



Central Square: Nurturing culture and community in Cambridge's downtown

Central/Kendall Square City Council roundtable . Goody Clancy . March 27, 2013

Central Square Plan roundtable

- Process
 - Foundations
 - Public engagement
- Community-based vision
- Framework
- Vision goals and strategies
 - A place for living
 - Public places to build community
 - Retail, cultural and non-profit diversity
 - Connecting people to the square
 - Leveraging investment
- Next steps



Red Ribbon Commission process

Conduct analysis (land use, building form, urban design, public space, transportation)

Develop draft plan strategies for each area of analysis

Vision



More than 20 Advisory Committee and public meetings

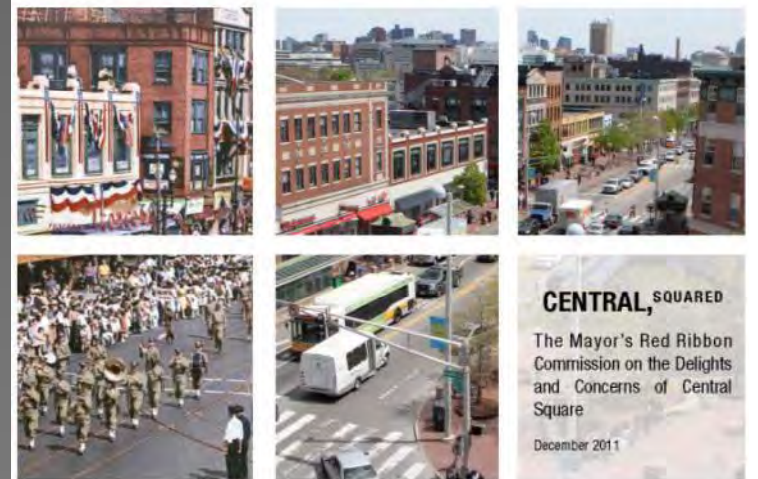
Executive summary by Advisory Committee

ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

NON-ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

VISION: community goals

- Preserve and enhance the Square's appeal to people from every walk of life and neighborhood.
- Celebrate and maintain the mix of old and new.
- Generate added diversity through more varied housing choices.
- Enrich the Square's public realm as place that invites community interaction at many levels



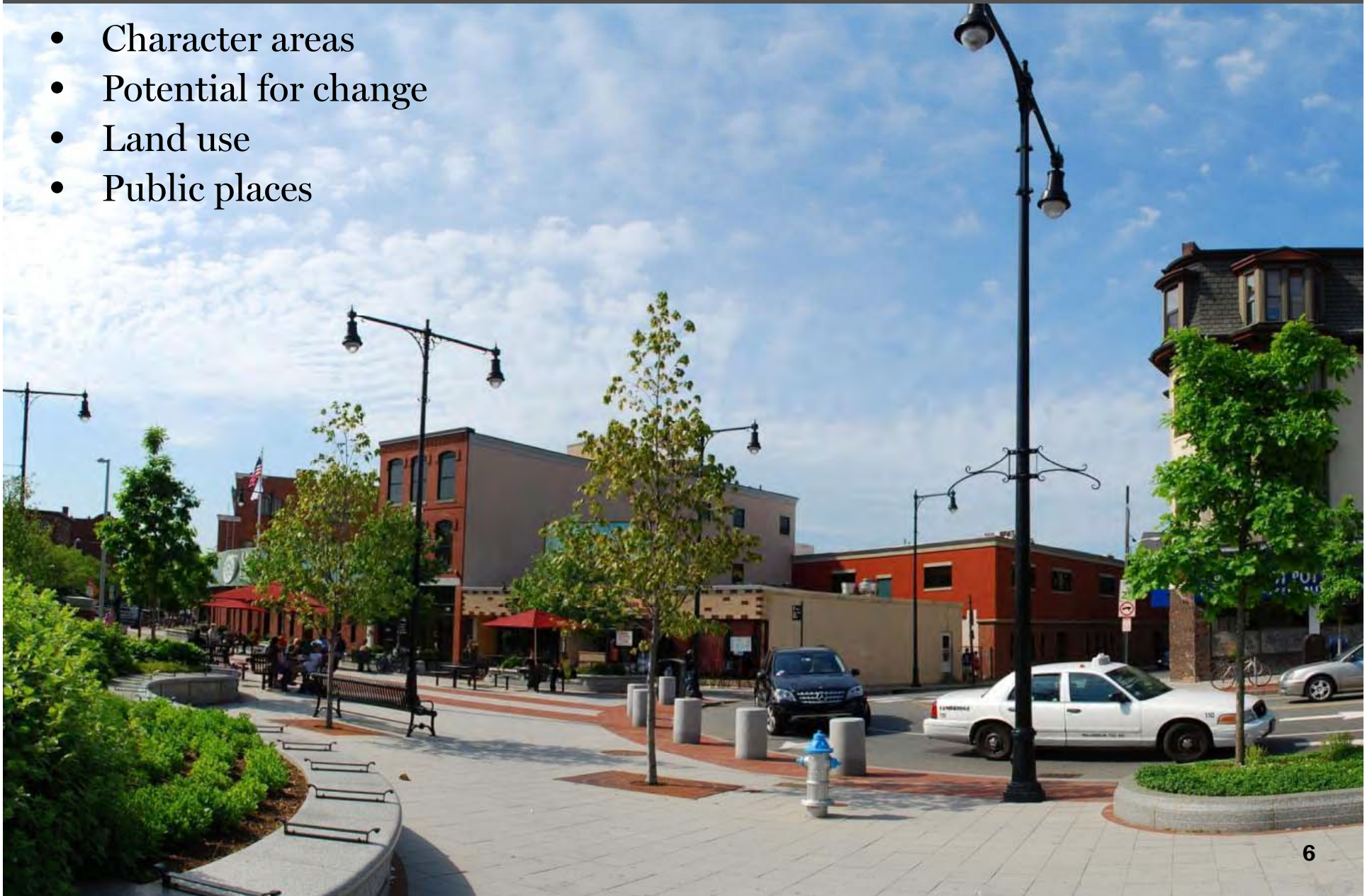
VISION: statement

Central Square is Cambridge's downtown and a center for nearby neighborhoods; a vibrant cultural district; a sustainable urban environment that invites people from all walks of life to shop, live, enjoy entertainment and the arts, find community together; and more.

