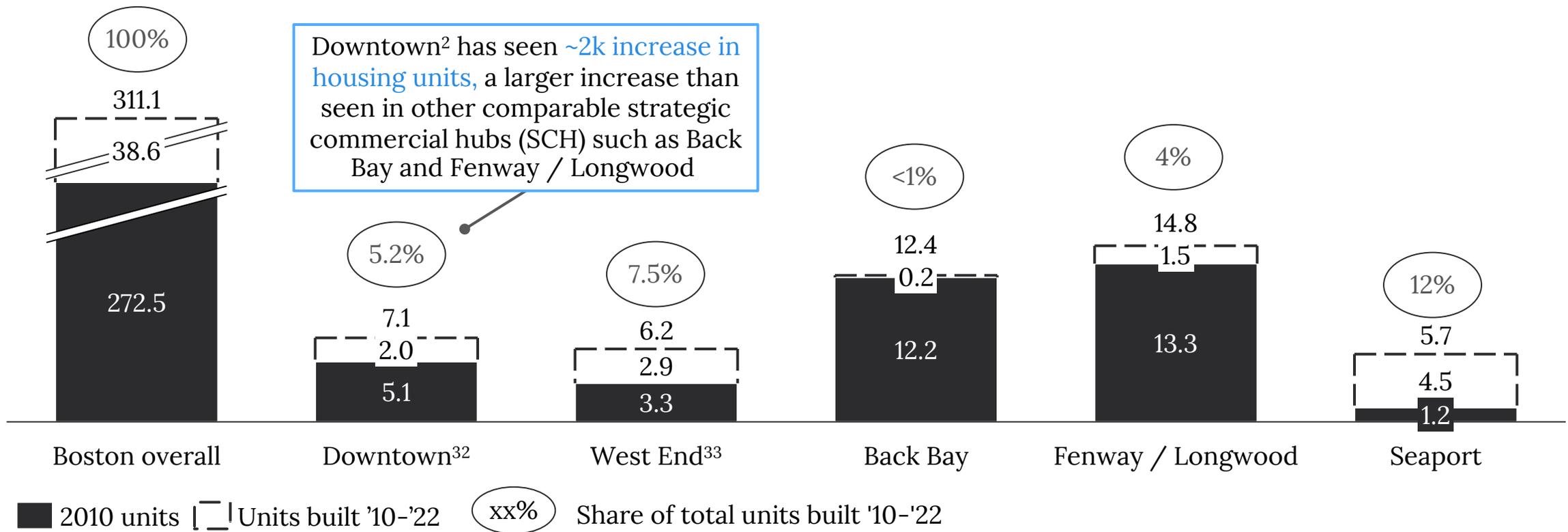


Decline in vacancy rates downtown²⁹ are coupled with **increasing rent prices**

Downtown effective rents increased ~15% over the past year, second only to Seaport (~19% increase) and above other SCHs (Back Bay at ~13%, Fenway/Longwood at ~12%)³⁰

However, downtown has fewer residential units than most other strategic commercial hubs

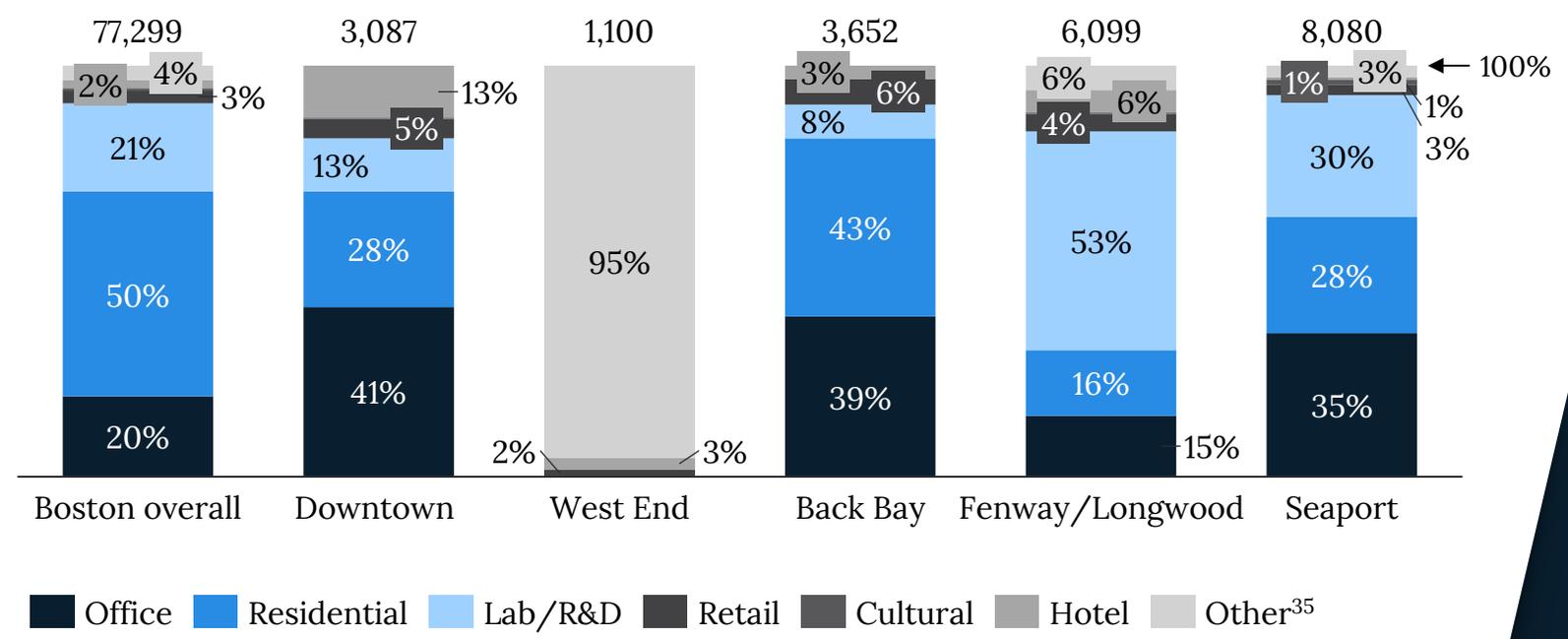
Number of housing units, 2010-2022 (k)³¹



Development pipeline suggests an under-index on residential space downtown may continue

Only <30% of development downtown is residential compared to ~50% in Boston overall

Downtown pipeline by type of build, June 2022 (sq. ft)³⁴



Since the pandemic, developer projects downtown have reduced plans for residential, hotel and office space in favor of lab/R&D³⁶



While ~31k housing units are in the development pipeline in Boston, only ~400 of those are downtown compared to ~1.1k in Seaport, ~1.3k in Back Bay and almost 1.4k in Fenway/Longwood³⁷

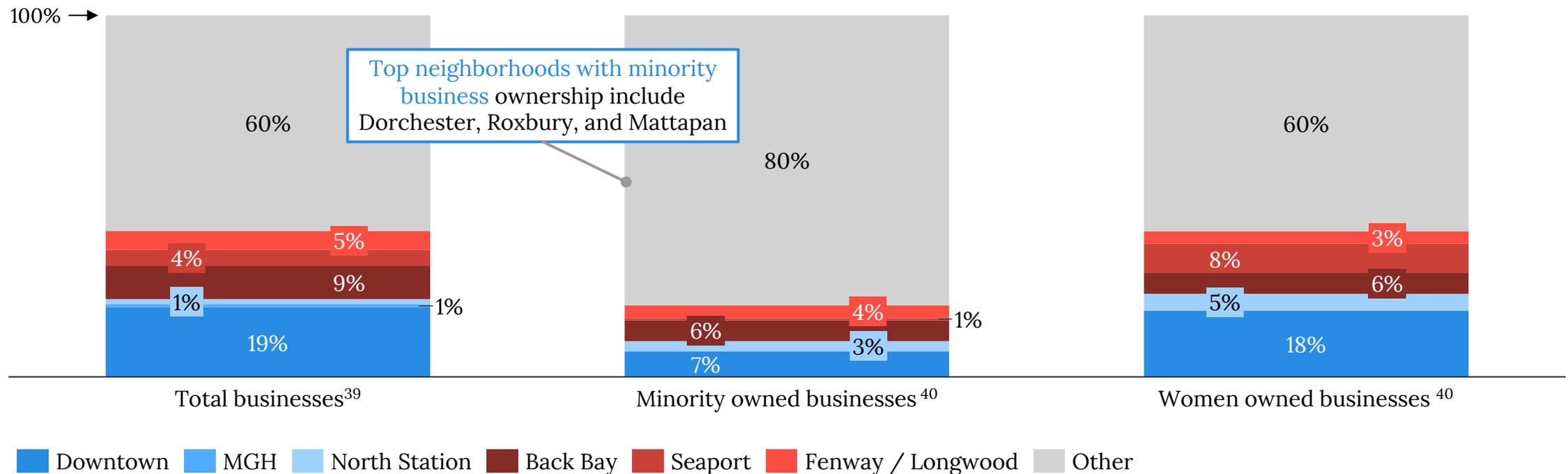


BIPOC business owners and workers were already under-represented downtown compared to the rest of the city pre-pandemic and likely have been particularly hard-hit

Compared to other neighborhoods, BIPOC business ownership is under-represented in the downtown area

~20% of Boston businesses are located downtown, compared to only ~10% of minority-owned businesses

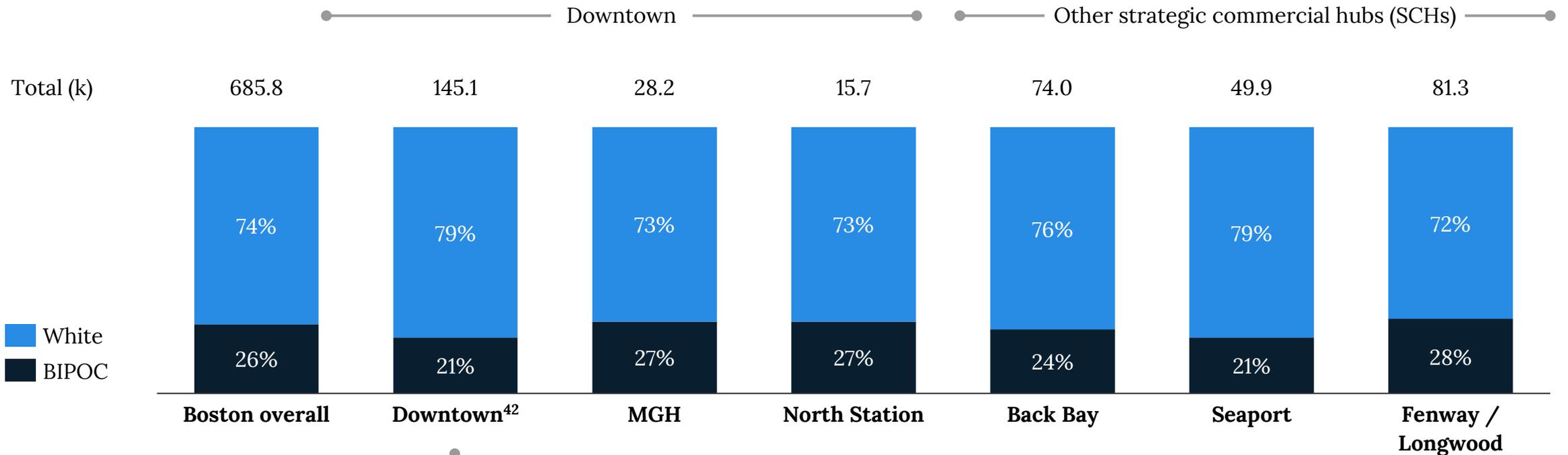
Percent of businesses by neighborhood, 2022 (%)³⁸



BIPOC employment is also under-represented downtown given low BIPOC representation in most prevalent downtown industries

Downtown is the 2nd “whitest” strategic commercial hub

Workers by race by neighborhood, 2019 (k)⁴¹



Under-representation of BIPOC workers downtown is driven by **less representation in industries most prevalent downtown**, especially professional, scientific, and technical services/finance and insurance roles; despite under-representation downtown, the area remains critical to BIPOC employment with **almost a quarter of Boston's BIPOC workforce employed downtown**

7

An estimated 50% of downtown's workers hold jobs that could be done remotely, based on their industry; if ~50% of those workers choose to work 2 days a week from home, downtown would experience a **daily decline of ~10-25% of its office workers**

Based on current assumptions about remote work, downtown could see an overall decline of 10-25% (20-45k) daily office workers

~50% Of downtown workers are eligible for remote work

~50% of downtown workers could work remotely, based on a University of Chicago study that outlines share of industry workers who are able to work remotely and breakdown of downtown workers by industry⁴³

50% Of those eligible to work remotely will choose to do so

Based on local and national polls, including a 2020 survey conducted by the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, approximately 50% of those eligible to work from home will choose to do so⁴⁴

2 Days per week, on average, that remote workers will choose to work from home

Based on an MBTA usage analysis done by the BID, gated validations in the downtown area are significantly lower on Mondays and Fridays compared to validations mid-week; this points to a pattern of remote work on average two days/week⁴⁵

Anticipate a decline of ~20 - 45k daily office workers downtown, 10-25% of pre-pandemic total

Daily visitors lost from workforce (000s)

% of "eligible" workers who adopt any sort of remote model⁴⁶

	25%	50%	75%	100%
0	0	0	0	0
1	4.8	9.7	14.5	19.3
2	9.7	19.3	29.0	38.7
3	14.5	29.0	43.5	58.0
4	19.3	38.7	58.0	77.4
5	24.2	48.4	72.5	96.7

