



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

Red Ribbon Commission process

(2010 – 2011)

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

Develop draft plan strategies for each area of analysis



**More than 20
Advisory
Committee and
public meetings**

Vision

**Executive summary letter by
Advisory Committee**

(Nov 2011 – Nov 2012)

**ZONING
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**NON-ZONING
RECOMMENDATIONS**

(2013 onward)

Committee

- Patrick W. Barrett III (Sean Casey LLC, Resident)
- Anya Alexandra Bear (MIT)
- Mark Boyes-Watson (Resident)
- Kathryn Lachelt Brown (Forest City)
- Kara Cournoyer (Novartis)
- Susan Fleischmann (CCTV, Resident)
- Josh Gerber (1369 Coffeehouse)
- Randa Ghattas (Resident)
- Nicholas Haney (Intercontinental Real Estate)
- Esther Hanig (Resident)
- Ming-Tai Huh (Resident)
- Gavin W. Kleespies (Resident, Cambridge Historical Society)
- Robin Lapidus (Central Square Business Association)
- Morris Naggar (3MJ Realty)
- Heather Nelson (Resident)
- Ahmed Nur (Planning Board, Resident)
- Patrick Rowe (MIT)
- Loryn Sheffner (Resident)
- Michael Simon (Central Property Owner)
- Saul Tannenbaum (Resident)
- Gail Willett (Resident)

VISION GOALS & STRATEGIES

A PLACE FOR LIVING



PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY



CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE



RETAIL/CULTURAL/NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY



Goals

A PLACE FOR LIVING

Increase housing stock and support community diversity through more varied housing

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 and **enable infill** development
- Continue **inclusionary housing policy**
- Add **middle income housing** incentives
- Encourage more housing in **Osborn Triangle** and on former **Quest block**, include 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



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
- Improved edges and streetscapes
- Programming



Major spaces



Mass Ave

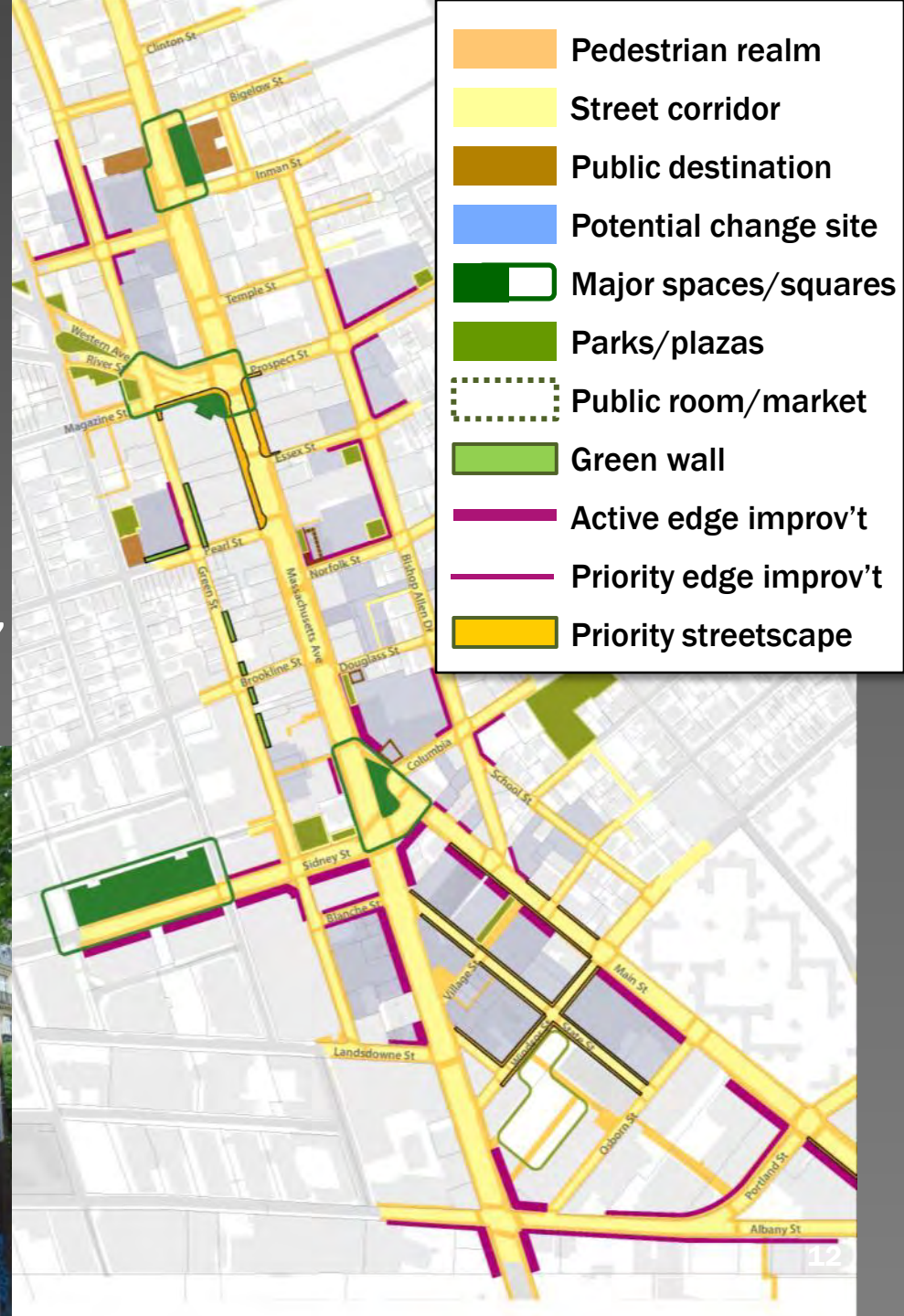
Possible concepts

- 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



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



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*)