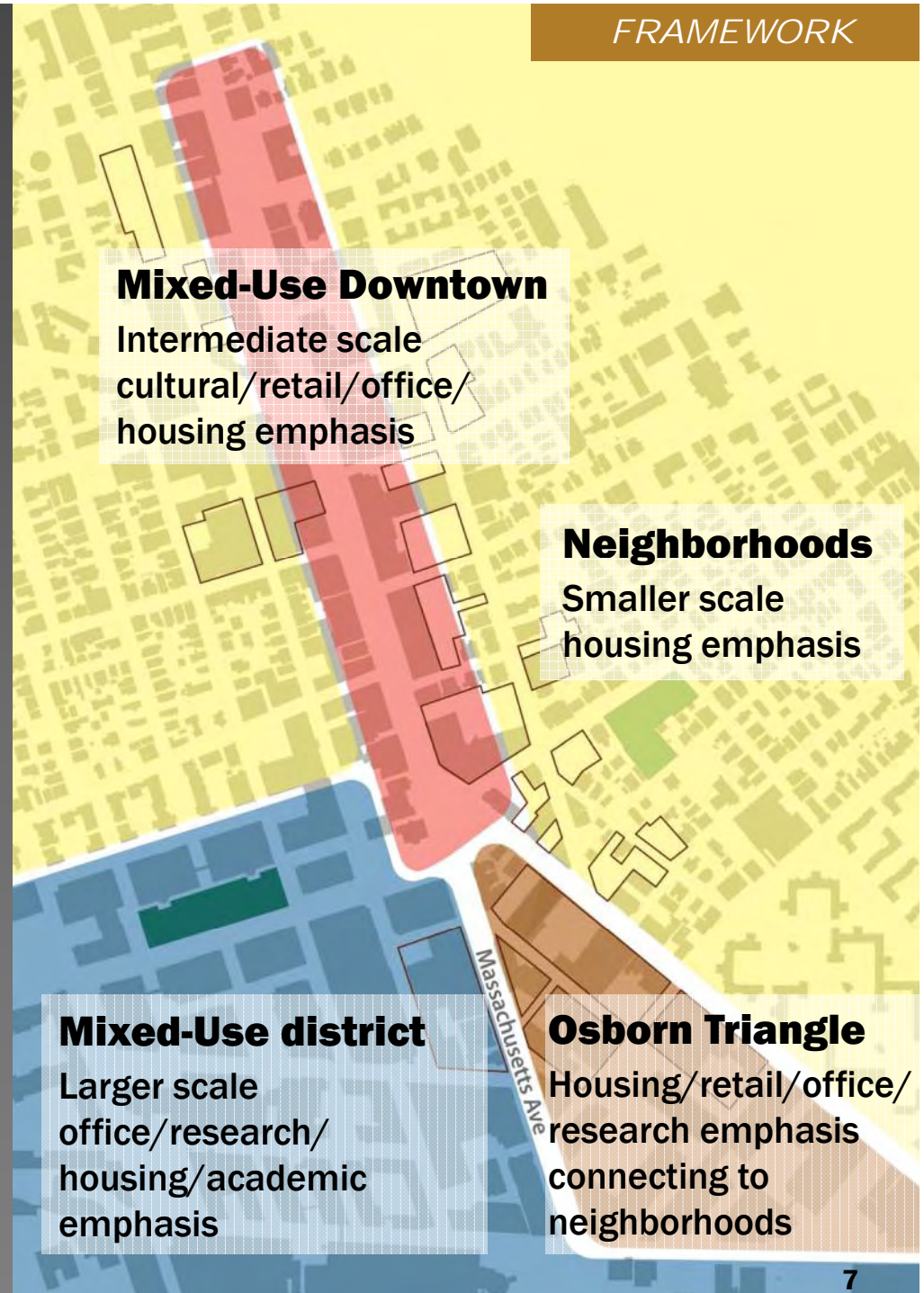



FRAMEWORK

- Character areas
- Potential for change
- Land use
- Public places



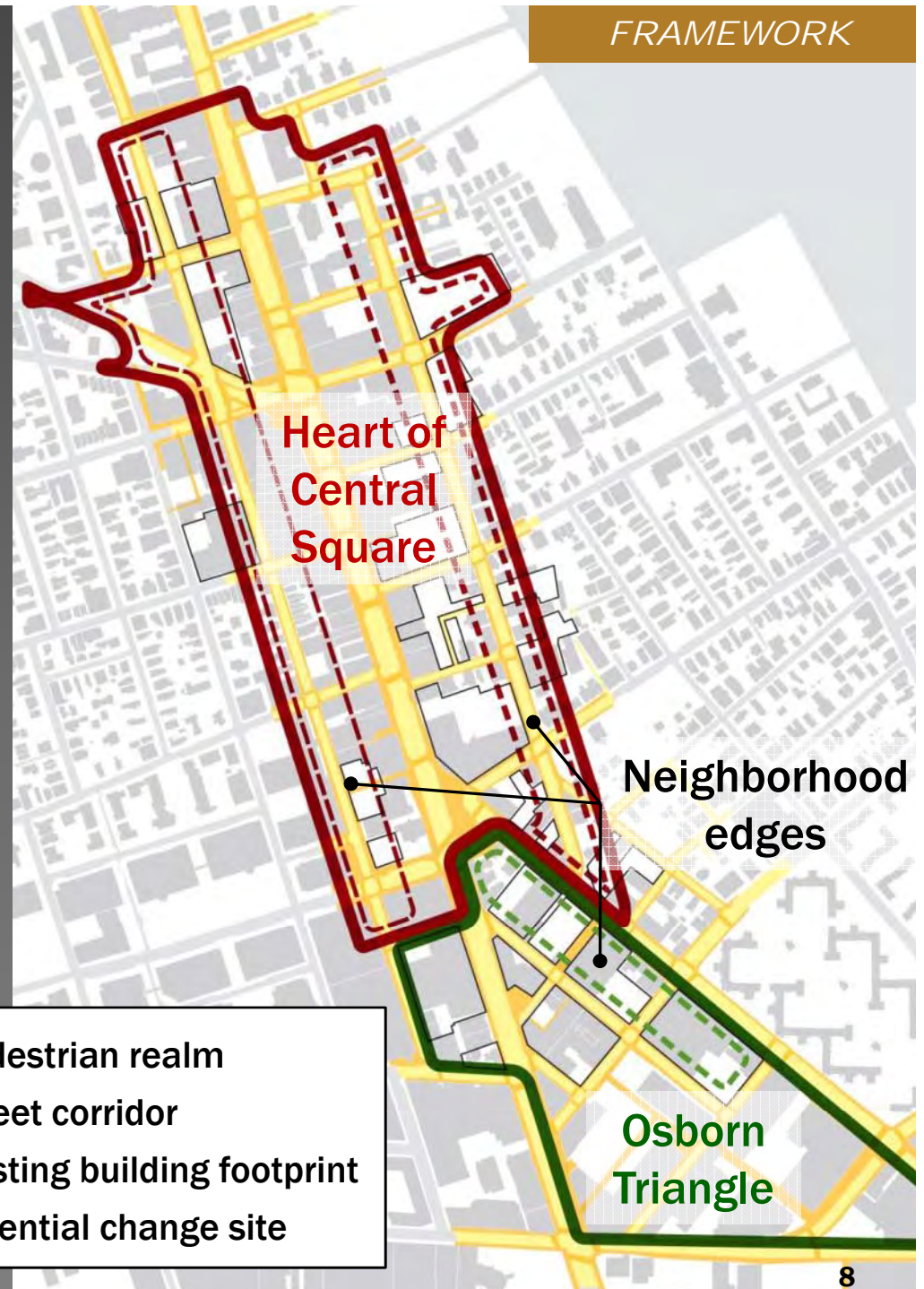
Context: character areas



 Potential change site

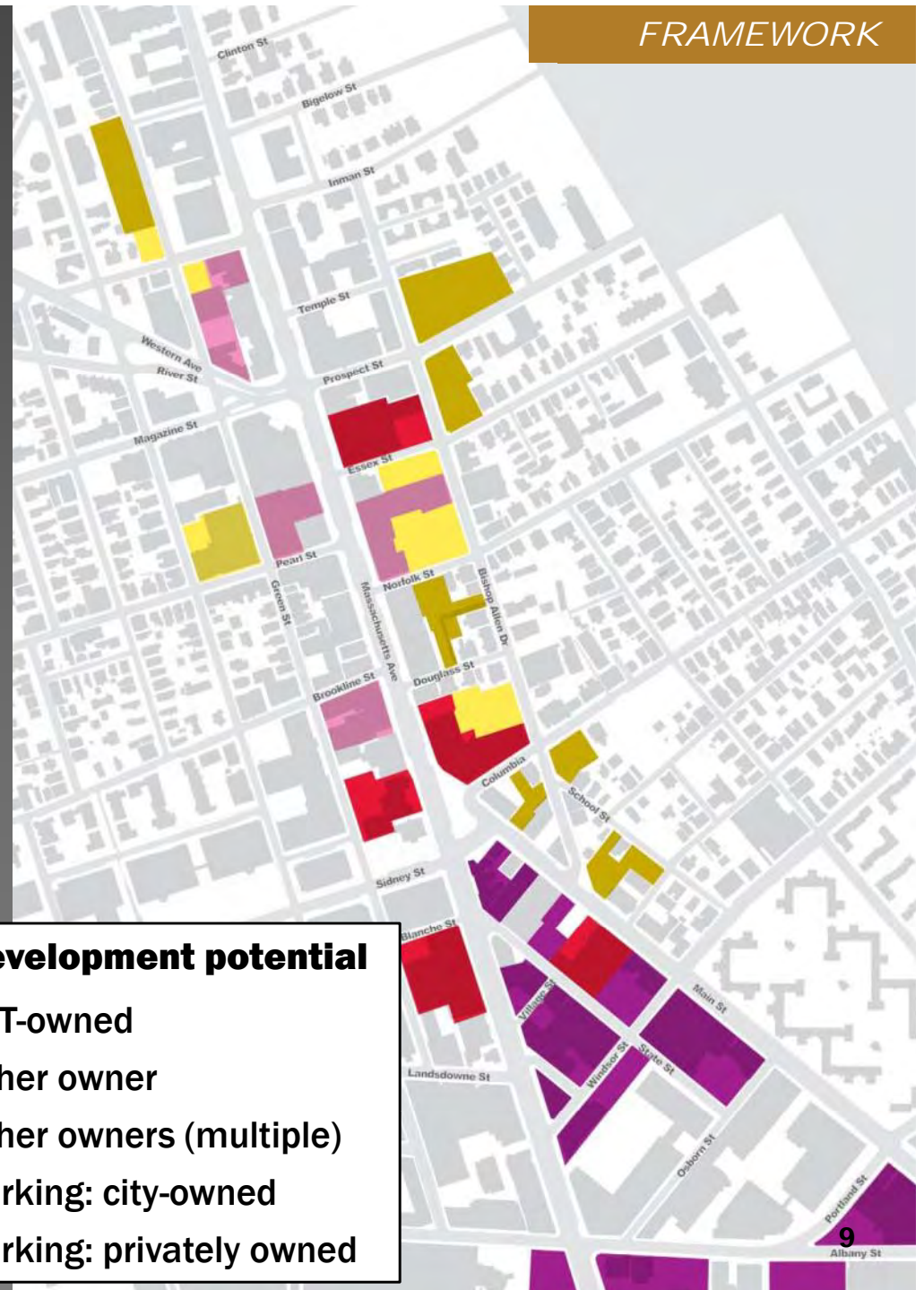
Character areas: revised concept

- Heart of Central Square
 - Mass Ave core
 - Green Street neighborhood edge
 - Bishop Allen neighborhood edge
- Osborn Triangle
 - Core area
 - Area 4 neighborhood edge



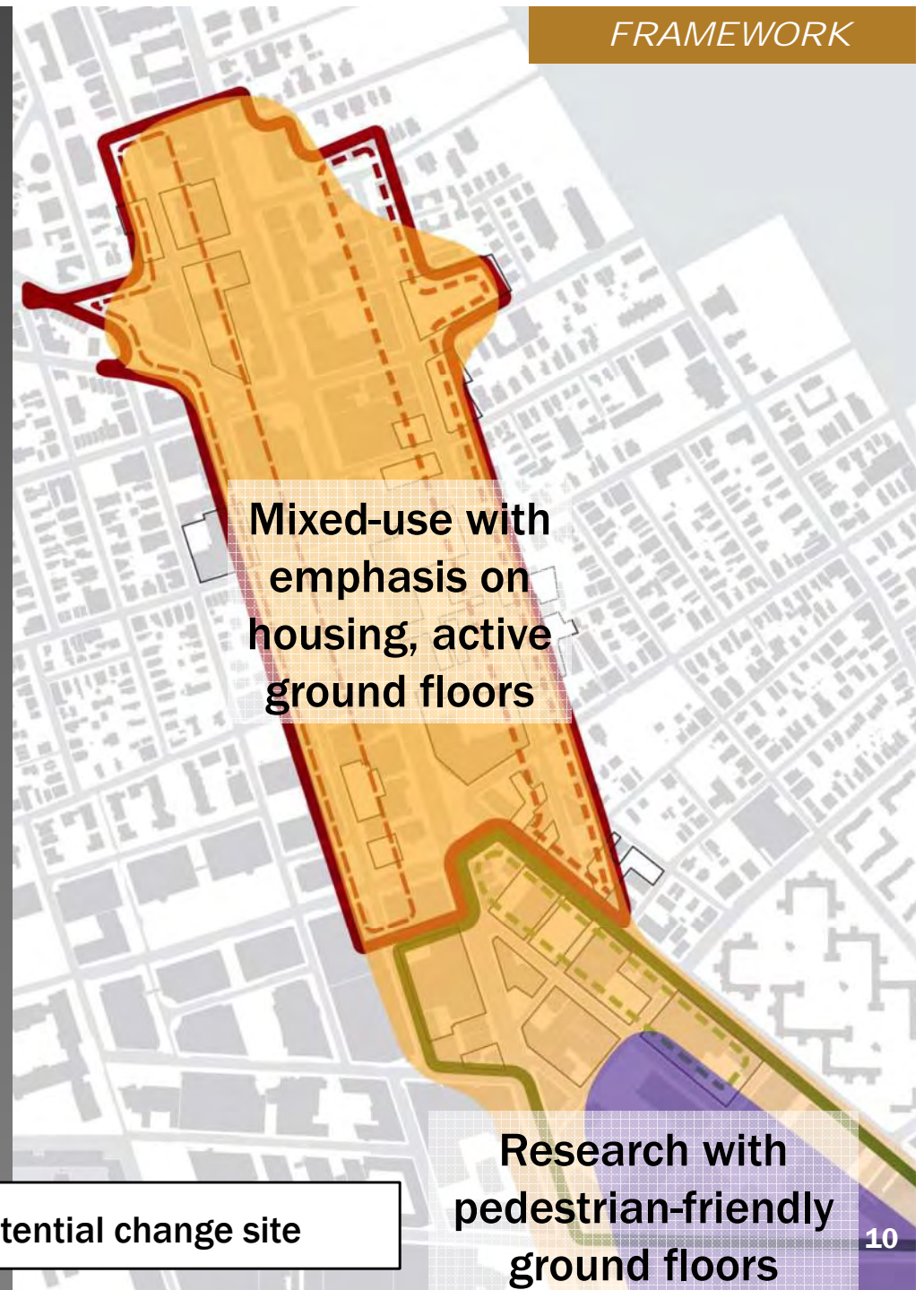
Sites with most potential for change

- Many sites *less* likely to change due to:
 - Actual or potential historic designation
 - Small size/fragmented ownership
- City parking lots are valued...
 - As potential (and current) public places
 - As potential housing sites
 - For potential to leverage other community benefits
 - For parking



Vision framework: land use

- Add or enhance ground floor active edges where needed
- Accommodate a lively mix of uses
 - Prioritize housing on upper floors
 - Encourage non-profit office/business use
 - Generally limit large-scale research uses west of Windsor Street corridor
- Accommodate comfortable use and scale transitions between study area and adjacent neighborhoods



VISION GOALS & STRATEGIES

A PLACE FOR LIVING



CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE



PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY



RETAIL/CULTURAL/NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY



To achieve the vision goals, **LEVERAGE FUTURE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INVESTMENTS**, as appropriate.

Goals

A PLACE FOR LIVING

Increase housing stock and support community diversity through more varied housing choices