Avg. # days remote workers work from home^{43,44}



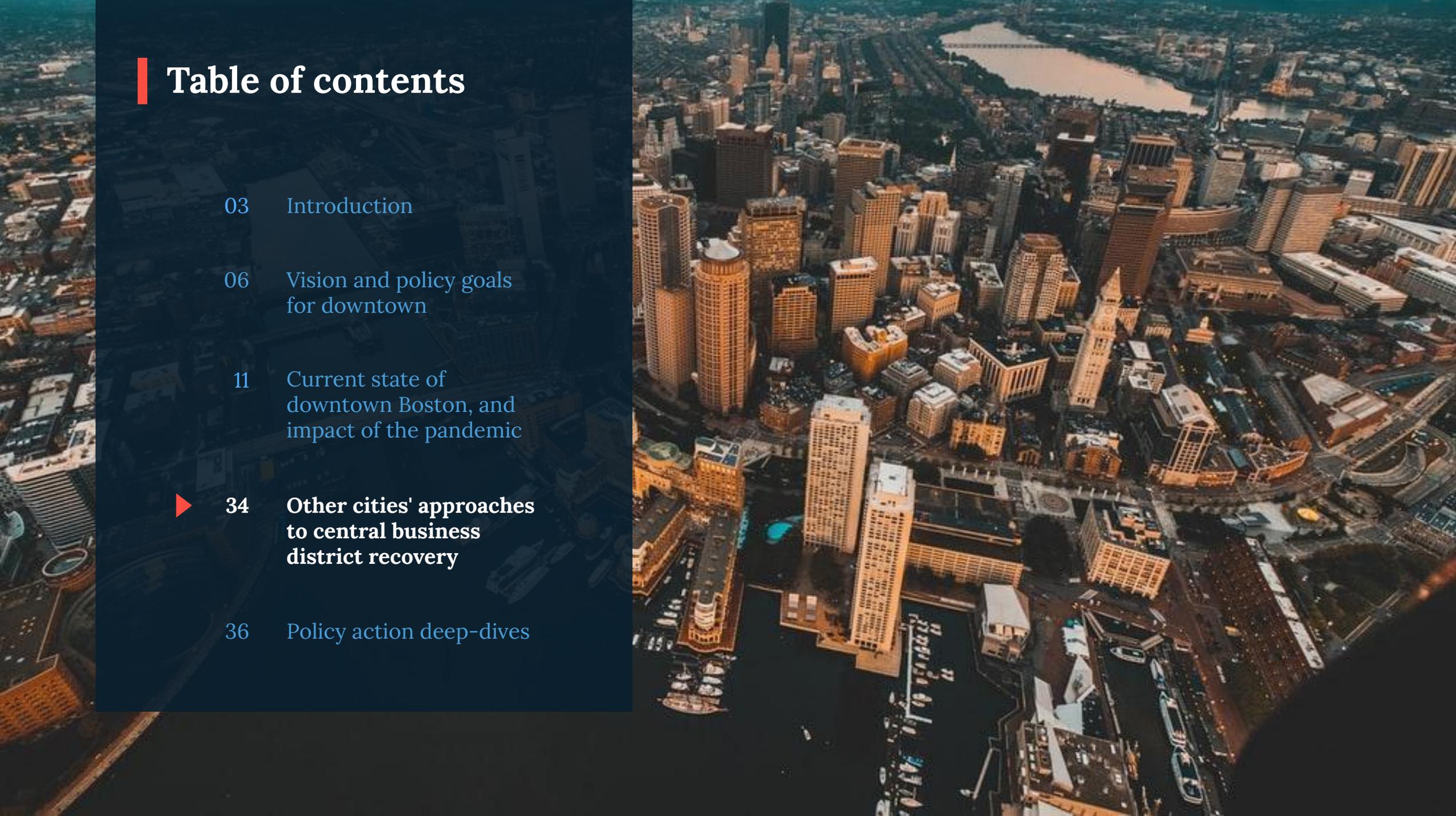
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Since the pandemic, other global cities have taken different approaches to addressing central business district economic health

Based on a non-exhaustive scan

City approach



Example city method

To improve livability concerns predating but emphasized by COVID, Paris⁴⁷ is:

- Extending operating hours of public transport
- Replacing parking spots with bike lanes
- Converting housing stock in public domain into affordable housing

To fill vacancies left by downsizing of banks' London operations, city⁴⁸ is:

- Supporting Canary Wharf private entity's projects that convert office buildings for new life sciences cluster
- Increasing the resilience of the transportation and water supply networks

To promote business tourism that decreased with COVID, Singapore⁴⁹ is:

- Subsidizing free cultural experiences to large visitor groups
- Marketing its "sustainable infrastructure" to tourists
- Facilitating local brand expos

To encourage post-COVID return of local retail businesses, NYC⁵⁰ is:

- Removing geographic limitations on retail
- Streamlining/repurposing space
- Simplifying city Business Portal application
- Creating modular outdoor dining setups

To encourage demand after a dramatic COVID decrease in foot traffic, Sydney⁵¹ is:

- Offering residents vouchers for hotel stays and restaurants
- Subsidizing events in CBDs
- Awarding grants for entertainment businesses extending operating hours



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Ensure the continued vibrancy of office space downtown, working with both companies and building owners to maintain and grow building occupancy

B



Ensure the continued vibrancy of office space downtown

Prior to the pandemic, downtown was the most foot trafficked area of Boston, with over 100k pedestrians passing through each day.⁵² Over 80% of this foot traffic was driven by workers and visitors, and 80% of downtown's physical space was occupied by offices.⁵³

From 2019 to 2022, due to the pandemic, office occupancy declined as hybrid and remote work increased; currently occupancy is at 30-35% of pre-pandemic levels.⁵⁴ Going forward, experts project these trends could continue; we estimate that 15-25% of downtown's office workers could stop commuting each day, opting for remote work instead.⁵⁵

With almost 60% of Boston's commercial office leases "locked" until after 2026, the "new normal" for downtown offices remains to be seen.⁵⁶ Currently, commercial office vacancy rates downtown are ~15%, higher than for the City overall and for other business districts like the Seaport or Back Bay. As working trends evolve, it will be imperative for the City to support developers and property owners to keep commercial space vibrant.⁵⁷

Globally, central business districts have responded in a variety of ways to the trend of remote work. London intentionally supported the conversion of office districts to life sciences space in its Canary Wharf district. Adelaide, a mid-size city in Australia, is activating vacant office space by matching startups with short-term, rent-free space.

Boston plans to increase commercial space occupancy and vibrancy in a few ways:

Increase accessibility of downtown space, and provide support for businesses looking to use space downtown in new ways

Downtown office space has historically been known for its large employers and multi-national business headquarters. We want to support these businesses to stay and grow downtown, while providing access to new organizations including the life science industry, arts and culture organizations, nonprofits, and startups. This includes helping developers, property managers, and other entities who seek to evolve downtown's "traditional" office space toward new uses.

Continue outreach and marketing to draw new and existing businesses and workers downtown

The City plans to expand its current outreach to new and existing organizations to support access to downtown space, and to bolster programming for workers and visitors who seek to enjoy downtown beyond work.

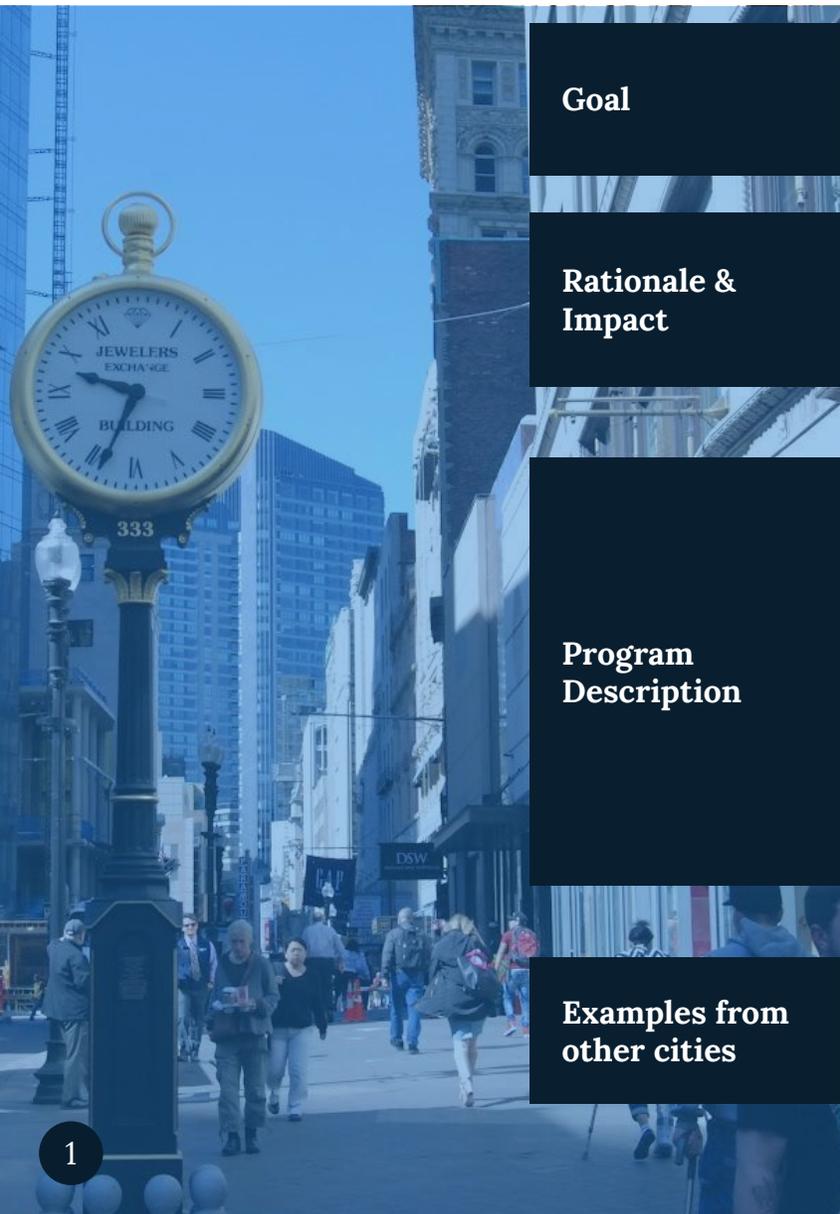
The City is considering five main actions:

1. Ramp-up proactive outreach to firms to help them locate or grow downtown
2. In "upper floors," create low- or rent-free spaces for
3. Set up a fund, team, or entity to engage business and philanthropic communities to secure affordable space for arts and culture institutions downtown and beyond
4. Continue Boston Together Again programming to bring the Boston community together while encouraging office workers back downtown
5. Collect and track economic indicators to inform City policy interventions

Ramp-up proactive outreach to firms to help them locate or grow downtown

Agency responsible:

Business Strategy Department of the Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion



Goal

- To build relationships with businesses and foster connections in the community, supporting the attraction, expansion, and growth of organizations downtown while centering equity

Rationale & Impact

- Trends in the office market remain to be seen, but continued high vacancy rates of ~15% and anecdotal evidence of consolidation suggest an increased need to work with businesses and partners downtown to support attraction and growth in the area⁵⁸

Program Description

- The City of Boston's Business Strategy team works across industries and neighborhoods to support businesses looking to grow in Boston or open their first or new location here
- The team works directly with businesses to support their needs, primarily across relocation, site selection and regulatory assistance, workforce development, and in promoting connections to the Boston and Massachusetts communities such as industry associations, quasi-public organizations, and educational institutions
- To further support businesses looking to grow or locate in Boston's downtown district, and to proactively build relationships with businesses in Boston, the City is considering a few actions:
 - **Increasing marketing, awareness, and in-kind resources:** Many businesses are not aware of the Business Strategy team or its roles in business development; increasing marketing and developing standalone resources that outline information curated to Boston – such as talent availability pipelines or key industry and state associations – will help businesses looking to locate or grow downtown and across Boston
 - **Building new partnerships and coordination tools:** To increase proactive outreach and relationship building, the Business Strategy team is considering developing a list of employers to develop regular, proactive touchpoints and increasing coordination with groups such as educational institutions, industry associations, quasi-public organizations, and property owners downtown that regularly interact with businesses

Examples from other cities

- **North Carolina:** In collaboration with industry associations, North Carolina has built out robust business development strategies inclusive of pitch materials and site selection support, to provide connections and resourcing to businesses looking to grow within or relocate to the State

In “upper floors,” create low- or rent-free spaces for startups, nonprofits, M/WBEs

Agencies responsible:

Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion; Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture; Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA)

Goal

- To fill vacant upper floor office space, both temporarily and permanently, with organizations who have not historically had access to downtown space due to cost barriers

Rationale & Impact

- Downtown office vacancy rates are at ~15%; ~8pp higher than pre-pandemic rates and ~4pp higher than Boston overall⁵⁹
- Startups and small businesses share a need for affordable office space, and highlight the benefits of working in an ecosystem

Program Description

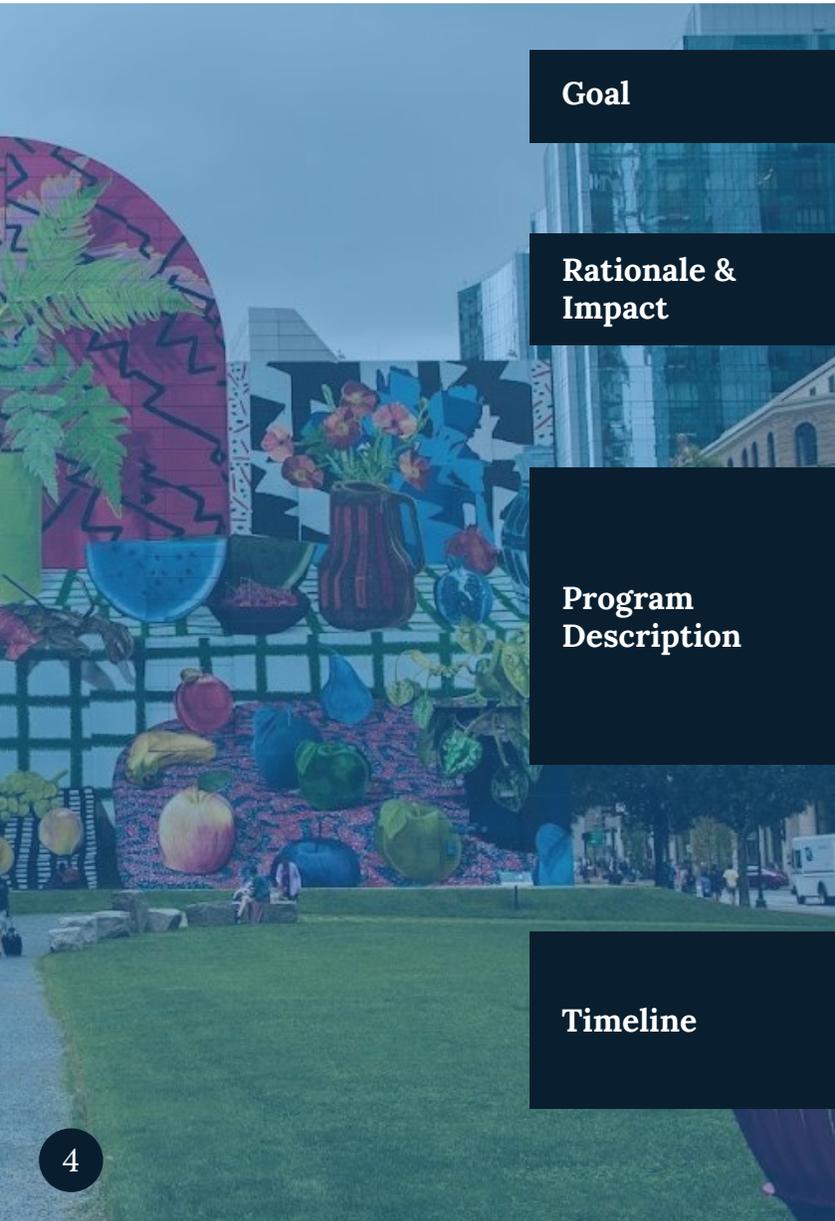
- The City is considering using this point in time as an opportunity to pilot a way to support organizations looking for offices or "upper floor" space; to do so, the City is exploring a few options that other cities have supported:
 - **Providing direct supports:** Rent subsidies or subsidized in-kind space could provide an opportunity for organizations to locate downtown more easily; several cities including Boston supported rent rebate programs through pandemic recovery
 - **Filling vacant space through matchmaking vacant leases with organizations:** Gaps in leases can provide an opportunity to introduce a new organization to a space, and often translate into long-term commercial leases
 - **Incenting property owners to house smaller businesses:** Tax incentives could support property owners to decrease vacancies and introduce new types of businesses downtown