OBJECTIVE

- Expand housing stock and increase the range of housing choices to serve a broad spectrum of incomes, ages and household sizes



Encourage new mixed-income housing

- Reduce obsolete parking requirements for housing and commercial uses to enable infill development
- Continue inclusionary housing policy
- Add middle income housing incentives
- Encourage more housing in Osborn Triangle and on former Quest block, with sensitive neighborhood connections



Goals

PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY

Leverage city owned property and new development partnerships to enrich the Square's public realm as place that promotes community interaction

OBJECTIVES

- Establish Massachusetts Avenue as a great public place
- Add and improve public spaces to invite a broader range of community activities
- Intensify programming of public spaces within the Central Square Cultural District to provide opportunities for community activity, celebrating cultural diversity and the arts
- Ensure positive relationship of new development to public space



What makes a great community place?



MORE INTERACTIVE ◀ ▶ **MORE PERSONAL**

Festival

Parks

Outdoor dining

A place to sit
with a friend

Enjoying
public art

A network of active public spaces anchored by one great downtown street

Opportunities to improve, expand public spaces

- Existing sidewalks
 - Mass Ave core area
 - Side streets
- Existing parks and plazas
- New park/plaza opportunities
 - City parking lots
 - Private redevelopment sites, through incentives
- New “public room”



Public realm framework

- Major spaces and squares
- Mass Ave.
- Public room
- Programming
- Parklets
- Improved edges and streetscapes