Examples from other cities

- **Adelaide, Australia:** The City of Adelaide funds Renew Adelaide, a nonprofit focused on activating vacant space by matching property owners with startups in need of space. The program provides rent-free space on a 30-day rolling basis, with ~40-70% of rent-free tenants ultimately signing a commercial lease in the same space. Renew Adelaide supports ~30 activations every year, with a cost-benefit ratio of \$3.90. Every dollar invested generates ~\$3.90 in business profits, wages, or commercial property income⁶⁰

Continue Boston Together Again programming to bring the Boston community together while encouraging office workers back downtown

Agency responsible:
Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion,
Mayor's Office;
Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau;
Office of Tourism, Sports, & Entertainment



Goal

- To bring Bostonians together in community while driving foot traffic - and customers - to the City's downtown business districts

Rationale & Impact

- Creating programming downtown can help boost foot traffic, building an area that is vibrant, exciting, and a place where people want to be outside of work

Program Description

- Started in 2022, Boston Together Again is a series of weekday cultural, food, and wellness events downtown; the program is designed to bring and keep Bostonians together in the downtown business district
- Events included in Boston Together Again range from kid and pet events on Boston Common, music and dancing on Faneuil Hall Plaza, and ongoing movie nights on Copley Square
- Boston Together Again is an opportunity for the City and its residents to reimagine what's possible in downtown public spaces through these few months of creative events, especially as people come back to work in person; people will have fun, vibrant and exciting programming to look forward to after work
- The 2022 City program was run by Rosemark Production, a Black- and woman-owned event firm based in Boston and led by Boston native Rose Staram

Timeline

- Launched July 19th and ran through October 12th
- Weekly programming included:
 - Wellness series and cultural nights on Tuesday evenings
 - Kid and pet festivals on Wednesday evenings
 - Movie nights on Thursday evenings
 - Late summer programming included roller skating on the Greenway

Collect and track economic indicators to inform City policy interventions

Agency responsible:

Business Strategy Department of the Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion and BPDA Research Team

Goal

- To understand shifting economic dynamics in the Downtown to help tailor, benchmark and drive City policy interventions to successfully drive the economic recovery in the neighborhood.

Rationale & Impact

- Market conditions in the Downtown are evolving at differing rates, from rising pedestrian counts, high but stagnant retail lease pricing, to fluctuating vacancy rates.
- Ongoing uncertainty about long term office leases in the Downtown influence policy decisions regarding new development, the viability of ground floor retail and more.

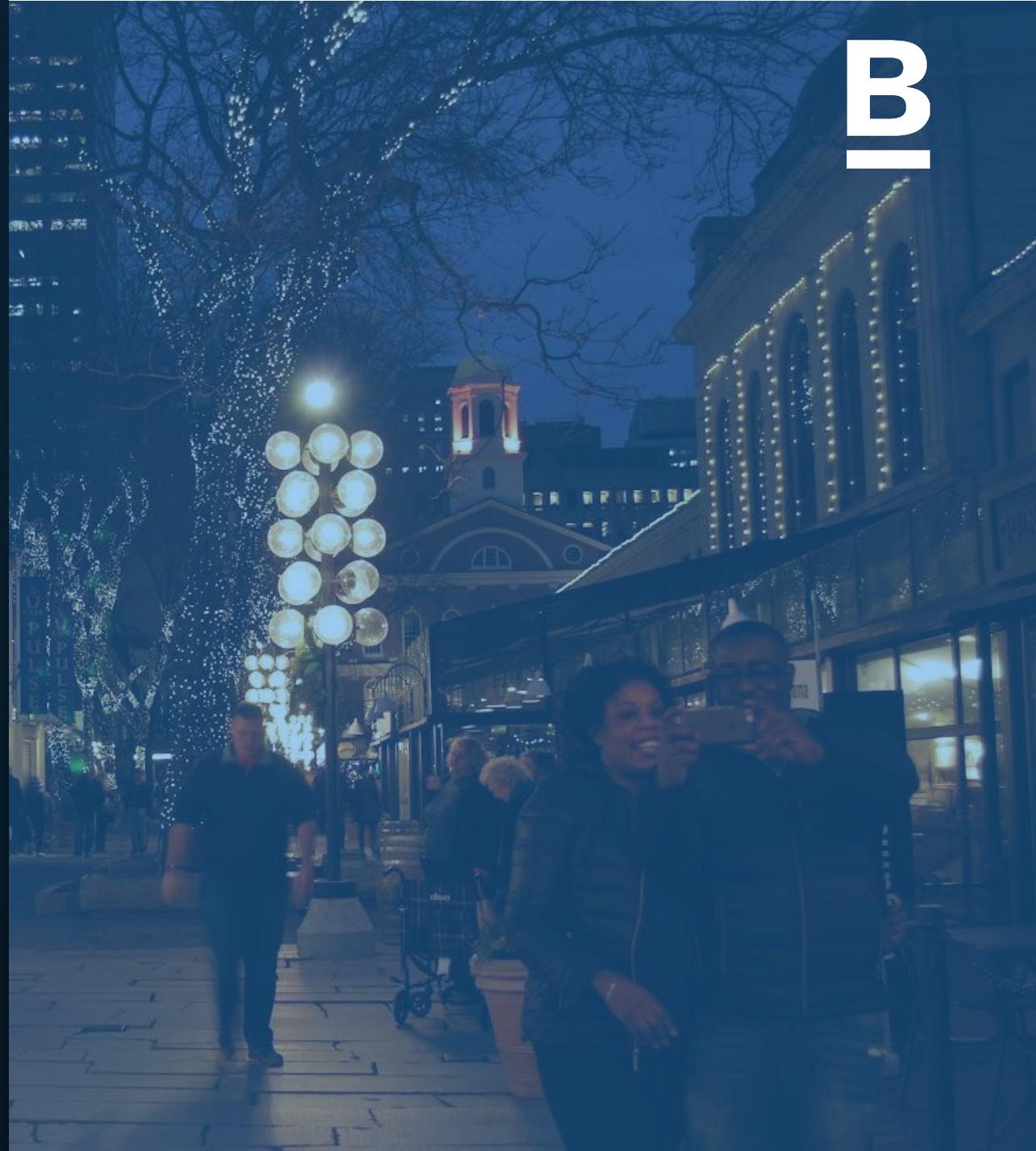
Program Description

- Close evaluation of economic indicators can help the City make better informed decisions regarding a variety of key goals including supporting retail storefronts, robust office and residential demand, and expanding multimodal streetscape efforts.
- Continue to closely track key indicators including office and retail rent rates across key districts to compare the Downtown submarket with Back Bay and the Seaport – this will help inform
- Track key indicators to help inform on-going policy decisions by the City to support Downtown revitalization efforts via the BPDA research team's COVID Recovery Dashboard.

Examples from other cities

- **New York:** The New York Economic Development Corporation tracks monthly shifts in housing and office space market trends, labor statistics, and more.

**Expand residential focus of
downtown**



B

Expand the residential focus of downtown

Downtown is one of the least residentially focused areas in Boston.⁷⁰ Its buildings have long served the needs of office workers and firms. But post-pandemic, the market for office space is uncertain. Moreover, Boston faces a housing crisis, with demand for housing reaching unprecedented levels.⁷¹ Encouraging more residential focus downtown will bring renewed vibrancy and economic diversity to the area while addressing the urgent need for more housing of all types in the City.

Importantly, Bostonians *want* to live downtown. Vacancy rates for residential buildings have dropped below pre-pandemic levels and compare favorably to Boston's other strategic commercial hubs. The number of residents downtown has also increased since before the pandemic.

Many of Boston's peer cities – including Paris, London, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. – are increasing residential development in areas that were largely commercial pre-pandemic. For example, Philadelphia developed more than 1,800 apartments in commercial spaces in the last two years.⁷³ London plans to create 1,500 homes from empty offices.⁷⁴

Taking inspiration from these examples, the City plans to advance a few broad themes.

Support developers and institutions pursuing residential projects

Currently, only ~28% of downtown's development pipeline is residential.⁷² Notably, however, many existing commercial buildings could be well suited for residential conversion, avoiding vacancies while preserving downtown's historic charm for future generations. The City plans to work with developers and institutions to better understand roadblocks to residential development and to support residential projects.

Address the Citywide housing crisis

City-wide efforts to improve housing affordability go hand-in-hand with increasing downtown's residential focus. Building more housing downtown will help to alleviate pressure in all neighborhoods of the City. This neighborhood continues to be a priority for the Mayor's Office of Housing given its below-average levels of income-restricted housing stock.

The City is considering four main actions:

1. Support conversions of class B/C office space into new uses including residential/student housing
2. Continue PLAN Downtown, which will update zoning considerations to further advance housing for Boston residents across all levels of affordability
3. Fast-track zoning for developments with a significant amount of affordable housing
4. Continue the city's multiple affordable housing options and programs

Support conversions of class B/C office space into new uses including residential/student housing

Agency responsible:

BPDA

Goal

- To increase critical mass of residents downtown, providing foot traffic outside of traditional office worker hours
- Provide needed housing supply, while preserving historic building facades for future generations
- Explore conversions to other uses including life science and lab buildings where appropriate

Rationale & Impact

- Residential vacancy rates downtown are below pre-pandemic levels and compare favorably to other strategic commercial hubs, but only ~28%⁷⁵ of the downtown development pipeline is residential
- Increased critical mass of downtown residents will attract greater economic activity and new businesses to the area

Program Description

City efforts to support residential conversions would focus on [identifying potential areas](#) for conversion, [partnering with stakeholders](#) to align on projects, [removing unnecessary roadblocks](#) to conversions, and [preserving downtown's historic character](#):

- Downtown contains many older class B and C office buildings that are less desirable to office tenants and have floorplate sizes well suited to residential conversion
- The City will conduct a study analyzing the financial and architectural feasibility of residential and other potential conversions and identify specific areas and building types where conversions could be successful
- In future Institutional Master Plan (IMP) discussions, the BPDA would work closely with institutions (e.g., Emerson College, MGH) to determine how they can be part of greater residential conversion projects
- The City would partner with developers and property owners to understand and remove unnecessary roadblocks to conversion

Examples from other cities

- [Nationwide increase in residential conversions](#): In 2021, ~7,400 apartment units were created from office conversions, more than 6x the number of units converted in 2011⁷⁶
- [Philadelphia](#): Developed 1,800 apartments in commercial spaces since 2020⁷⁶
- [London](#): Plans to create 1,500 homes from empty office buildings⁷⁷

Continue PLAN Downtown, a BPDA-led study to develop a framework for the residential enhancement of downtown

Agency responsible and Timeline:

BPDA; Launched in September 2018 and was paused in March 2020, set to restart in fall 2022; estimated to last approximately 8 months

Goal

- PLAN Downtown aims to preserve, enhance, and grow downtown Boston; the study will help ensure that downtown is preserved as an area of high economic activity, with increased residential density, and that it remains an accessible place for all people to live and work

Rationale & Impact

- PLAN Downtown targets seven areas of focus: livability, walkability, affordability, access to open space, daylight, dynamic use of public space, and climate change preparedness
- The study builds on prior city plans, including Imagine Boston 2030: A Plan for the Future of Boston (2017), Climate Ready Boston (2016), and the Economic Equity and Inclusion Agenda (2016)

Program Description

PLAN Downtown is a set of recommendations developed by the BPDA to help preserve, enhance, and grow downtown Boston; the following draft actions are an extraction from the plan drafted in March 2020:

- [Promote dense, mixed-use development to support living, working, and leisure activities](#); example actions could include:
 - Providing a civic infrastructure to support a diverse set of uses, particularly residential ones, through incentivizing new uses for underutilized parking garages that create new opportunities for public amenities and spaces
- [Promote the retention, growth, and diversity of active ground-floor uses, especially legacy and small businesses](#); example actions could include:
 - Setting up a fund or grant from development contributions to reinvest in existing small businesses and cultural organizations, or support new small businesses in beginning operations
- [Update zoning considerations to further advance housing for Boston residents across all levels of affordability](#); example actions could include:
 - Applying Acquisition Opportunity Loans⁸¹ to Class C office and other lower-rent or higher-vacancy spaces to transform them into housing
 - Further studying alternative development models that make housing more affordable (e.g., co-housing, custom build housing) and evaluating their feasibility downtown
 - Further studying the capacity for public land downtown to support affordable housing upon redevelopment and prioritize redevelopment

Continue the City's offering of multiple affordable housing options, and fast-track developments with a significant amount of affordable housing

Agency responsible

Mayor's Office of Housing, Department of Neighborhood Development; BPDA

This summary combines two actions:

Fast-track zoning for developments with a significant amount of affordable housing