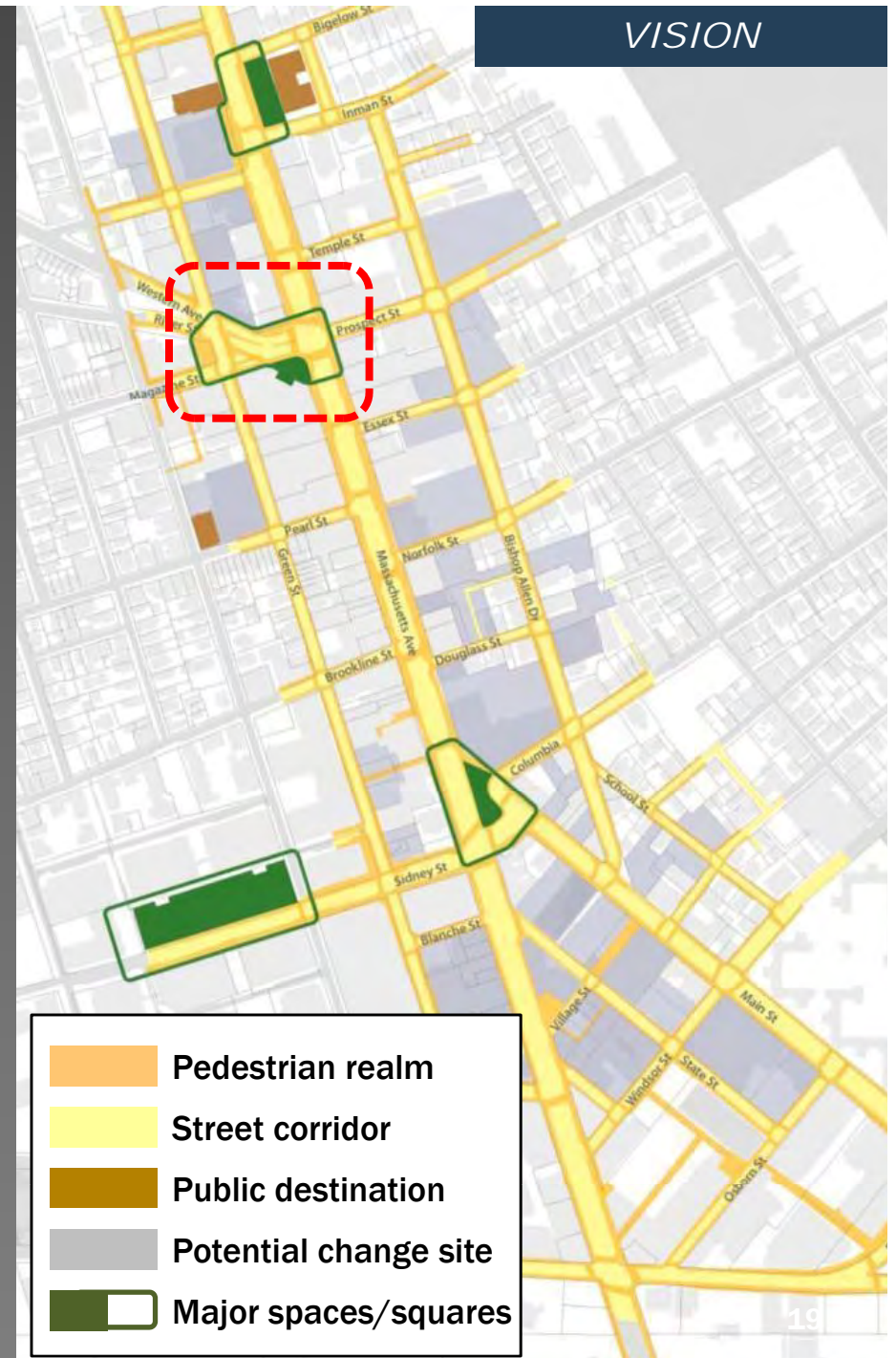
Major spaces



Major spaces: Carl Barron Plaza

Possible concepts

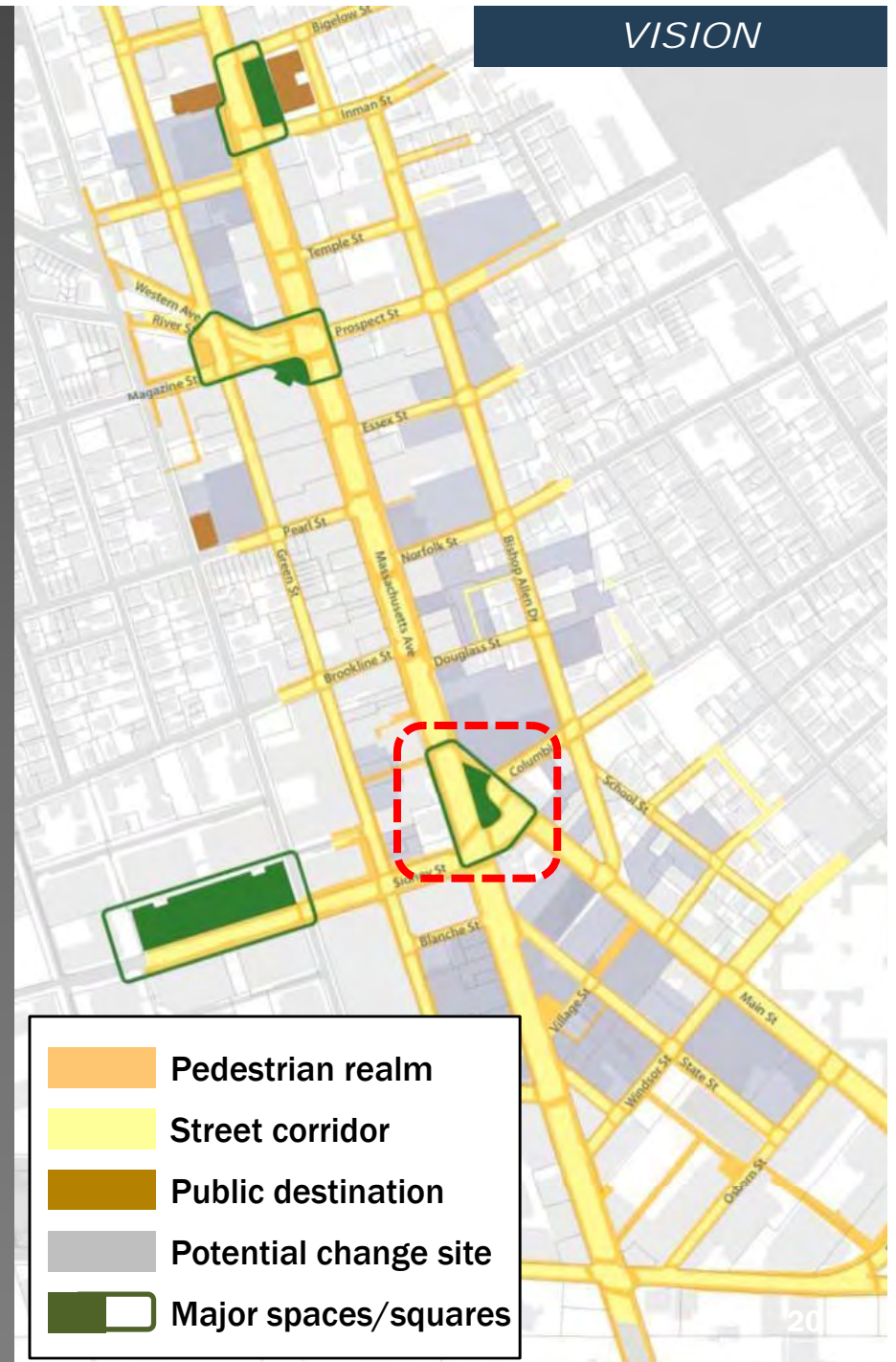
- More open layout for flexible programming (*city*)
- Widen Magazine St sidewalk (*city initiative, MBTA coordination*)
- Expand programmed events (*city/CSBA*)
- Improve active uses across Western Ave. and Green St. (*parklets; city coordinate with Western Ave. streetscape improvements*)
- More active occupancy along Holmes Building (*city work with owner to add interim or permanent active use*)



Major spaces: Jill Brown-Rhone Park

Possible concepts

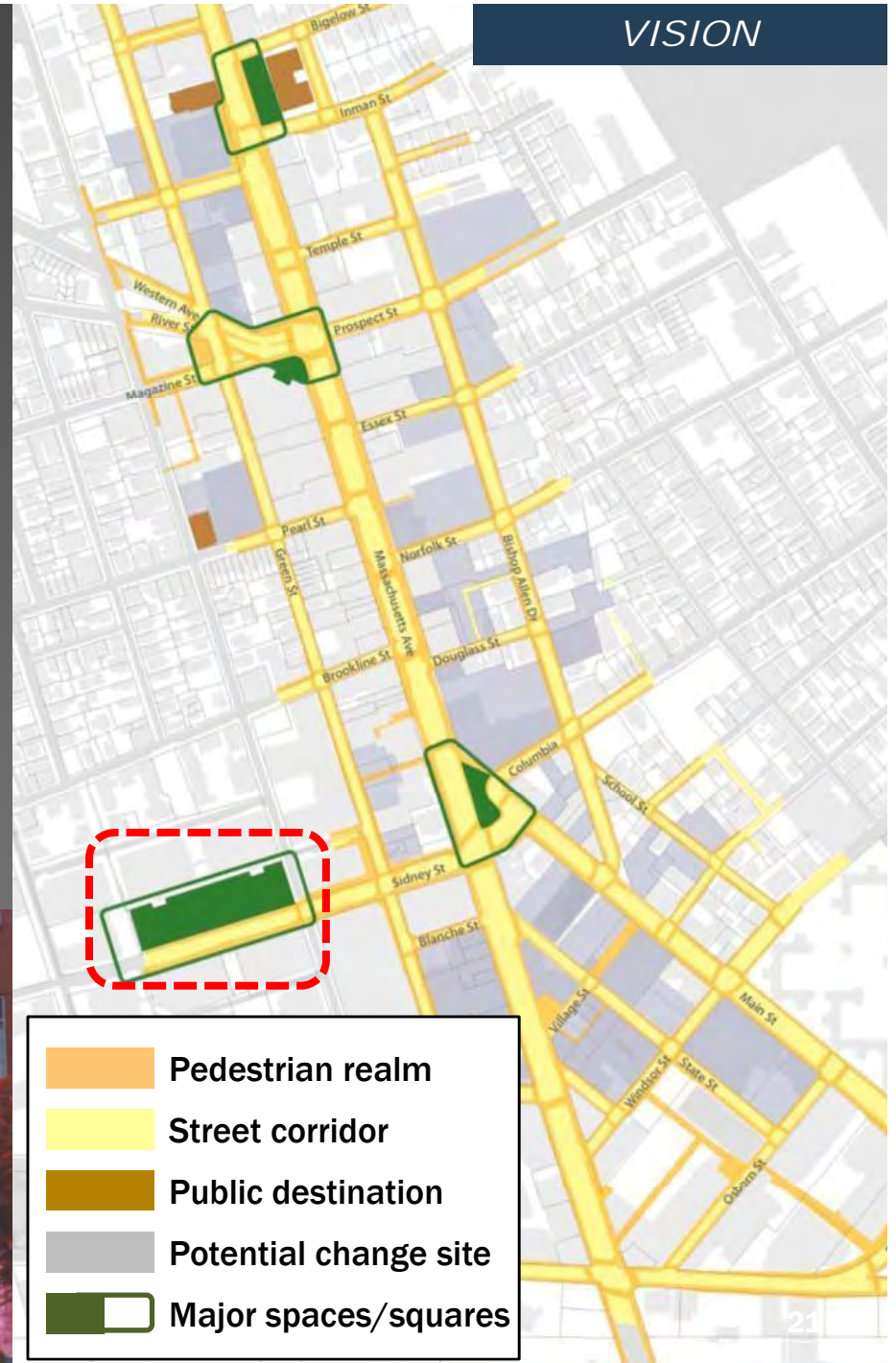
- Continue/expand programmed events (*CSBA, CAC etc.*)
- More active occupancy along former Quest frontage, and across Mass Ave and Sidney Street (*condition of redevelopment*)
- Add spatial element (e.g. trellis, stage) toward Sidney St to buffer traffic, add human scale, host programmed activity (*city/CAC*)



Major spaces: University Park Common

Possible concepts

- Continue/expand programmed events, including kids' activities (*CSBA, neighborhoods, Forest City...*)
- Add wayfinding signage from Mass Ave and other directions (*city/CSBA*)
- Promote more active ground floor uses along Sidney Street (*city, CSBA work with Forest City; leverage proposed 300 Mass Ave redevelopment*)



Mass Ave

Possible concepts

- Add signature design elements through plantings, signage, lighting etc.
- Add outdoor dining and parklets in underutilized spaces and/or through redevelopment
- Add public art including opportunities for play and signature transit information signage
- Incent consistent edge of active and small-format retail storefronts
- Add trees and/or flowers in planters where in-ground planting impossible



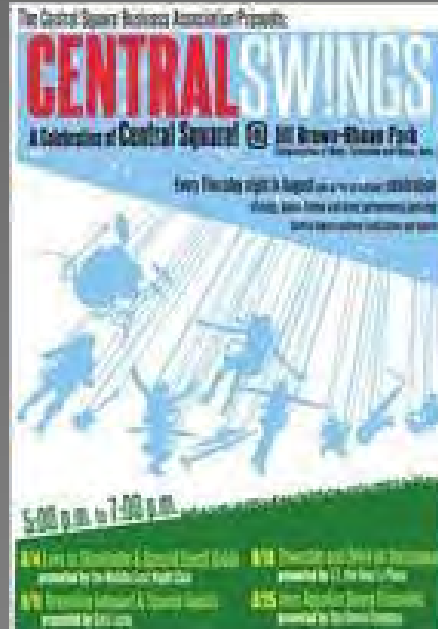
Public room

- Programmed events
- Informal use
- Potential for market stalls
- Active street edge



Programming

- Events programming in major spaces, from buskers to festivals (*CSBA, CAC, others*)
 - Central Swings
 - Taste of Cambridge
 - Street festivals
- Public art and play installations (*CAC, CSBA, cultural organizations in the square*)



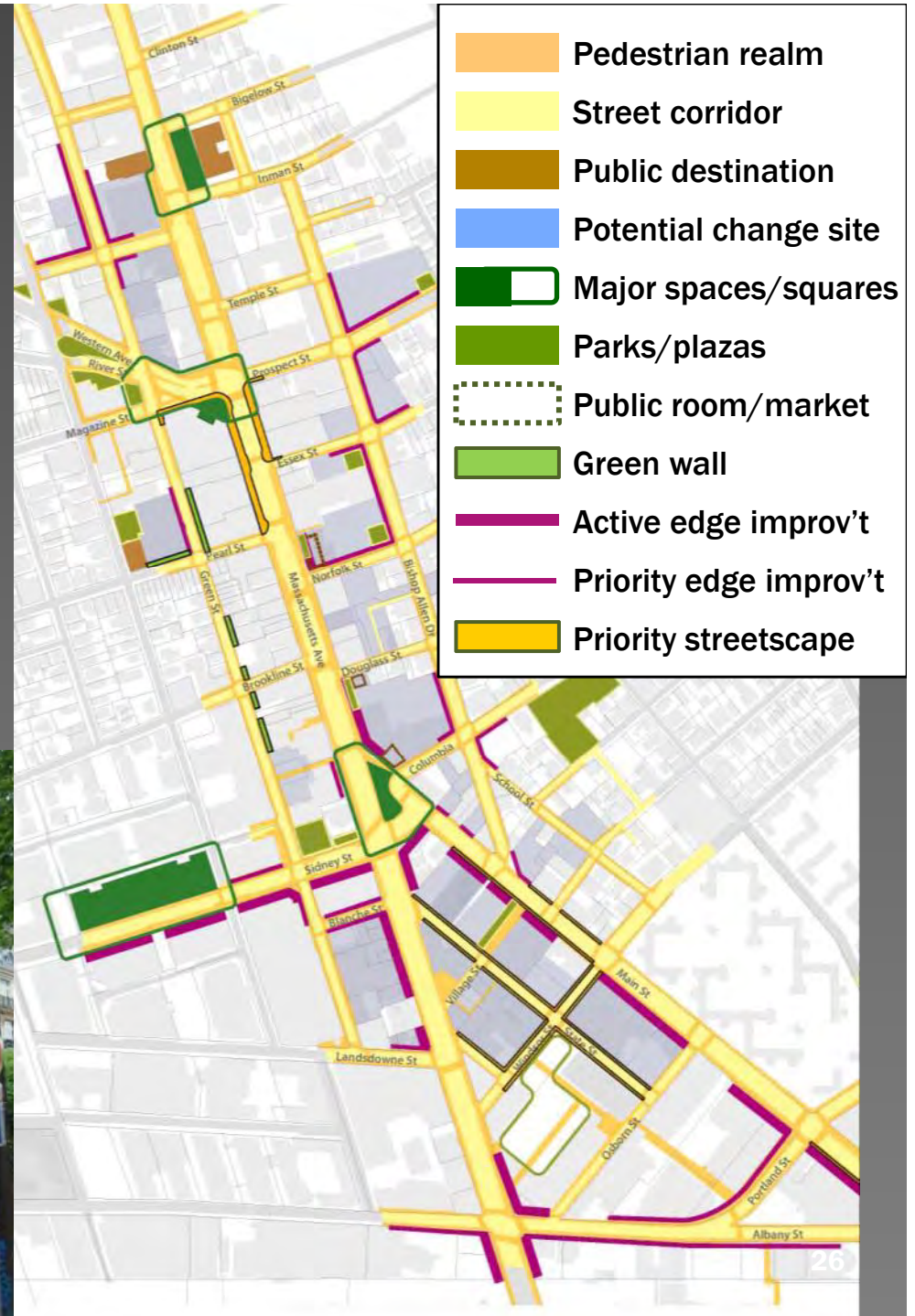
Parklets

- Compact area: 10-20 feet to any side
- Quickly installed, limited cost
- Funding, management, design and inspiration by potential business/organization partners