Continue the city's multiple affordable housing options and programs

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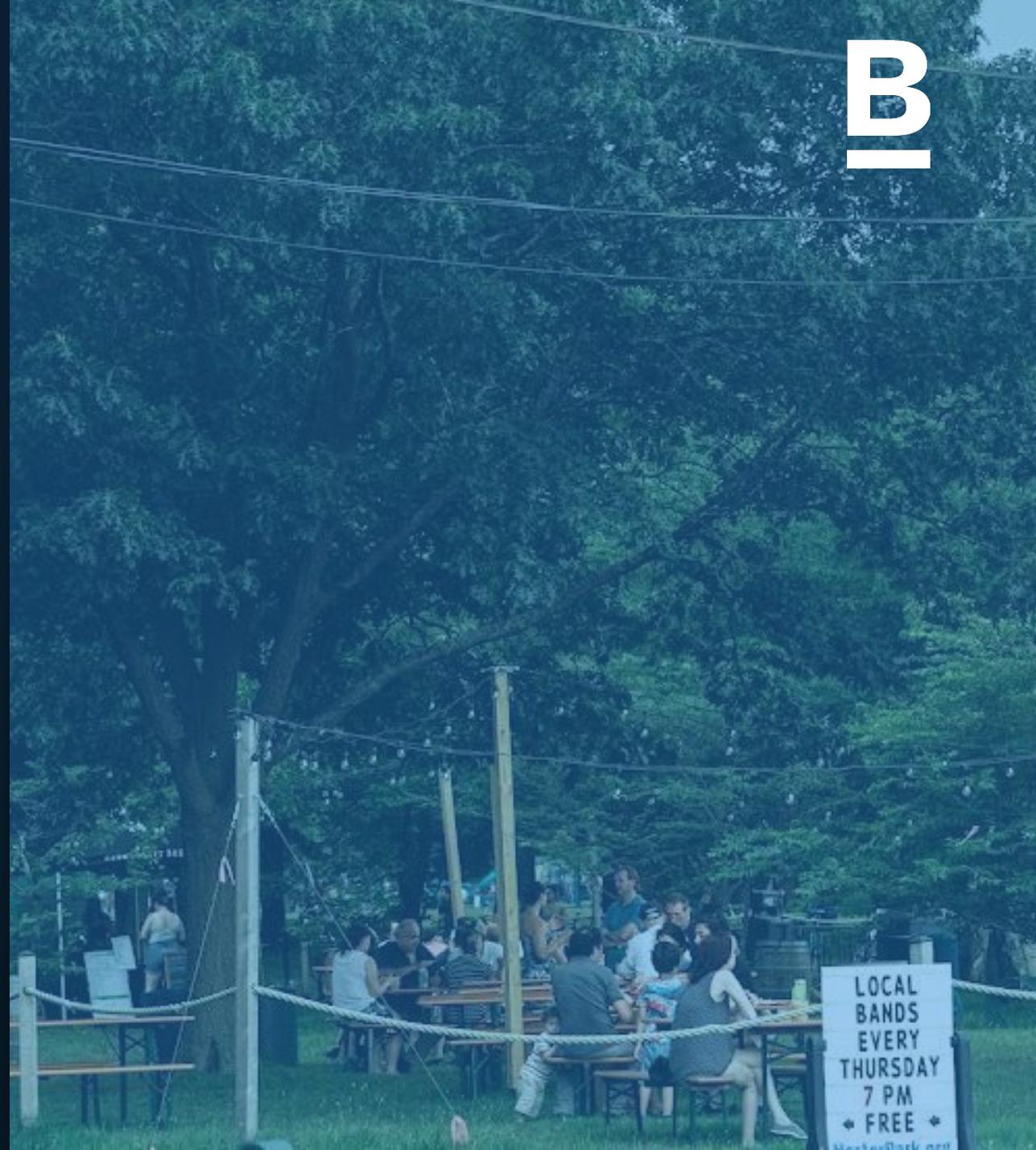
GOAL

IMPACT & RATIONALE

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- To make housing downtown more accessible and increase the number of residents downtown by mitigating barriers for lower-income residents to stay and thrive in the City
- To facilitate creation of affordable housing
- Across Boston, ~19% of housing is income-restricted; downtown has fewer income restricted units than other areas of the City, making it a priority area for investment¹
- Downtown has the third highest average rental rate² across neighborhoods and only 1,219 subsidized units; an expansion of direct supports that aid and encourage creation of affordable housing could help bring residents to the area
- Affordable housing often has a lower return on investment than market rate or commercial developments; fast tracking these builds could make affordable housing more economically attractive for developers
- Within the Mayor's Office of Housing, the Department of Neighborhood Development is focused on three main areas that will continue to expand affordable housing access downtown:
 - Maintaining relationships with developers: The Department actively talks to developers and seeks out opportunities to expand affordable housing options downtown, maintaining a strong relationship with the BPDA to assist in these expansion efforts
 - Fast-tracking developments with at least 40% affordable housing: Currently, the City's primary tool to fast-track developments with 40% affordable housing is the 121A tax abatement agreement³, which can allow for a faster approval process. The City is interested in other potential fast-tracking solutions to elevate both rentals and homeownership
 - Providing subsidies to affordable housing projects: The Mayor's Office of Housing provides \$30M in funding to projects that are 40% or more affordable, and the funding covers both homeownership and rentals; most of the Mayor's Office of Housing funding for affordable housing is allocated through an annual RFP process - the RFP is released in August, proposals are due by the end of September, and awards are made in January
- There are many affordable housing programs across the City and at the State and Federal are used in tandem with these investments; notably, State and Federal voucher programs are often leveraged by Department of Neighborhood Development funded properties

Expand the daily use of downtown beyond work by bolstering downtown's cultural, retail, services, and hospitality ecosystems



Expand the daily use of downtown beyond work

Pre-pandemic, downtown was home to over 180 retail businesses, 30 cultural institutions, and 440 restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and hotels¹. These organizations formed the backbone of a rich economic and cultural ecosystem, but they have been hard hit in recent years.

Importantly, weekend foot traffic is recovering faster than weekday foot traffic, suggesting that people want to do more downtown than work.² Recent events the City has hosted such as Boston Blooms, #DTXLOVE, and Games Day at the Steps were well attended. Building on this momentum, the City will broaden its efforts, inspired by peers around the world. Notable examples include Sydney, which introduced culture passes for cultural and arts venues and designed new public spaces; and New York City, which introduced its "NYC Winter Outing" program to bring visitors to key restaurants, hotels, and entertainment venues during the low-traffic winter season.

Support existing businesses

The City can help existing businesses and industries downtown expand their operations through programming, investment, and regulatory facilitation. Industry-specific promotional weeks, such as Dine Out Boston, have been historically successful in boosting spend and engagement at Boston restaurants during slow periods; expanded promotional efforts - for hotels, cultural centers, retailers, or more - could provide similar activation for other industries downtown. The City can also invest in placemaking activities that make the downtown space a more inviting place to spend time; by improving infrastructure and putting on programming, the City can entice broader audiences to this space, bringing increased traffic to the businesses operating downtown, especially at night and other low-traffic periods. By easing unnecessarily complex policies and re-thinking zoning laws, the City will also greatly facilitate the ability for businesses downtown to continue and expand operations and lower barriers for new entrants looking to serve this neighborhood.

Encourage new entrants and new uses of space

Though downtown has historically been thought of as office-centric, a shift towards a more mixed-use neighborhood creates opportunities to reimagine use of space and draw new businesses and events. Pop-up stores can fill vacant retail storefronts, while beer gardens and holiday markets can occupy public areas. A more holistic view of Boston's downtown will require expanded zoning codes to incorporate modern use cases, as well as programmatic efforts by the City to create new events and institutions downtowns.

1. StreetLight data; Retail defined as: Grocery Store, Convenience Store, Clothing Store, Department Store, Home Specialty Store, Specialty Store, Sporting Goods Store, Home Improvement & Hardware Store, Consumer Electronics Store, Office Supply & Services Store; Cultural defined as: Historical monument, performing arts, tourist attraction, and museums; Restaurants, bars etc. defined as: coffee shop, hotel, restaurant, nightlife; 2. Weekday foot traffic in 2022 is 53% below its 2019 baseline, while weekend traffic is only 34% below baseline; data from sensors in the Downtown BID, compares footfall from March 13 (day one of shutdown in Boston) through June 21 to maintain equal comparison

The City is considering nine main actions:

1. Update 'retail' definition in zoning
2. Create spaces, events, and programs to expand nightlife downtown
3. Attract, grow and make visible creative economy businesses downtown
4. Strengthen industry-specific promotional programs
5. Explore new spaces for temporary pop-ups
6. Identify and execute active uses for city-owned public space
7. Fund new events and programming to draw new audiences downtown
8. Centralize a review of fine schedules, inspections, and enforcement data systems for businesses
9. Continue PLAN Downtown's efforts on mixed-use development

Update 'retail' definition in zoning code for first floor retail space to include newer use cases (e.g., daycare, co-working spaces, maker-retail)

Agency responsible:
BPDA,
Zoning Commission



Goal

- To lower regulatory barriers for new retail and services establishments, encouraging new and diverse businesses downtown

Rationale & Impact

- The current zoning code defines retail establishments inconsistently across downtown's seven zoning districts (e.g., in some downtown districts, a narrow retail definition pushes new types of retail establishments into a lengthy zoning appeals process)
- By aligning the definition of retail downtown, businesses will be able to set up operations far more quickly, increasing access to diverse applicants and filling vacant spaces consistently across downtown

Program Description

- Update Articles 8, 38, 39, 40, 45, 46, and 47A of the Zoning Code to expand and align the definition of "retail" establishments to include modern use cases, including daycare, co-working space, maker-retail space, and other relevant uses
- To execute this change, a representative in the BPDA Planning Division will write an amendment based on a needs assessment related to the gaps in the current Code. The BPDA will conduct a planning process and public dialog that includes at least one public meeting to explain the intent of the proposed amendment and seek comments for revision before taking the proposed amendment to the BPDA Board of Directors for approval. The BPDA will also petition the Zoning Commission to adopt changes after the public dialogue and planning process is complete. The Zoning Commission will hold a public hearing and vote on the proposed amendment. Once voted upon, the amendment will be sent to City Council to be signed into the Code.

Examples from other cities

- [New York City](#): In June, 2022, New York Mayor Eric Adams announced the "City of Yes" plan, expanding citywide zoning initiatives to support small businesses, create new housing, and promote sustainability; the first amendment of this plan revolves around zoning for economic opportunity, providing businesses with the flexibility to repurpose space for a post-pandemic city, including removal of geographic limitations on certain types of businesses, elimination of obstacles to repurpose space for new uses, and creating flexibility for existing businesses to expand without triggering additional hurdles.⁸⁴

Create spaces, events, or programs to expand nightlife downtown, ideally to attract new populations and demographic or socioeconomic groups

Agency responsible:
Economic Opportunity and Inclusion,
Mayor's Office of Arts & Culture



GOAL

- To make Boston a 24-hour city, on par with other global cities, with nightlife that is inviting and welcoming to everyone

IMPACT & RATIONALE

- There are currently only 89 nightlife establishments open in downtown Boston⁸⁵
- Boston's "sleepy" reputation impacts the City's ability to attract and retain younger talent
- Nightlife establishments in peer cities contribute roughly \$1.5M per establishment to a city's economy annually,⁸⁶ representing significant economic opportunity for Boston

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- The City is currently searching for a Director of Strategic Initiatives to develop programs and initiatives that remove systemic barriers, advance economic justice, and establish equity for small businesses and workers throughout the city, with a focus on the night time economy and opportunities
- Led by the efforts of the new Director, the City could explore a number of different types of action, including but not limited to allocating City funds to stimulate the nighttime economy (including grants for local musicians or entertainers, activation activities, or funding for educational programs), investment in nighttime infrastructure improvements (such as lighting, public restrooms, community spaces), adjusting regulations (such as late night opening hours and entertainment licenses) to facilitate ease of doing business, or partnership with the private sector to activate downtown areas and stimulate foot traffic
- Expansion efforts should focus on creation of gathering places with an eye towards diversity downtown, including inclusive programming and expanded opportunities for BIPOC entrepreneurs

EXAMPLES FROM OTHER CITIES

- **Sydney, Australia:** Sydney launched a "24-hour Economy Strategy" in September 2020, which laid out a detailed action plan to create a 24-hour city renowned for its vibrancy, diversity, safety, and access through both the day and night, revitalizing the economy and city center in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic; Sydney based its strategy on five key pillars – integrated planning and place making, diversification of night-time activities, industry and cultural development, mobility and improved connectivity, and changing the narrative⁸⁷

Attract, grow and make visible creative economy businesses downtown

Goal

- To expand the presence of the creative economy downtown

Rationale & Impact

- Creative economy businesses in fields like digital creative services, fashion, music, and video technology are in a relatively strong position post-pandemic
- Successful creative economy businesses (e.g., Harmonix, Sonos) are already based downtown
- New expansions of creative economy businesses, focused on customer engagement and activation, could fill some of the over 70,000 square feet of vacant retail space downtown⁸⁸, bringing diverse foot traffic back to the area

Agency Responsible

- Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC)
- Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion (OEI)

Program Description

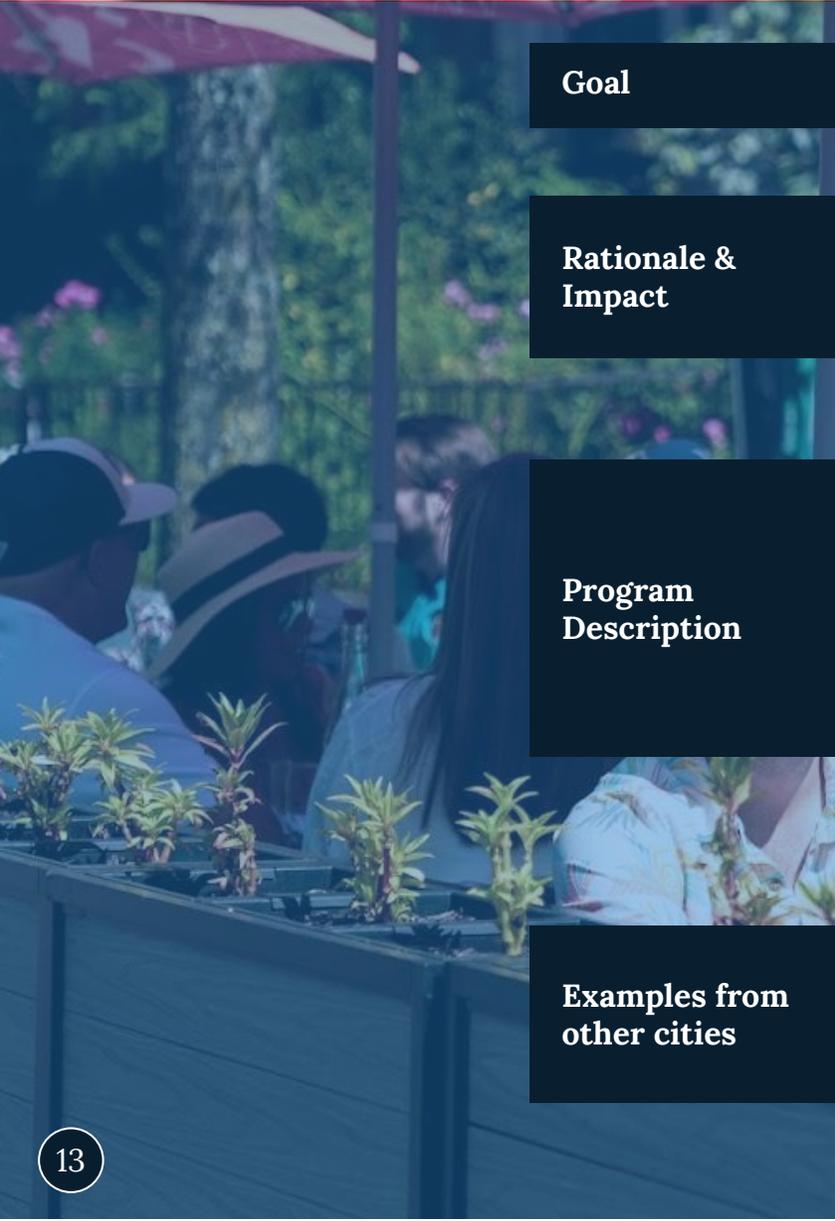
- The City would create a creative economy proposition package, and actively recruit new creative economy businesses to establish operations downtown
- The City would partner with existing creative economy businesses downtown to encourage expansion of their presence to focus on street-level customer engagement experiences and activation events; potential incentives and support for these initiatives would be outlined in the creative economy proposition package
- The City would work to harness the trend of experiential arts attractions by actively recruiting experiential commercial arts organizations, and directing them to vacant space downtown; part of this effort could include partnerships with regional, national, or international cultural institutions to build outposts downtown, or partnerships with local organizations to highlight and expand accessibility to local institutions