Improved edges and streetscapes

- Mass Ave and Main Street: active ground level uses where lacking
- Trees/flowers in planters where in-ground planting not possible
- Occupied spaces and/or green edges along parking lots
- Green walls along parking structures, other blank walls with southern exposure



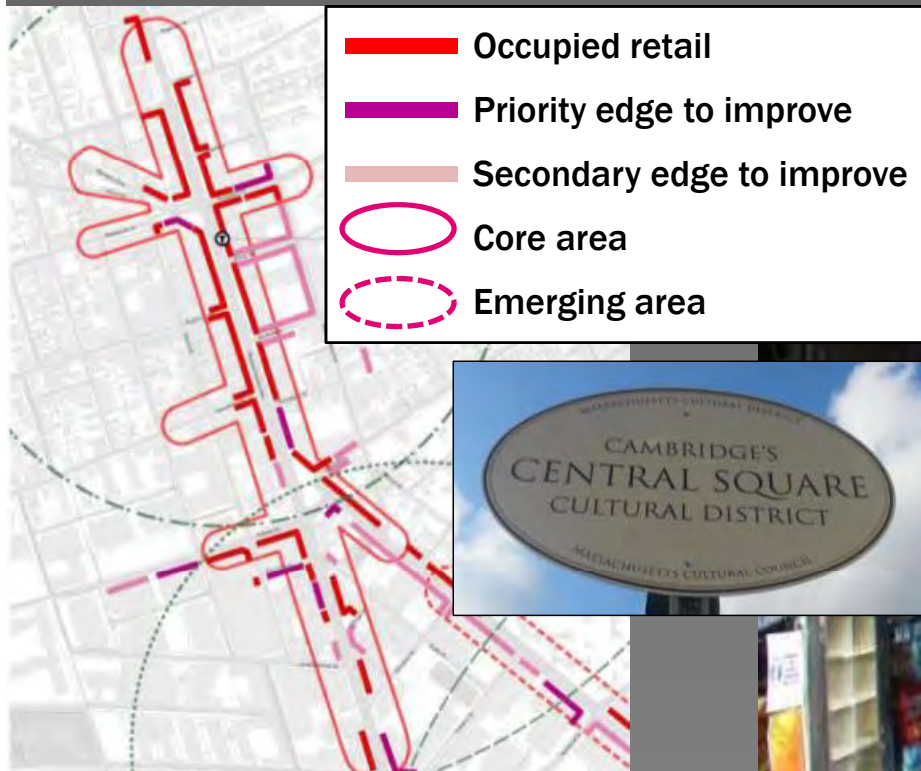
Goals

RETAIL, CULTURAL AND NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY

Expand retail & entertainment opportunities while celebrating and nurturing the mix of old and new, venerable and funky businesses and cultural institutions

OBJECTIVES

- Reinforce the Central Square Cultural District as a vibrant retail and cultural destination for nearby neighborhoods and the city
- Support an attractive and vibrant walking environment by keeping retail storefronts continuously occupied with active uses



Size new retail for small and local business

- Exempt new ground floor retail space from counting toward density limits
- Size at least 1/3 of space for small businesses, and no more than 1/3 of space for larger businesses
- Prevent “formula retail” chains by discouraging deeper floorplates, use of disposable serveware etc.
- Remove “fast food cap” to enable more small food/beverage shops



Minimum one-third of space



Maximum one-third of space

Encourage side-street retail and services

- On selected side streets, require ground floor space to be convertible to retail (adequate ceiling height, accessibility, services, storefront)
- Where retail has limited market potential, encourage child care, arts uses, non-profit office space and similar community-serving uses by exempting these ground floor uses from density limits



Child care in downtown setting



Flexibility for retail, small business, live-work

Create market stalls

- Provide small and local businesses a low-cost presence in the Square
- Verify costs, feasibility and management of small market stall rental to merchants
- Locate the market stalls in a highly visible, marketable area with significant passing pedestrian traffic, possibly integrated with Public Room
- Consider expansion of current farmer's market/winter market program.
- Consider using temporarily vacant storefronts per winter market precedent



Outdoor market (North Market, Columbus)



Winter market in former Blockbuster store ³⁰

Continue façade improvement grants

Before



After



Proactively keep storefronts occupied

- Require property owners to work with city, CSBA and/or local non-profits to fill storefronts vacant 6 months with public art, temporary or “pop-up” retail, non-profit business use, or other occupancy that contributes to overall economic prosperity and character of the Square
- Establish convenient mechanisms to help temporarily fund insurance, utilities and/or related costs that may impede short-term occupancy



Temporary retail



Winter market in former Blockbuster store

Continue, expand CSBA initiatives

- Promote Cultural District identity through branding, events, streetscape etc.
- Connect customers/visitors to businesses, organizations and events
- Organize public events featuring local businesses, organizations, artists
- Monitor/share data on retail occupancy, inventory to aid priority tenanting
- Explore feasibility and desirability of Business Improvement District to enhance management capacity



Goals

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE

Enrich neighborhood walkability and livability with safe, green streets and improved access choices.

OBJECTIVES

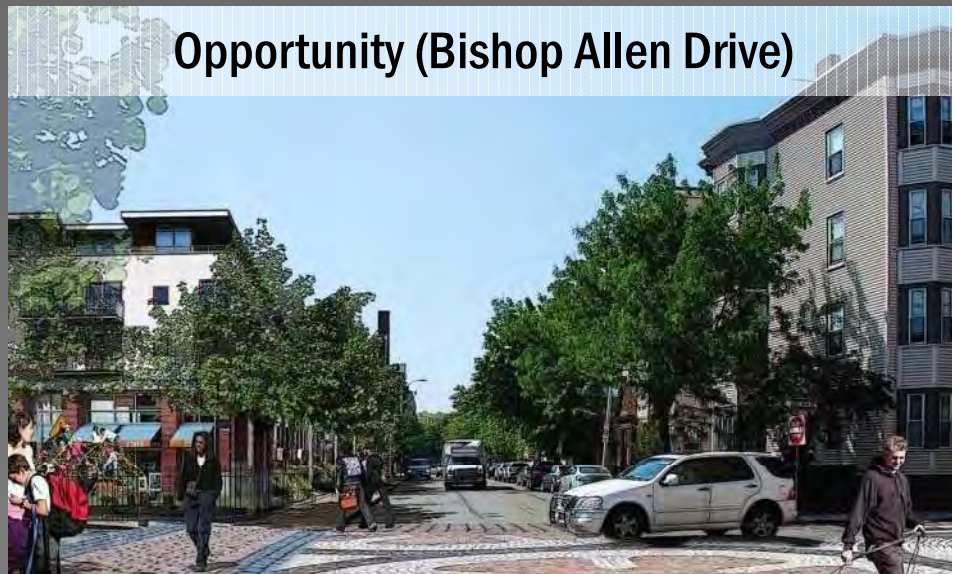
- Enhance the street network to make walking and biking more convenient, safe and fun
- Maintain and improve a variety of good transportation choices
- Update parking requirements to reflect increased preferences for alternatives to driving
- Add plantings and green infrastructure to encourage a healthier environment



Enhance side street walkability

Proposed concepts

- Scale and use transition from Central Square to neighborhoods
- Potential transformation of parking lots into housing and public spaces
- Locally produced art in public spaces
- Rain gardens serving aesthetic and stormwater functions
- Green plantings on blank walls



Improved wayfinding and connections

- New connections
- New wayfinding signage
 - Identity
 - Orientation
 - Events/information



Potential Mass Ave-State-Main connection



Goals

LEVERAGE FUTURE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INVESTMENTS, as appropriate

Mitigate neighborhood impacts.

OBJECTIVES

- Apply criteria to achieve community benefits if city parking lots are redeveloped
- Continue to promote sustainability in planning, design, and development



Leverage city parking lots as a unique benefit opportunity

- Consider opportunities for affordable housing, retail, public open space
- Ensure sensitive transition to neighborhoods
- Address ongoing public parking needs



Foster a sustainable future for central square

- Encourage smart growth
 - Mix of uses
 - Emphasize housing within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of Central Square station
- Encourage walking, biking, transit use, car-sharing
- Regularly update sustainable development standards to the state of the art. Selected new thresholds include:
 - LEED Gold for commercial development
 - Energy use tracking
 - District steam feasibility analysis (Osborn Triangle)
 - Cool (green or white) roofs
 - On-site low-impact stormwater management



Update building form policy to enhance quality of place while adding residents and businesses

- Ensure mix of lower and taller buildings along Mass Ave with guidelines and floor size limits
- Continue policy of stepping building volumes down toward neighborhoods along side streets
- Consider raising height limits from 80' to 140'-160' to encourage housing and other community benefits
- Enable transfer of development rights to encourage housing along Mass Ave and in Osborn Triangle while keeping densities lower near neighborhoods
- Update design guidelines

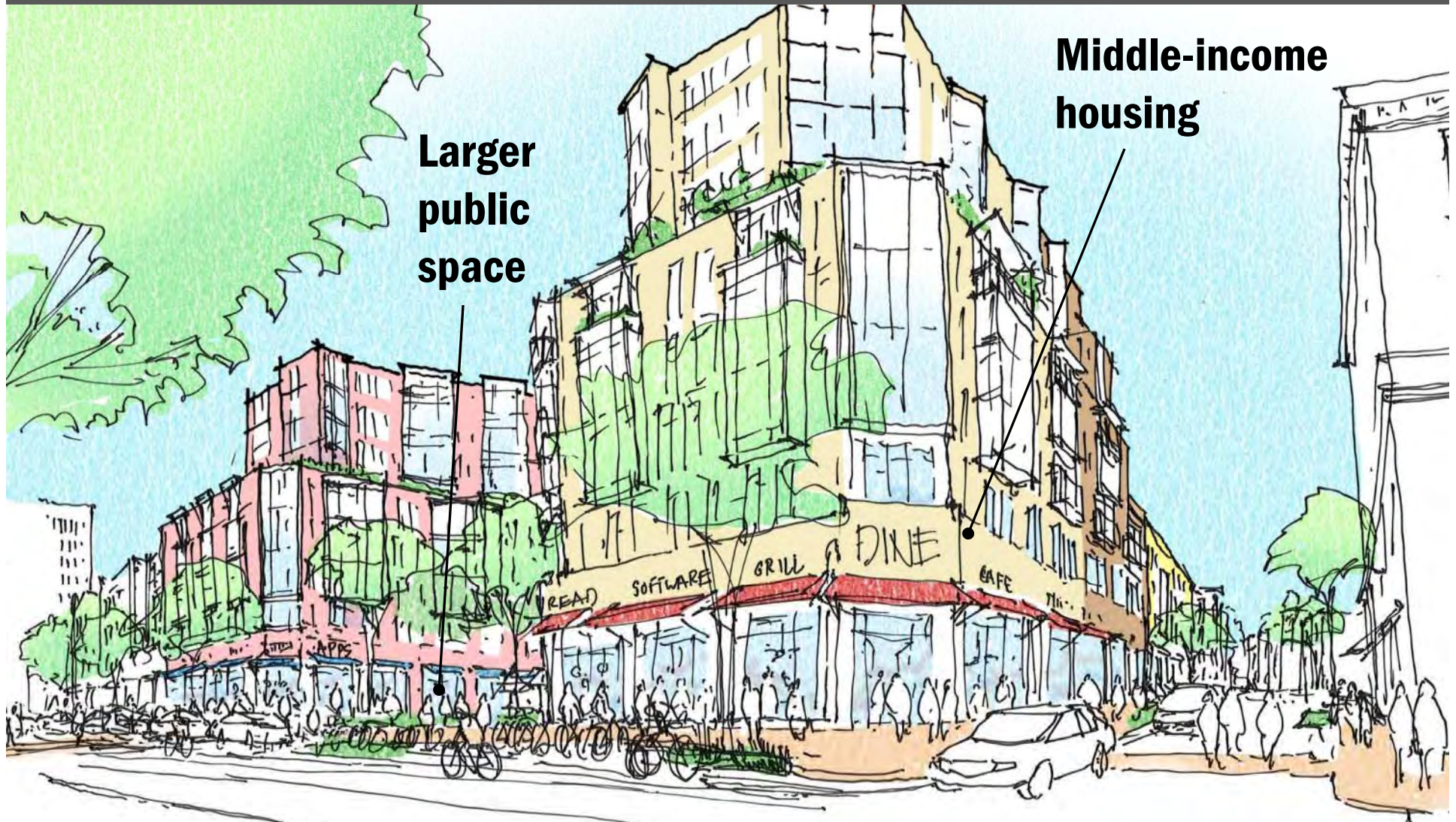


Opportunity: current height and density limits



Today: 55-60' façade height limit at Mass Ave. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.

Opportunity: moderate density and height increase

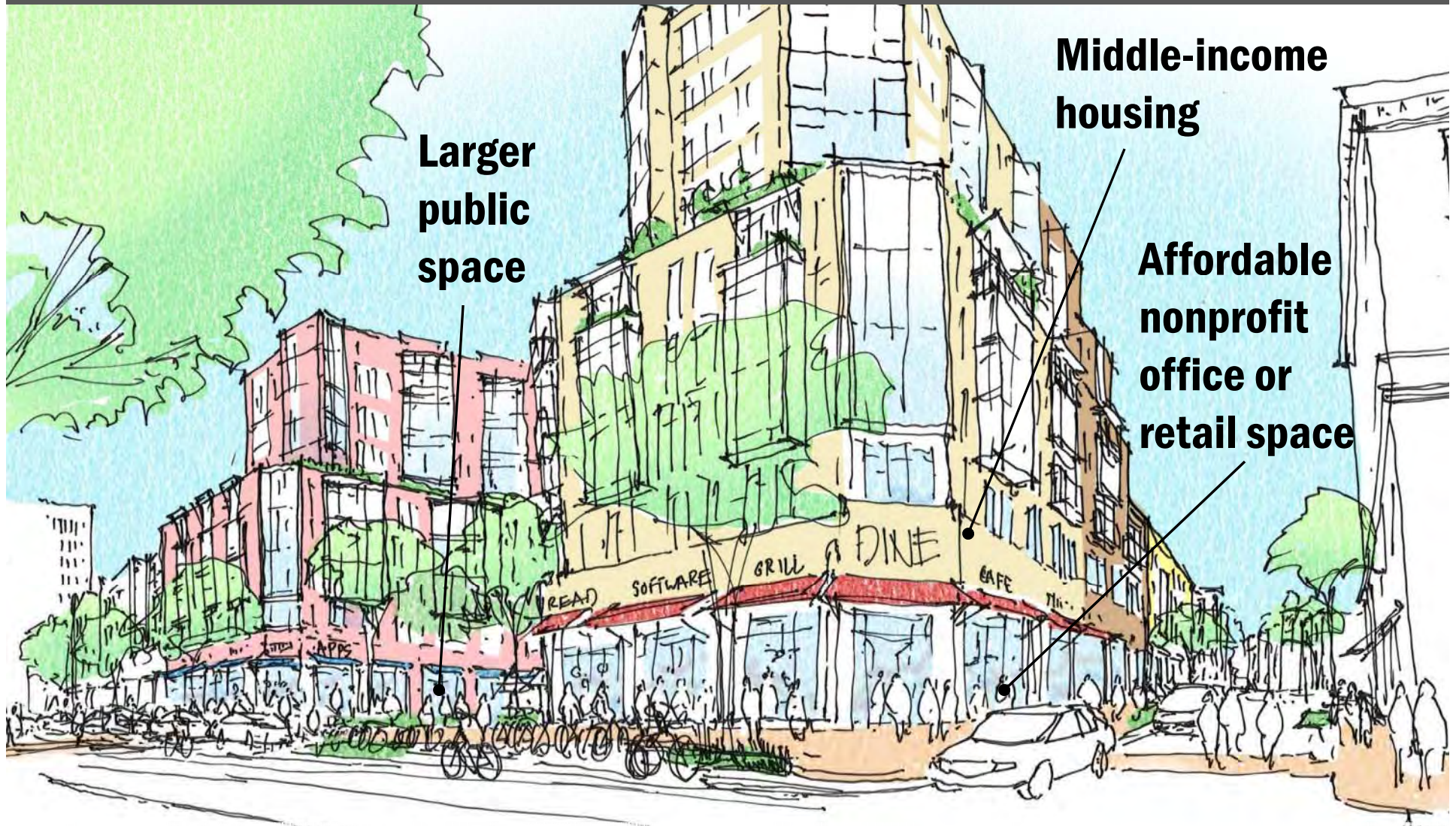


Larger
public
space

Middle-income
housing

Retain 55-60' façade height limit at Mass Ave.; additional height set back and spaced out