Examples from other cities

- [Denver, Colorado](#); [Las Vegas, Nevada](#); [Santa Fe, New Mexico](#); [Houston, Texas](#); Immersive arts and entertainment company, Meow Wolf has established locations in converted retail space in four major US cities, with a distinctive style of immersive, maximalist environments that encourage audience participation⁸⁸
- [Nationwide](#); immersive exhibitions such as *Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience*, and *Immersive Frida Kahlo* have seen popularity nationwide, including successful exhibitions in Boston

Strengthen industry-specific promotional programs

Agency responsible:
Mayor's Office;
Greater Boston Convention
and Visitors Bureau



Goal

- Create a compressive promotional portfolio to strengthen and expand current industry promotional programs

Rationale & Impact

- Creating a centralized industry promotional program could draw additional new visitors to the area, as seen through New York City's 'NYC Winter Outing'
- Currently Boston has programs that could be strengthened by additional promotional programs and events or revitalized; pre-pandemic the Mayor's Holiday Special provided 15k discounted tickets

Program Description

- Boston has recently hosted a wide range of industry specific promotional events including Dine Out Boston, Mayor's Special and Harborfest, but there is opportunities to strengthen this programming coming out of the pandemic
- The City could have three potential ways forward:
 - Consider creating a hotel week, including downtown hotels; this could consist of creating a steering committee, getting buy-in, to proposing a potential week
 - Create a committee to create a symbiotic relationship between different promotional weeks and coordinate across industry weeks; this committee could consist of members from various hotel, restaurant etc. associations and Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau, Mayor's Office etc.
 - Reinvigorate the Mayor's Holiday Special after a hiatus during the pandemic: Assemble a task force including the Mayor's Office, Art's Boston, and Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau to potentially discuss relaunching this programming

Examples from other cities

- **New York City:** NYC & Company created NYC Winter Outing, a multi-industry event during the 2022 low season, Jan – March, by creating concurrent events including: NYC Restaurant Week, NYC Broadway Week, NYC Must See Week and launching the first NYC Hotel Week. Pulling on the success of restaurant week, NYC & Co formalized and expanded the concept to other industries to help tourism rebound in NYC

Source: Dine Out Boston, Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau website, Mayor's Holiday Special; Arts Boston website, Boston Harborfest website, NYC & Company website

Explore new spaces for temporary pop-ups



Agency responsible:

Mayor's Office;
Office of Equity
Opportunity and
Inclusion

Goal

- Create a thriving pop-up culture, allowing for small, start-up retail businesses to trial new business concepts in our downtown area

Rationale & Impact

- About two thirds of small retail businesses have utilized pop-up space to build brand awareness, introduce a new product or connect with customers
- In creating a thriving pop-up culture, the City has an opportunity to support small businesses by providing additional spaces for pop-ups and streamlining the permitting and licensing

Program Description

- City of Boston can lease or otherwise acquire space at attractive locations to offer shorter-term leases to small businesses for pop-up purposes; some locations have already been identified by the City
- Generating short term leases for potential for pop-up locations will create spaces for pop-ups while providing stability for landlords
- Participants would apply for a spot in one of the city owned spaces, which will be awarded using an equitable and transparent process
- In addition, the city could explore coupling pop-up space provision with a ladder program to help businesses prosper after leaving the space
- Create a program for businesses transitioning out of the city owned pop-up spaces; designed an incubator to help local, BIPOC, women-owned businesses thrive post utilizing City owned pop-up spaces

Examples from other cities

- [Sydney, Australia](#): In the city of Sydney's COVID-19 recovery plan, they are encouraging temporary pop-up events in public spaces by expanding possible locations and streamlining pop-up permitting and licensing
- [Atlanta, Georgia](#): They city of Atlanta has created the Beltline MarketPlace, an incubator that provides BIPOC businesses with a pop-up location on the Atlanta Beltline, and guidance to help advance those businesses to become permanent brick-and-mortar stores

Goal

- Identifying public owned spaces for new active uses including pop up markets, restaurants, and beer gardens

Rationale & Impact

- Downtown currently has few public gathering spaces outside of private restaurants. Using outdoor city-owned public space for markets, casual restaurants, and beer gardens will help create an attraction to bring people downtown

Agency Responsible

- Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion
- Mayor's Office of Ats
- Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Office of Tourism, Sports, & Entertainment
- Public Realm

Program Description

- Identifying and executing active uses for city-owned public space can be broken down into the following steps:
 - Identify possible spaces: these spaces could include City Hall Plaza, Boston Commons, Faneuil Hall, Sam Adams park etc.
 - Pinpoint potential active uses for the space such as for seasonal markets, coffee stands, beer gardens, community gatherings, and maker fairs
 - Align on dates for specific events and seasonal entities (i.e., a holiday market or a summer beer garden)
 - Coordinate with external vendors, business owners, etc. to create a list of businesses interested in participating in the new active uses of the space
 - Set-up active use cases on specified dates and help promote to the public, generating interest in the new use of city-owned public space

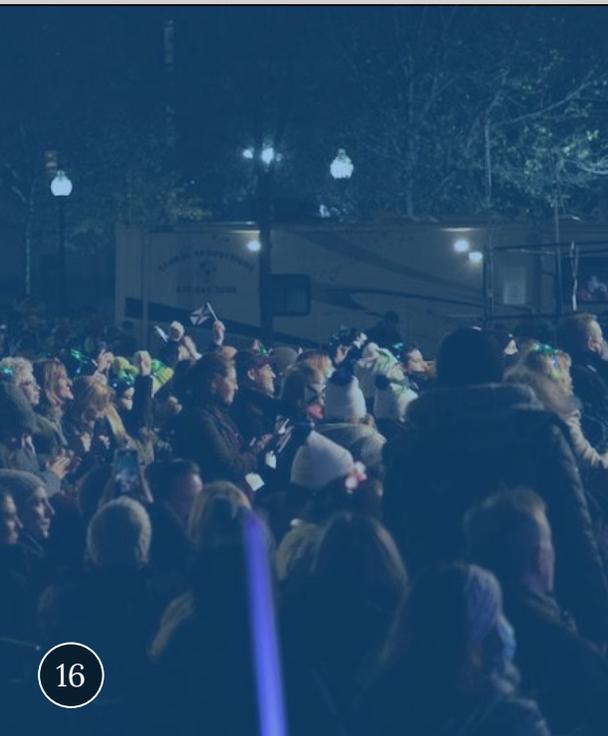
Examples from other cities

- **Sydney:** In an effort to best utilize space owned by the city, Sydney has thrown silent discos in the State Library, as a part of the Sydney Festival.
- **New York:** to bring winter-time energy and foot traffic to city owned parks, New York has created thriving holiday markets in Bryant Park and Union Square Park.

Fund new events and programming to draw new audiences downtown

Agency responsible:

Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture;
Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion;
Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau;
Office of Tourism, Sports, & Entertainment
Public Realm



GOAL

- To build on existing and to create new community events to bring Boston's residents together in new and exciting ways

IMPACT & RATIONALE

- Boston's downtown foot traffic is down 55% from 2019 levels⁸⁹, creating new events and programming can draw additional visitors and residents downtown

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- The City continues to refine and pilot new events in the neighborhoods including the ones listed below and will continue to pursue new potential events
- Boston Together Again: Running July 19th through mid-October; The program is designed to bring and keep Bostonians together in community while driving foot traffic - and customers - to the City's downtown business districts. Events in Boston Together range from yoga in Copley Square, to music and dancing on City Hall Plaza, and movie nights on the Rose Kennedy Greenway at Dewey Square
- Open Streets: Running intermittently through summer and early fall in various locations around Boston; The Open Streets program is designed to help bring business and celebration to Boston communities, while challenging residents to envision a road without cars
- Copley Connect: Ran from June 7th to June 17th; The program was designed as a 10-day pilot project transforming Dartmouth Street into a plaza space and connecting Copley Square and the Boston Public Library
- Boston Blooms: Ran on April 13th, 2022; A block party designed to welcome back employees, residents and visitors back to downtown Boston, consisting of food trucks, live music, local performers, street art, and a pop-up beer garden
- First Night: Runs annually on New Year's Eve; Since 1975, First Night has been a celebration of the season, beginning of the new year, and celebration of artistic performances
- Harborfest: Runs annually over Independence Week; This summer tradition is one of the largest 4th of July celebrations in the US including historical reenactments, boat tours, entertainment, etc.



Centralize a review of fine schedules, inspections, and enforcement data systems for businesses

Agency responsible:

Mayor's Office of Consumer Affairs and Licensing; Inspectional Services Dept.; Boston Fire Dept. Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion

Goal

- To improve ease of opening and operating a business by speeding up the approval process, helping business owners better understand and navigate the approval process, and by creating ways for business owners more easily fulfill and respond to city requirements

Rationale & Impact

- This administration acknowledges that it can be difficult for entrepreneurs to navigate inspection and enforcement processes. Mitigating and clarifying variability on costs and lowering obstacles to obtain inspections are two common requests from small businesses and M/WBEs. These businesses may have less staff capacity to navigate city processes and may be disproportionately impacted by fines. Importantly, improvements to the current inspections data process will help the city better track business outcomes and measure city progress toward equity goals.

Program Description

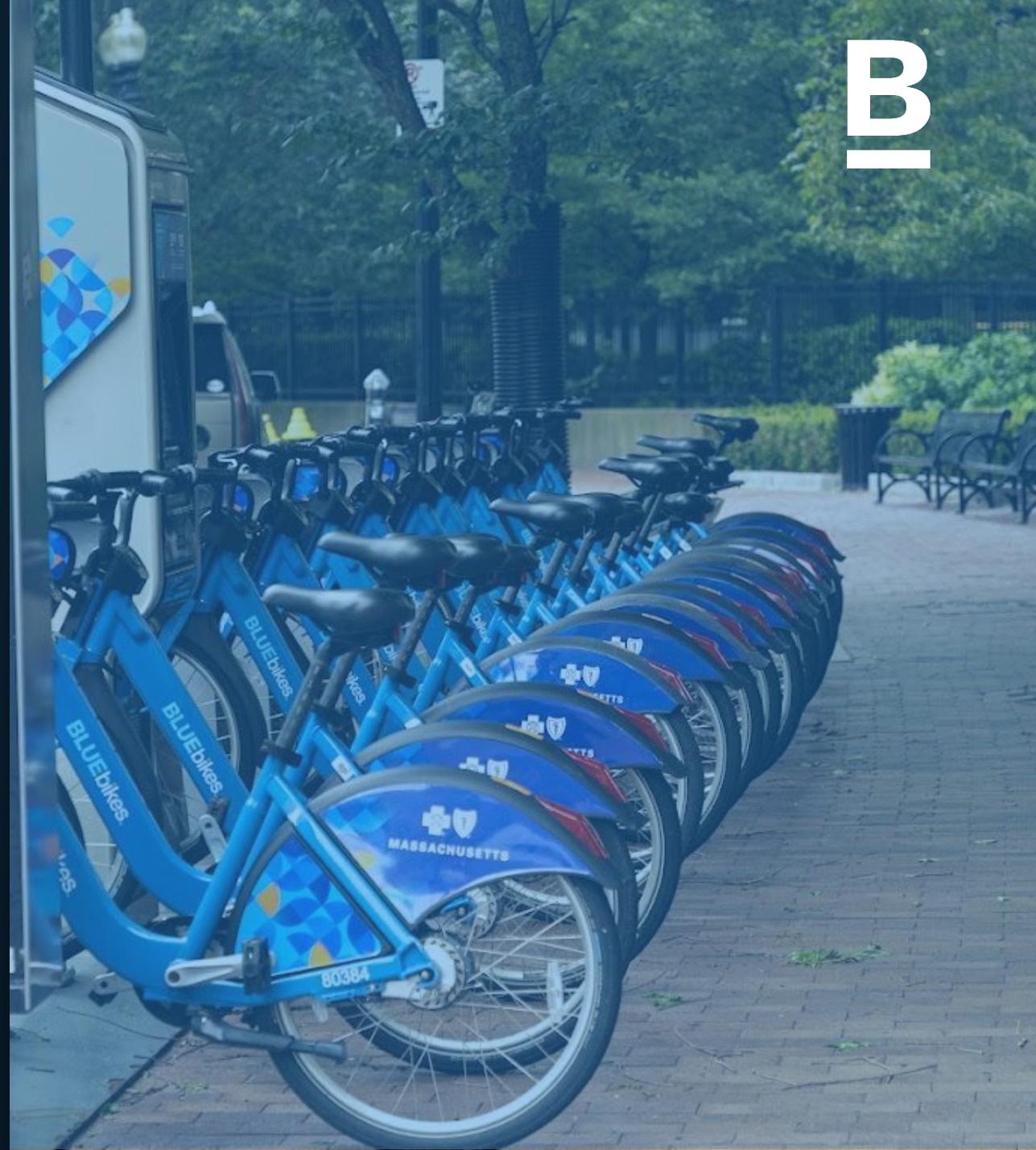
Overarching questions the City will consider as it undertakes this review:

- What opportunities exist to streamline the existing inspection process?
- How can the city enable businesses to more easily contact the city, and to schedule and coordinate required appointments?
- What city staff supports are needed on the back-end (e.g., in terms of staff times or other resources)?
- Are processes sufficiently accessible online? Is the sequence and duration of various procedural steps significantly clear?
- Is the fine system rational and well-placed to achieve the city's goals?
- Should the city consider expediting businesses through the process if they meet certain criteria?