Opportunity: greater density and height increase



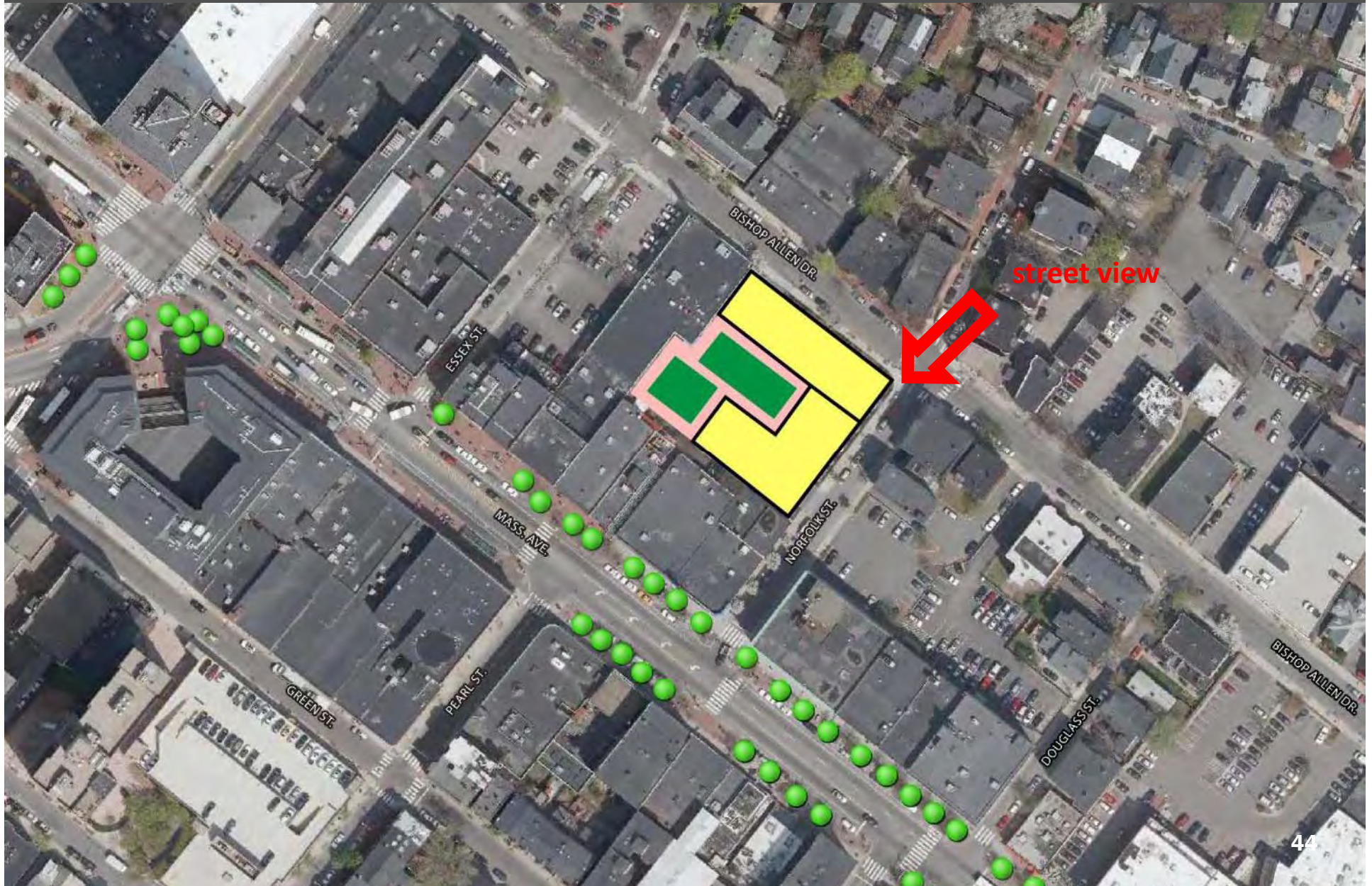
**Larger
public
space**

**Middle-income
housing**

**Affordable
nonprofit
office or
retail space**

Retain 55-60' façade height limit at Mass Ave.; additional height set back and spaced out

Neighborhood view: Norfolk St. at Bishop Allen



Opportunity: current height and density limits

Existing Street View



Opportunity: current height and density limits

Redevelopment at Naggar Property only



© 2012 Google Report a problem Image Date: July 2007

45' façade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.

Opportunity: current height and density limits

New Development at City Parking Lot 5



45' façade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.

Opportunity: current density, increased height

New Development at City Parking Lot 5 + Naggar site



© 2012 Google Report a problem Image Date: July 2007

45' façade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.

Opportunity: bonus density, increased height

New Development at City Parking Lot 5 + Naggar site



© 2012 Google Report a problem Image Date: July 2007

45' façade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.

Bishop Allen at Norfolk St.



Bishop Allen at Norfolk St.



City parking lot 5 today



45' façade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.

City parking lot 5 with housing over storefronts



45' façade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.

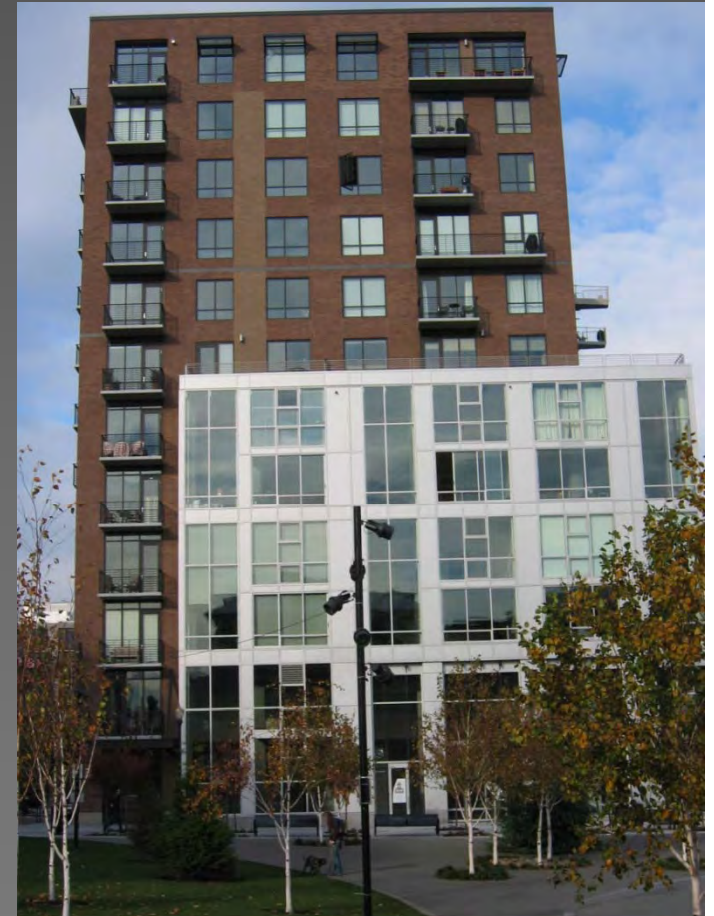
City parking lot 5 with housing and public park



45' façade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.

Update building form policy to enhance quality of place while adding residents and businesses

- Ensure mix of lower and taller buildings along Mass Ave with guidelines and floor size limits
- Continue policy of stepping building volumes down toward neighborhoods along side streets
- Consider raising height limits from 80' to 140'-160' to encourage housing and other community benefits
- Enable transfer of development rights to encourage housing along Mass Ave and in Osborn Triangle while keeping densities lower near neighborhoods
- Update design guidelines



DISCUSSION

A PLACE FOR LIVING



PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE



RETAIL/CULTURAL/NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY



To achieve the vision goals, **LEVERAGE FUTURE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INVESTMENTS**, as appropriate.