Examples from other cities

- **New York, NY:** Built a robust website for entrepreneurs that is easy to navigate, connects city requirements with processes from other levels of government, provides enough information on all requirements for starting a business (e.g. permits and zoning), and allows entrepreneurs to track all of their information and progress in one place⁹⁰
- **Indianapolis, IN:** Created a portal that guides applicants through the business licensing process and helps them finish regulatory requirements; license terms last a full year so applicants can renew on their own schedule⁹⁰
- **Philadelphia, PA:** Enacted a system that allows entrepreneurs to apply for almost every license or permit required online, without having to mail in materials or visit the different agencies in person⁹⁰

Support connectivity and mobility downtown via multi-modal transportation infrastructure and protected infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists



Support connectivity and mobility downtown via multi-modal transportation infrastructure and protected infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists

Downtown is the most connected area of Boston, with dense coverage of underground rapid transit and bus service, as well as a sizable number of private and public commuter operators. On any given day, tens of thousands of pedestrians traverse downtown while getting to workplaces, residences, and recreational spaces.

As we look toward a new vision for downtown as a connected, engaging, and multi-faceted space, we believe that downtown streets should be reliable, pleasant, and accessible for all manners of transit and transportation. Many of Boston's peer cities—such as Paris, Seattle, Wales, and New York—have made investments in transportation infrastructure in recent years, attracting new visitors and optimizing use of space for pedestrians, cyclists, and motor vehicles. For example, Paris has shut off major roads at its city center to make them completely pedestrian-focused. New York has overhauled its logistics policies to optimize truck deliveries and improve congestion and emissions. Seattle is piloting cargo-bike deliveries, making last-mile delivery more efficient and sustainable. These changes improve how residents, workers, and visitors experience central business districts.

Lessons learned to date offer insight into some of downtown Boston's key opportunities for transport mobility revitalization, and steps that can be taken to address them.

Draw more pedestrians downtown

People want to spend time in places that are accessible, pleasant, and dynamic. In a city context, this can mean well-designed streets, reduced congestion, and space for friendly interactions. Streetscape improvements and pedestrian zones could catalyze downtown as a place to shop, play, and spend time, leading to improved foot traffic, growth in economic activity, and a more diverse, equitable, vibrant city center.

Balance renewed streetscapes with logistical needs

Though more people downtown are walking and biking, vehicles still play a critical role downtown, especially those required to deliver supplies to and from businesses and restaurants. Instead, Boston can work with business and community stakeholders to better understand and track delivery logistics to streamline these movements while supporting a vibrant commercial ecosystem.

Maximize safety on the streets

Safe streets are critical to a vibrant and effective downtown; but to maximize safety for all travelers, the City must consider how its streets are designed. Multi-modal streetscapes - such as those designed using Boston's Complete Streets model with dedicated bike lanes, wide sidewalks, and thoughtful traffic patterns - can have a material impact.

Minimize transport-related pollution

Expanding sustainable transportation is the foundation for reducing emissions, creating shared prosperity, and protecting public health. Infrastructure design choices have a direct impact on how Bostonians get around the City; by advocating for more reliable public transportation and prioritizing bike lanes, sidewalks, and traffic-calmed streets, the City can reduce transport-related pollution, and support Boston's Green New Deal.

The City is considering five main actions:

1. Advocate and partner with the MBTA to address critical safety and reliability challenges
2. Pilot "pedestrianization" of certain streets
3. Study logistics movements to optimize deliveries and aid pedestrianization
4. Make permanent infrastructure changes for an expanded public realm
5. Form a working group to address areaways for more extensive sidewalk updates

Advocate and partner with the MBTA to address critical safety and reliability challenges

Agency responsible:

Mayor's Office; Boston Transportation Department



GOAL

- Ensure a safe, reliable rapid transit system for residents, and workers
- Expand transport possibilities by working with the MBTA to increase service levels

IMPACT & RATIONALE

- Boston relies on the MBTA to fuel the regional economy. The current reliability challenges at the agency has made it clear that the City has to lean in to ensure residents and workers can safely get around the City

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- Dedicating parts of city streets for pop-up bus lanes for temporary bus service during service shutdowns, as well as curb space for drop off and signal prioritization
- Providing expanded space at sidewalks and bus stops for the increase in bus riders
- Thinking collaboratively about alternative transit service with the MBTA; for example the temporary ferry route during the Blue Line shutdown
- Supporting the use of parallel transportation routes, such as increased and reduced fair Commuter Rail service lines near shutdown subway service
- Coordinating with transportation providers on alternative transportation connections, such as expanded BlueBikes in impacted areas
- Coordinating with key stakeholders, such as Boston Public Schools, major employers, and community leaders to identify impacts and needs during shutdowns, and assist the MBTA in multilingual outreach to ensure thorough communication

EXAMPLES FROM OTHER CITIES

- [Wales, UK](#): Transport for Wales is a nonprofit agency owned by the Welsh Government that advocates for transport-related matters. In 2018, Transport for Wales partnered with Keolis and Amey, multinational transport companies, to support the transformation of the Wales and Borders rail networks.⁹¹ To date, this partnership has included new financing and operational models, transformation of passenger and customer experience through integrated ticketing and on demand transport systems, and infrastructure transformations and maintenance of rail lines.⁹²

Pilot "pedestrianization" of certain streets downtown



Agency responsible:

City of Boston Streets Cabinet;
BPDA; activation offices

Goal

- To enhance the pedestrian experience downtown by piloting programs that reserve specific streets for pedestrian use

Rationale & Impact

- Foot traffic downtown remains ~55% below pre-pandemic levels; regaining foot traffic is key to successful revitalization⁹³
- Downtown pedestrian zones drive foot traffic; zones with expanded pedestrian use in parts of Boston saw 61% higher traffic than other areas in the city during COVID-19⁹⁴
- 92.5% of respondents to a 2021 Boston.com survey were in favor of pedestrianizing a major road in their town or neighborhood⁹⁵

Program Description

- The City is considering one or several pilots of street pedestrianization downtown, to understand impact on economic, logistic, and foot traffic factors and consider feasibility of different pedestrianization models, including time of day, day of week, season, or long-term
- The City has seen material success with time-bound pilots to date, including Copley Connect, Open Newbury, and other Open Streets events; building on the success of these events, this pilot would cover a longer time horizon, to examine longer-term impacts of streets dedicated to pedestrian use, and the placemaking and activation resources required
- The City, as part of the PLAN Downtown effort, has already identified potential candidates for pedestrianization in this area (including Canal Street, Tontine Crescent, and expanded areas in Downtown Crossing), but selection will require additional study from safety and enforcement teams, including fire, police, traffic engineers, and public works, among others
- Activation and differentiation are critical components of successful pedestrianization; the City should involve stakeholders from the BPDA; Office of Tourism, Sports, and Entertainment; Office of Arts & Culture; Disabilities Commission, Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion; and Office of the Environment to trial place-making efforts that make pedestrianized zones enticing for people to use

Examples from other cities

- **Montreal, Quebec:** Montreal has set aside a \$12M fund to help pedestrianize streets in the summer months, subsidizing up to 2/3 of the cost of pedestrianization efforts and simplifying the process for merchants and the groups that represent them; Montreal views pedestrianization projects as a direct contribution to both commercial vitality and quality of life for business owners, residents, customers, passers-by, and tourists⁹⁶

Study logistics movements to optimize deliveries and aid pedestrianization

Agency responsible:

Mayor's Office of New Urban
Mechanics (MONUM);
Boston Transportation Department

Goal

- To better understand movements of logistics vehicles downtown, and inform actions to reduce congestion and emissions while improving pedestrian safety and street experience

Rationale & Impact

- Last-mile delivery vehicles are necessary for a dynamic downtown, but contribute disproportionate social costs largely driven by congestion, emissions, and safety concerns; increased numbers of trucks increase these costs
- Downtown has one of the highest concentrations of delivery vehicles in the city, with many areas seeing 1,100-2,300 daily truck trips in 2019⁹⁷; this volume is expected to more than triple by 2030⁹⁸

Program Description

- Last-mile delivery logistics can create congestion, noise, and safety concerns in a busy City center; to ensure Boston is able to properly regulate, incentivize and support an efficient system of delivery logistics, and to inform decisions surrounding pedestrianization and other streetscape changes, the City needs to study delivery-related logistics movements
- To begin, the City would form a task force of key stakeholders – including members of logistics companies, local businesses, and citizens – to understand the unique needs and challenges presented at each stage in the delivery process and prioritize action; the City would then collect baseline information on current logistics movements to understand areas of greatest need in relation to vision
- Ultimately, the study of information gathered would enable the City to develop policies and action plans to address the areas of greatest impact, including but not limited to improvements to delivery infrastructure, new regulations for delivery trucks, recommendations on curbside regulations and parking enforcement capacity, optimization of delivery vehicle size for an urban context, or incentives to encourage specific delivery actions

Examples from other cities

- **New York:** New York City pursued its "Delivering New York" initiative from 2016 – 2021; through this effort, the City's Department of Transportation, partnering with engineers and data experts, engaged stakeholders across the delivery value chain to develop a comprehensive plan that addressed core needs for improvement, informed by extensive data collection and analysis.; the team's insights were synthesized into 32 strategies, supported by 101 action items, laying out a plan for New York to meet its defined vision⁹⁹

Make permanent infrastructure changes for expanded public realm

Goal

- To make sidewalks, bike lanes, and roadways more welcoming, accessible, and safe, encouraging multi-modal transport options

Rationale & Impact

- Better sidewalks have shown increases in property value, foot traffic, and accessibility
- Improved streetscapes would encourage and enable more active transport, ensuring streets are designed for more than just vehicle traffic
- In a pilot done on State Street, bike traffic increased by 15% when given a designated lane, even with temporary dividers¹⁰⁰

Agency Responsible

- City of Boston Streets Cabinet

Program Description

- City action to improve streetscapes should follow the pattern of the current State Street and Blossom Street reconstruction projects, introducing dedicated bike lanes, widening the sidewalk and making it fully accessible, improving roadway conditions, and analyzing and optimizing use of curb space to maximize efficiency
- Streetscape improvements should be approached in priority order, based on volume of daily foot, cyclist, and car traffic, as well as number of safety and accessibility concerns; the City should also consider impact of increased active transport, and areas that could benefit most from increased pedestrian and cyclist usage
- The City has already programmed reconstruction of 1,600 curb ramps City-wide every year to move toward universal accessibility
- Where possible, the City should pilot major alterations to streetscapes prior to investing in permanent infrastructure changes, to test and validate usefulness and ultimate impact of the new infrastructure, and iterate on design as needed

Examples from other cities

- **Detroit, MI:** The City of Detroit invested \$80M in bond funding to improve streetscapes across the city, to improve safety and quality of life for Detroit residents, as well as to create a beautiful corridor where businesses can thrive and visitors feel safe and welcomed; the improvement projects include sidewalk expansions, bike lanes, improved lighting, landscaping, and more; since 2019, the city has undertaken 14 separate streetscape projects¹⁰¹

Form a working group to address areaways for more extensive sidewalk updates

Agency responsible:

Public Improvement Commission; Public Works Department; Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics

Goal

- To develop a systematic way to categorize and address areaways; to increase the opportunity for sidewalk improvements that lead to greater safety, accessibility, and climate resiliency

Rationale & Impact

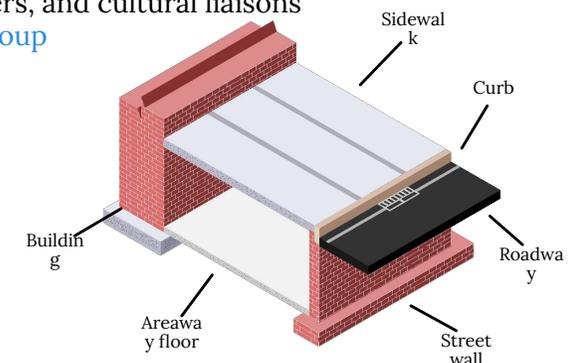
- Areaways are privately owned sidewalk vaults that often prevent the City from making sidewalk and infrastructure updates; they are likely most present in historic districts, such as downtown and Chinatown
- In Boston's most foot trafficked district, private responsibility for sidewalk maintenance can lead to accessibility and safety issues
- Areaways also prevent climate resiliency and mitigation, such as street trees and storm water drainage, in areas most impacted by urban heat¹⁰²

Program Description

- The Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics is [working to more systematically identify and map areaway's locations](#), to provide a basis for a recommended strategy to address areaways
- The City is [considering dedicating additional resources to identify a systematic solution](#) to reconstruct, fill, or otherwise address areaways upkeep and safety, identifying a way to simplify more extensive streetscape updates to ease accessibility and green infrastructure implementation
- To start this process, a [working group would be formed](#) to focus on conducting an analysis to identify condition and use of areaways, identifying safety concerns, implementing supports or incentives to address areaway reconstruction or filling, and [determining ongoing resourcing needed to continue assessment and areaways management](#), including funding required to implement recommended actions or to support construction costs
- This working group should consist of a [multidisciplinary team](#) including but not limited to Boston's Public Improvement Commission, Public Works Department, the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Boston's Disabilities Commission, Boston's Green Infrastructure team, ISD, the BPDA, and community members such as community and business associations, property managers/owners, and cultural liaisons
- In the long run, there is [potential to align this effort with the Green Infrastructure Working Group](#) which will work across departments to ensure a uniform approach to green infrastructure implementation

Examples from other cities

- [Seattle, WA](#): In 2018, Seattle conducted a structural analysis of underground areaways, highlighting structural vulnerabilities and documenting the location of areaways across the City. Since then, Seattle has created a City-operated areaways program to track and inspect areaways, define and implement safety measures, such as load restrictions, and incentivize the reconstruction or filling of areaways



Enhance economic opportunity downtown by supporting women, BIPOC, and other underserved populations; and by strengthening the small business and creative community



Enhance economic opportunity downtown by supporting women, BIPOC, and other underserved populations; and by strengthening the small business and creative community

As the city's economic engine, downtown Boston employs almost 200,000 workers and contains a larger number of businesses – 6,000 – than any other neighborhood.^{103,104} Yet business ownership downtown is not reflective of Boston's diverse makeup. Just 23% of downtown's workers are BIPOC, and BIPOC workers are under-represented in the industries most prevalent downtown.¹⁰⁵ Only ~10% of BIPOC-owned businesses are located downtown, compared to ~20% of all Boston businesses.¹⁰⁶ High rent prices and complex rules and regulations have historically presented obstacles for small and M/WBE business owners.

Boston has a unique opportunity to ensure that *all* people can share in economic prosperity downtown. Many peer cities are similarly focused on providing equitable supports. For example, in response to the heightened risk of Black-owned small business closures during the pandemic, Baltimore launched a grant program to provide ~\$50k support Black entrepreneurs occupying vacant storefronts.¹⁰⁷ Cities like London and New York have supported their downtown districts and neighborhoods by investing in local business improvement districts (BIDs) to improve business and community conditions.

Boston can support our diverse landscape of downtown workers and business owners in a few key ways:

Simplify rules and regulations to make it easier for small businesses and M/WBEs to operate

We recognize that complex regulatory processes may burden small business owners and entrepreneurs seeking to do business downtown. By decreasing barriers to licensing, we hope to make it easier to open a downtown business or host an event. And by ensuring City contracts support M/WBEs, specifically, we will prioritize contracts to support revitalization such as events through the Sheltered Market Pilot program.

Create physical space for diverse businesses downtown, bolstering recovery and increasing access to new customers

By actively supporting diverse businesses to operate downtown, we can work to increase the presence of these important businesses in the neighborhood.

Develop avenues for long term advocacy and support

Supporting underserved populations and small businesses must be done alongside partners who advocate for and provide support to these communities. Fostering these relationships through additional planning, community engagement, and expansion of organizations supporting businesses will allow for more sustainable long-term growth.

Source: BPDA Research Division Analysis; OntheMap; Go Downtown Baltimore

The City is considering six main actions:

1. Launch a multi-million dollar commercial subsidy program and technical assistance targeted to support underserved businesses
2. Pilot simplified process to hold special events to help BIPOC and emerging artists and performers
3. Expand entrepreneurship opportunities for street vendors/food trucks, currently 70% owned by BIPOC entrepreneurs, by allowing them to operate in more areas and at later times
4. Set up a team to foster more business improvement districts downtown and beyond
5. Continue PLAN Downtown, which seeks to promote the retention, growth, and diversity of active ground-floor uses, especially legacy and small businesses
6. Continue to prioritize procurements that have impacts on downtown revitalization through a permanent Sheltered Market Program, which allows the City to reserve certain contracts for M/WBEs

Launch a multi-million dollar commercial subsidy program and technical assistance targeted to support underserved businesses

Goal

- To fill desirable, visible, well-trafficked, vacant spaces with a diverse set of small business owners

Rationale & Impact

- Downtown foot traffic has seen increases over the past ~6-12 months and is mostly driven by workers / visitors, a potential new customer base for small business owners¹⁰⁸
- Retail vacancy rates have declined below pre-pandemic levels downtown, but remain higher than rates in Boston overall; this program provides an opportunity to fill the ~4% of vacant retail spaces downtown¹⁰⁹

Agency Responsible

- Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion

Program Description

- \$9M in ARPA funding is expected to be made available to distribute as [grants](#) to small business owners and entrepreneurs citywide
- The City anticipates up to ~\$150k to be available for each grantee, distributed over a 3-year period, serving [~50-60 small businesses](#)
- All businesses 10 years or younger who want to [open a new location or open their first brick and mortar location](#), as well as aspiring entrepreneurs, are anticipated to be eligible to apply for funds
- Funds will likely be able to be used to offset a [range of capital \(e.g., outfitting the space, inventory\) and operating \(e.g., rent\) expenses](#)
- In addition to grant funds, grantees will receive [one-on-one and cohort-based technical assistance](#) from the City and local partners to support access to, success, and growth in a new space
- The [program description is subject to change](#), as the Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion has been soliciting feedback and [participation in finalizing and implementing program design](#)

Examples from other cities

- [Baltimore, MD](#): In response to increased storefront vacancies in Downtown Baltimore and heightened risk for Black-owned small business closures, Baltimore BOOST (Black-Owned and Occupied Storefront Tenancy) initiative was created in 2021 to provide \$50k grants to support build out/operations (e.g., renovations, rent, etc.); entrepreneurs also receive technical, legal, marketing, zoning and permitting, and accounting support from local partners; 5 entrepreneurs in '21 starting class¹¹⁰

Pilot simplified process to hold special events to help BIPOC and emerging artists and performers



Agency responsible:

Mayor's Office;

Mayor's Office of Consumer Affairs and Licensing (MOCAL) and Special Events Committee

- Goal**
 - To re-energize downtown's foot traffic by expanding the non-work uses of downtown spaces through events
 - To increase number of events in downtown and in Main Streets by easing the one-time entertainment licensing process for event organizers
- Rationale & Impact**
 - Getting a one-time entertainment license, needed to host events, can require event organizers to go through the special events process, which can be time consuming, complex and involve various departments
 - The city has direct control over many parts this process, and can offer some new supports to streamline it
- Program Description**
 - One of the main steps required to host an event involves getting an entertainment license, which requires input from various city departments (e.g., Inspectional Services Department, Fire Department, MOCAL)
 - Three potential pilots can lower the complexity of running an event while following appropriate safety measures:
 - "[License in a box](#)" pilot could ease process for one-time entertainment licensing for special events by having city pre-select certain venues and "greenlight" them for certain types of events, allowing event organizers to apply to host in those spaces
 - A "[concierge model](#)" pilot would provide technical support to one-time entertainment license or one-day alcohol license applicants, minimizing back-and-forth between MOCAL's Entertainment Division and other departments
 - [Waiving entertainment licensing fees](#) may lower barriers to hosting events
- Examples from other cities**
 - [Toronto, Canada](#): Toronto set up a "license in a box" program of sorts by creating pre-approved locations for booking arts, music & movie nights in parks
 - [Columbus, Ohio](#): Columbus has a small business concierge within its Department of Building that acts as a liaison between the city and small businesses
 - [New York City](#): Through its Small Business Services (SBS) Department, NYC supports businesses navigating licensing through supports like an SBS hotline

Expand entrepreneurship opportunities for street vendors/food trucks, currently 70% owned by BIPOC entrepreneurs, by allowing them to operate in more areas and at later times

Agency responsible:

Small Business Development – oversees food truck program and permitting; Parks Department – oversees vending in city parks; Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics – planning food cart pilot program

Goal

- This initiative aims to grow the number of mobile food vendors; create economic opportunity for diverse business owners and entrepreneurs; and increase foot traffic downtown through improved liveliness

Rationale & Impact

- Almost three quarters of food trucks are run by people of color¹¹¹. At the same time, Boston is ranked #20 out of 20 major cities on ease to open a food truck¹¹², and the city is under-indexed in mobile food vendors, with only one licensed food vendor outside of Fenway Park, special areas such as the Downtown BID, and city parks. There is a clear opportunity to ease the process for entrepreneurs

Program Description

The city is exploring at least five primary tactics to expand opportunities for street vendors and food trucks:

- [Re-evaluating or restructuring the food truck lottery](#) to emphasize more flexible and varied uses of sites
- [Exploring proposals](#) to expand food truck hours of operation
- [Exploring options](#) for a food cart and smaller-scale mobile enterprise program
- [Identifying locations for pilot programs](#) where smaller scale food cart vendors or emerging entrepreneurs could participate in new downtown- and neighborhood-based street vending hubs, while activating more public space for hospitality and leisure
- [Centralizing and streamlining the permitting process](#) for food trucks

As a next step, the city will be reviewing potential proposals across departments

Examples from other cities

- [Portland, OR](#): After 55 food cart vendors were displaced from a private parking lot in 2019, the city helped move them to a publicly owned street and former park space downtown as part of a broader initiative to reactivate vacant park space¹¹³
- [Austin, TX](#): The city created a one-stop-shop for food truck permitting (e.g., all of the approval services are in one building) and significantly reduced permitting fees (in 2018, fees totaled \$1.1k in Austin vs \$17k in Boston)¹¹⁴
- [Los Angeles, CA](#): The city made use of private lots in high density areas for food trucks to set up in allowing the trucks to have an easily accessible place to sell, and to easily attract customers¹¹⁵

Set up a team to foster more business improvement districts downtown and beyond



Agency responsible:

Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion

Goal

- Encourage the growth of BIDs downtown and across Boston to support additional entities whose mission is to improve the experience of those who live, work, and visit Boston districts

Rationale & Impact

- Downtown BID has invested ~\$50M over 10 years, supporting the transformation of the Downtown Crossing district¹¹⁶
- BIDs have been shown to be a successful model globally, with cities and businesses around the world supporting BIDs to provide supplemental services to the district, such as marketing and events, streetscape enhancement, and security

Program Description

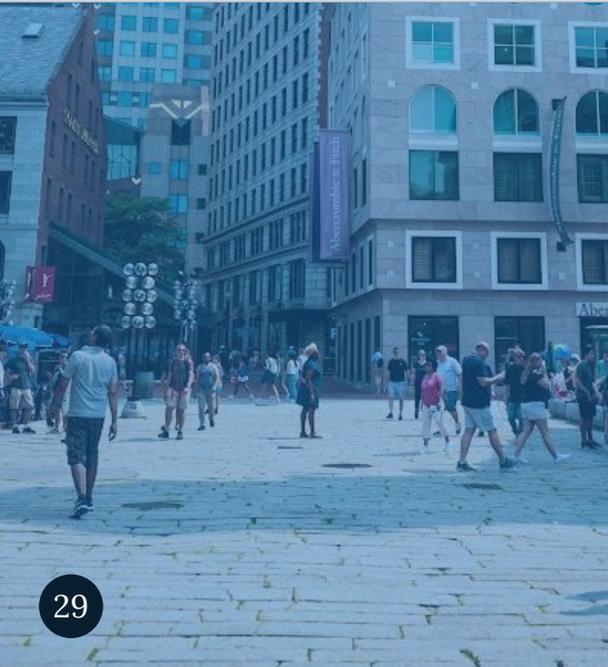
- In line with other cities' small business and economic development teams, Boston could hire a new employee in the Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion to serve as the Boston BID coordinator and City liaison, tasked with coordinating existing BID efforts and supporting the expansion of BIDs
- Roles and responsibilities of this new staff member would likely focus on supporting interested districts through the BID formation process, including strategic support to identify goals, legislative authorization, and navigating City processes, as well as supporting existing BIDs by supporting BIDs to navigating City agencies and processes and acting as the City liaison on BID boards
- Furthermore, the City will explore additional support once this staff member is hired, such as announcing a target number of BIDs for expansion, waiving fees associated with the process, or developing matching start-up funds

Examples from other cities

- **New York:** New York City has 76 BIDs, supported by the City's Small Business Services Department; The City offers program management support to existing BIDs (e.g., collecting annual impact data, coordinating the sharing of best practices across BIDs, providing workshops and trainings for BIDs) and development support for forming BIDs (e.g., technical assistance on planning process, access to sample templates / documents, facilitate groups through legislative process, etc.)¹¹⁷
- **London:** London's Mayor announced targeted expansion goal of 50 BIDs, achieving this goal in 2016 with 20 additional BIDs formed since 2012; London City Hall has resources to support this expansion goal, including a grant program to partially fund forming BIDs, coordinated communication through newsletters and quarterly meetings, workshops and toolkits (e.g., "how to set up BIDs"), etc.¹¹⁸

Continue to prioritize procurements that have impacts on downtown revitalization through a permanent Sheltered Market Program, which allows the City to reserve certain contracts for M/WBEs

Agency responsible:
Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion; Administration and Finance Cabinet



GOAL

- To increase access to City funds being used to revitalize downtown as a source of revenue for minority and women-owned businesses

IMPACT & RATIONALE

- A disparity study released in 2021 showed that only ~1.2% of ~\$2.1B in City contracts for construction and professional goods and services went to Black and Latinx-owned businesses¹¹⁹
- An initial contract released to support downtown revitalization via events coordination was released through the Sheltered Market Pilot and awarded to a Black-owned businesses

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

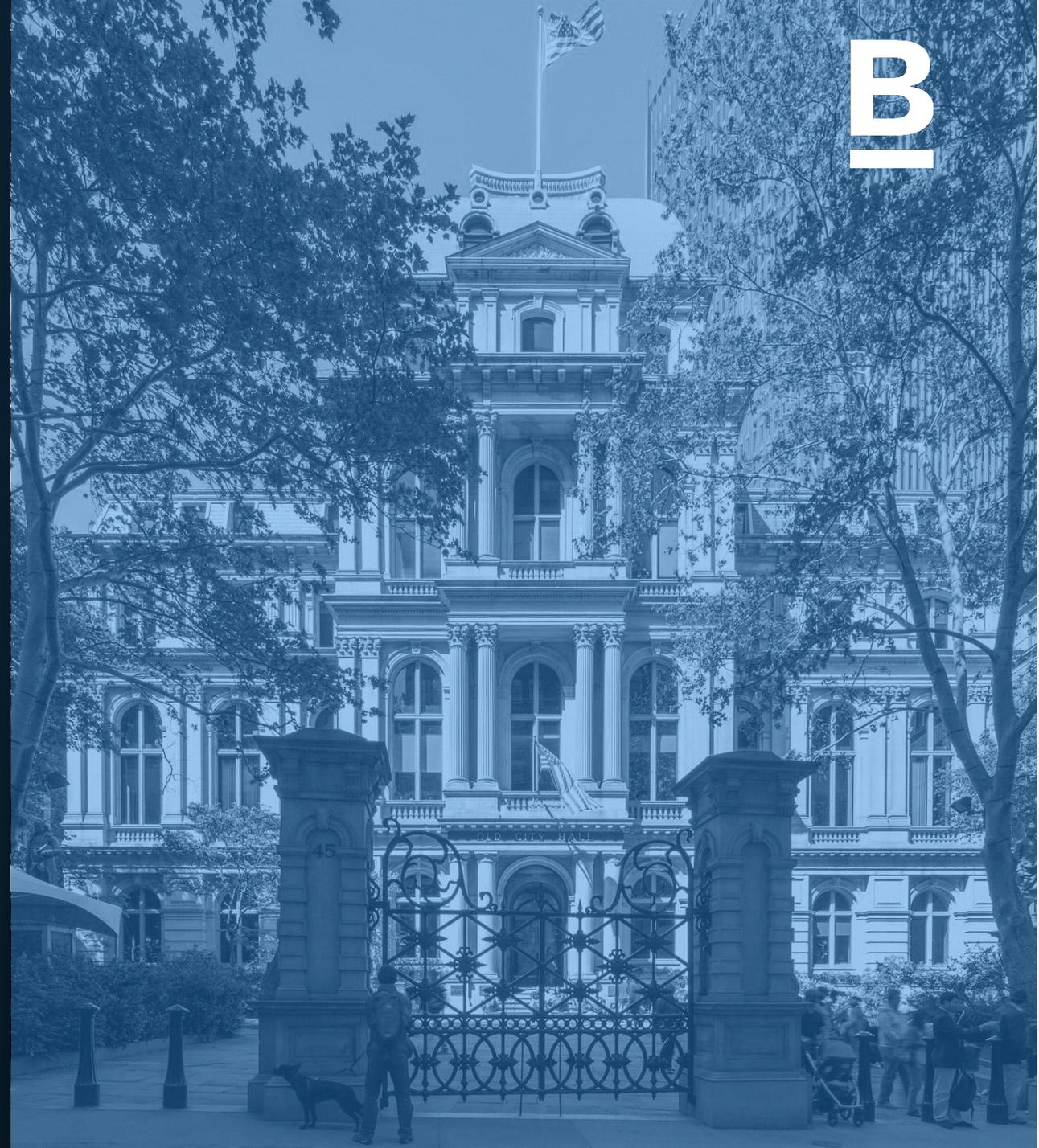
- The City has released and awarded a \$300k contract through the Sheltered Market Pilot to support downtown revitalization through activation and coordination of downtown events for summer and fall 2022
- The Sheltered Market Program is a pilot procurement process that maintains competitive bidding for specified professional services, support services, and goods and services contracts while limiting eligibility to minority and women-owned businesses
- As the City continues to support downtown's revitalization, contracted support will be prioritized through the Sheltered Market Program as often as possible, providing revenue to minority and women-owned businesses while supporting efforts to increase vibrancy and foot traffic downtown

TIMELINE

- The Sheltered Market Pilot program launched in January 2022; the downtown activation and events coordination RFP was released and closed in May 2022
- The City Council authorized the Sheltered Market as a full-scale program in late summer 2022, and the City plans to prioritize other contracts related to downtown revitalization through this program

**Grow Boston's footprint as a
global tourism hub**

B



Grow Boston's footprint as a global tourism hub

Pre-pandemic, an estimated 5,000 people came daily to visit downtown's many historic sites¹²⁰ – from the Freedom Trail, to the site of the Boston Massacre, to Quincy Market. Home to many of the oldest landmarks in Boston, the downtown area continues to play a pivotal role in attracting and welcoming visitors. But, in line with other areas of Boston and with other global cities, the downtown area has seen tourism foot traffic fall since the start of the pandemic.

Reviving tourism will be essential to the neighborhood. Across the globe, cities are investing to rekindle tourism:

- New York invested in a \$450M tourism recovery plan, including a \$30M marketing campaign to clearly communicate and attract potential visitors to some of the area's top attractions.¹²¹
- London has invested similarly, creating the city's largest international tourism campaign. This campaign is estimated to bring in an additional £81 million in spending and an additional 330,000 visitors to the capital.¹²²

Lessons learned to date offer insight into some of downtown Boston's key opportunities for re-building tourism:

Enhance attractions for a post-COVID world

In a post-COVID-19 world, working to highlight a city's attractions is essential to attracting more visitors to an area. By creating a culture or attraction pass, Boston can increase attraction visits and provide discounts for visitors, increasing foot traffic. Part of this is reimagining key attractions, like Faneuil Hall Market Place, post-COVID-19 to ensure they are places visitors want to visit and feel safe visiting.

Increase the number of large downtown events and facilitate the process for planning them

Large events create buzz and excitement, creating both small and large positive impacts on the city. These large events can raise the profile of cities, leading to lasting economic benefits including large increased tourism, new infrastructure, and global recognition.

Elevate awareness of attractions

Key to attracting visitors to Boston is increasing awareness of what the city and downtown have to offer. Identifying and capturing location, attraction, or city through a marketing campaign can help drive visitors to an area. Both New York City and London have launched large marketing campaigns aimed at bringing back both local and international tourists. Boston can do the same through highlighting downtown attractions through a marketing campaign.

Source: BPDA Research Division Analysis; City of London; State of NY

The City is considering four main actions:

1. Create a downtown-specific marketing campaign to encourage visitation, which may include a culture pass or tourism pass
2. Set up a dedicated team, fund, and/or contract vehicle to secure a pipeline of large events
3. Re-imagine Faneuil Hall post-COVID-19
4. Continue the All-Inclusive Boston tourism campaign promoting the diverse stories and attractions of the city to encourage more visitation, both locally and globally

Create a downtown-specific marketing campaign to encourage visitation, which may include a culture pass or tourism pass

Agency responsible:

Mayor's Office;
Greater Boston Convention and
Visitors Bureau

Goal

- Build on existing or create new marketing materials to draw visitors downtown and to attraction sites

Rationale & Impact

- Downtown area is home to 12 of the top 100 Boston attractions including mostly historic sites¹²³; on average, these sites are seeing ~2.5k fewer visitors per day compared to 2019¹²⁴
- Drawing additional visitors to downtown, especially to key attractions, small diverse businesses, and cultural events, is essential to a successful recovery post COVID-19

Program Description

- Create a comprehensive marketing campaign and attraction or culture pass to draw visitors downtown in two ways:
 - Possible expansion of 'All Inclusive Boston' campaign to include various downtown attractions and historic sites or look to creating a downtown specific campaign to highlight the attractions and history downtown
 - The city's "All Inclusive Boston" campaign has had 57M overall impressions and has driven ~4k new visitors to Boston¹²⁵
 - Creating a culture or attraction pass to draw visitors to more sites throughout the city
 - Attraction passes draw more foot traffic to an area, and with an attraction pass 80% of people with a pass go to the marquee attraction compared to the 10% of those intending to visit an attraction.¹²⁶

Examples from other cities

- **New York City:** Launched a \$450M tourism recovery plan, including a \$30M marketing campaign to clearly communicate and attract potential visitors; NY is expecting a 70% increase in tourists in 2022, largely driven by domestic tourism¹²⁷
- **London:** Launched the largest campaign in the city's history that has reached 43M individuals in the US, brought in an estimated £81M in additional spending and ~330,000 additional visitors to the capital¹²⁸

Secure a pipeline of large events via a dedicated team, fund, or contract vehicle

Agency responsible:

Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion;
Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau;
Office of Tourism, Sports, & Entertainment

Goal

- To assist and support Boston event spaces and other potential hosts to attract large events
- To create a pipeline of these events to help bring visitors downtown

Rationale & Impact

- Cities experience a large boost around the time of the event; jobs, spending, tourism are all higher but largest impacts (~30% in trade) for large events; conferences provide a temporary boost¹²⁹

Program Description

- The City is committed to helping potential hosts and event spaces secure Boston as the host city for large events, with the long-term goal of helping to create a large pipeline of events
- The Mayor's Office could create a task force whose mission is to assist Boston entities that are pursuing large events and conventions and help bring them to Boston
- This team could:
 - Facilitate quarterly meetings between key stakeholders (event spaces, Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau, etc.) to create clear communication channels
 - Work with Boston event spaces and other potential hosts to align city agencies to support their efforts (e.g., potentially providing letters of support to large event organizers, providing guides/informational packets about hosting in Boston, etc.)
 - Possibly create a fund to help support or ensure large events can afford to come to Boston (e.g., covering a portion of hotel costs etc.)

Examples from other cities

- [Sydney, Australia](#): In their Central Business District Sydney has utilized large events to encourage visitors to come to and spend time in the city. Additionally, they have invested in infrastructure and outdoor spaces to help facilitate some of these larger events

Re-imagine Faneuil Hall post-COVID-19



Goal

- Establish a shared vision for Faneuil Hall Marketplace between the City, ground lessee, and vendors to create a more authentic connection between Boston's history, culture, and the business offerings at the property
- Add a greater emphasis on Boston-based businesses, small business incubation, and M/WBEs participation

Rationale & Impact

- Current focus on national tenants reduces authentic experience for visitors
- Marketplace lacks thorough connection to Boston businesses and neighborhood economic development
- Significant deferred investment is required to maintain physical condition of this historic property

Agency Responsible

- Boston Planning & Development Agency
- Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity & Inclusion

Program Description

Work to establish a new direction for Faneuil Hall that is:

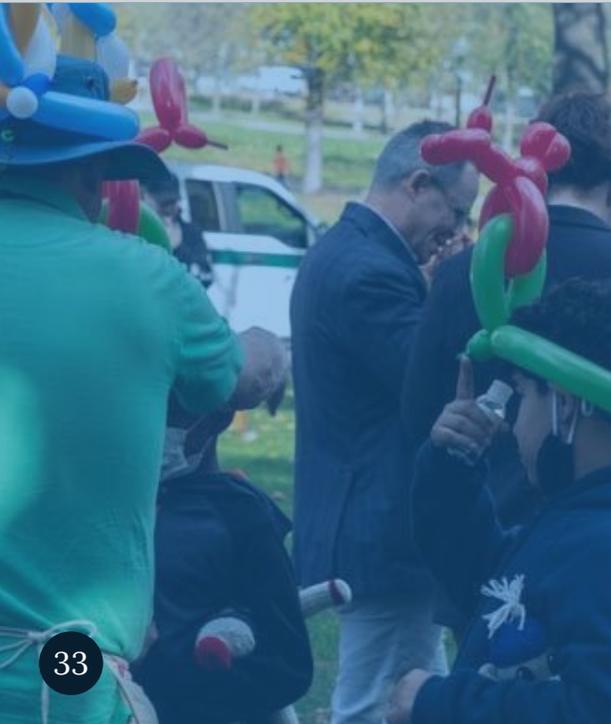
- A lynchpin of economic activity, attracting both locals and tourists
- A continuation of Boston's recognition for leading and innovating globally, showcasing and incubating Boston's food, culture and history
- A point of pride for Boston, reimagining Faneuil Hall to re-create a vibrant hub and marketplace
- Inclusive and diverse, supporting a robust mix of tenant businesses, programming and customers

Examples from other cities

- Covent Garden, the Ferry Building, Navy Pier, and Chelsea Market are key sites the City can look to identify key characteristics in successful marketplaces.
- **Chicago:** Navy Pier relies on entertainment anchors to attract over 8 million visitors per year.
- **San Francisco:** The Ferry Building connects downtown San Francisco to the waterfront, attracting over 6 million visitors per year.
- **London:** Covent Garden used strategic acquisitions to increase the significance of the property as the centerpiece of a cultural district.
- **New York City:** Chelsea Market's ground-floor market hall was created to attract businesses to the office space, which makes up most of the square footage. Retail businesses are required to be New York based.

Continue the All-Inclusive Boston tourism campaign promoting the diverse stories and attractions of the city to encourage more visitation, both locally and globally

Agency responsible:
 Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion;
 Mayor's Office;
 Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau;
 Office of Tourism, Sports, & Entertainment



GOAL

- To increase awareness and drive trips to Boston's neighborhoods from diverse local and international tourists; currently focused on driving increased visitors post COVID-19

IMPACT & RATIONALE

- The first phase of the All-Inclusive Boston campaign generated 57 million overall campaign impressions, 1.16 million video impressions, 400% increase in web traffic, and 1.1 million social media impressions¹³⁰

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- "All Inclusive Boston" is an industry campaign that showcases the Boston of today aiming to show the new generation of diverse entrepreneurs, innovators, and artists that encompass today's Boston
- The advertisements have been shown across Boston, Massachusetts, New England, and larger tri-state area
- The program was designed to help Boston's tourism industry (the city's third largest industry) recover from a 70% dip in tourism and an 80% dip in hotel revenue¹³¹
- In November 2021, The City announced the expansion of the All-Inclusive Boston campaign to build on the existing campaign and add marketing for the B-Local program to promote local holiday shopping
- Similarly in April 2022, The City announced the expansion of the All-Inclusive Boston campaign to help spur economic recovery from the pandemic in addition to helping reimagine how Boston is perceived globally and locally

Timeline

- First Phase launched April 2021
- The City extended for a second phase in Nov. 2021
- Mayor Wu extended the campaign in April 2022



CONCLUSION



We have outlined an ambitious plan to continue to support revitalization downtown and across Boston's neighborhoods. To achieve these goals, the City will look to you – our business, education, cultural, and non profit community organizations, and our residents – to be our partners, leveraging your own experience and expertise to support the continued vibrancy of our City. We believe that together, we can ensure the City will not only recover, but will flourish.

We see the resilience of Boston reflected in its downtown; and with it, a commitment from partners and community leaders to continue moving the City forward. Foot traffic is beginning to rebound as visitors return, weekend events and traffic are increasing, and office occupancy is beginning to rise as workers come back to collaborate in person. As we look toward the future, we see downtown as a hub for the City; a dynamic, inclusive community that welcomes all residents, workers, and visitors of all kinds to Boston.

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Endnotes

1. Daily average of foot traffic in the downtown region Jan-Jun 1, 2022
2. Compares weekly average of Jan-Jun 1, 2019, to Jan-Jun 1, 2022; Includes establishments that did not register any footfall in 2019 (e.g., establishments that were built or moved to the area between 2020-2022)
3. Footfall data based on entry to commercial venues, may exclude footfall to venues not registered (e.g., parks, residential buildings); Weekly average of Jan-Jun 1, 2019; Does not measure distinct people, measures all entries to unique establishments; Weekday v. weekend breakdown based on Jan-Jun 1, 2019
4. Strategic commercial hubs include Back Bay, Seaport and Fenway / Longwood
5. Downtown includes Financial District and West End; West End encompasses North Station and Beacon Hill
6. Daytime population measured in people (2020), office and retail measured in square feet (2022), residential measured in number of housing units (2020)
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9. Source: Census, 2020, BPDA Research Division Analysis
10. Footfall data based on entry to commercial venues, may exclude footfall to venues not registered (e.g., parks, residential buildings)
11. Compares weekly average of Jan-Jun 1, 2019 to Jan-Jun 1, 2022; Includes establishments that did not register any footfall in 2019 (e.g., establishments that were built or moved to the area between 2020-2022)
12. Downtown includes entire in-scope district (e.g., accounts for West End areas of MGH / North Station); Note: Footfall does not measure distinct people, measures all entries to unique establishments
13. Downtown defined as the Downtown BID district
14. Based on daily foot traffic measurements captured by the Boston BID pedestrian sensors; compares footfall from March 13 (day one of shutdown in Boston) through June 21 for sampled years (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) to maintain equal comparison; Source: Boston Downtown BID pedestrian sensors, 2019-2022
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20. Source: CoStar, 2015-2022, BPDA Research Division Analysis

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31. Based on 2010 and 2020 Census and number of residential units receiving a certificate of occupancy from Jan 2020 to July 2022
32. Downtown encompasses Financial District, South Station, Gov. Center and includes Leather District
33. West End includes residential space in addition to North Station / MGH
34. Pipeline defined as development projects under review by the BPDA board and BPDA article 80 approved projects that are not yet under construction; Source: BPDA Development Review development database, BPDA Research Division Analysis
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