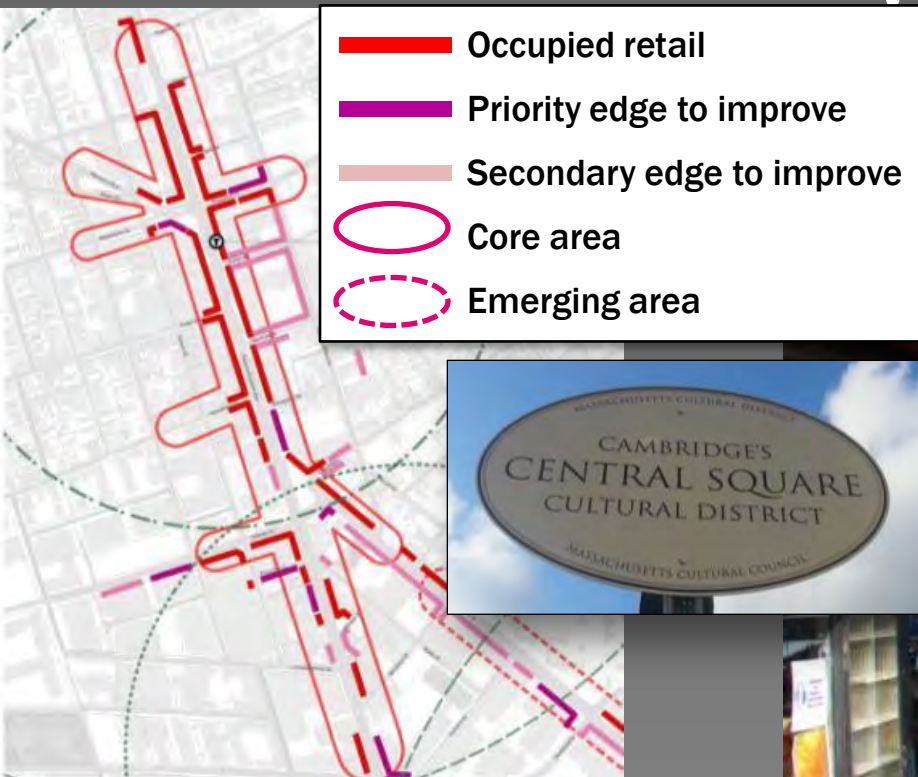
Goals

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
- Enable valued businesses and non-profit organizations to get started and maintain a long-term presence in the study area



Size new retail for small and local business

- Exempt new ground floor retail space from counting toward **density limits**
- Encourage floorplates that will not appeal to large businesses and are conducive **for small businesses**
- Manage “**formula retail**”
- Remove “**fast food cap**” to enable **more small food/beverage shops**



Encourage side-street cultural/non-profit space

- 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)



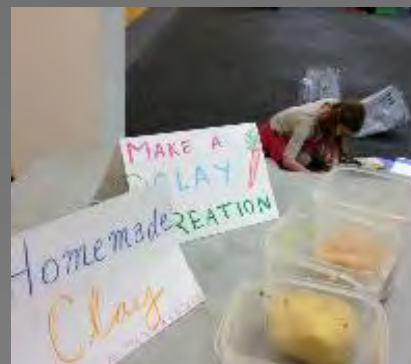
C2W market in former Blockbuster space

Proactively keep storefronts occupied

- 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 and events, 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

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

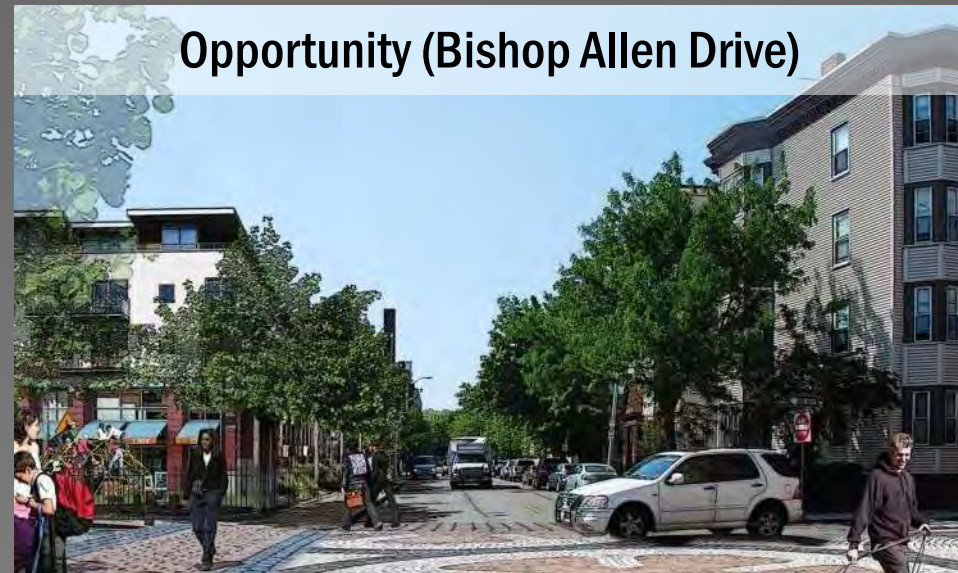
Proposed concepts

- 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

Today (Green Street)



Opportunity (Bishop Allen Drive)



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

- Opportunities for affordable housing, retail, public open space
- Ensure sensitive transition to neighborhoods
- Address ongoing public parking needs if redeveloping parking lots



Foster a sustainable future for central square

- Encourage **smart growth**
 - Mix of uses
 - Emphasize housing within ½ 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



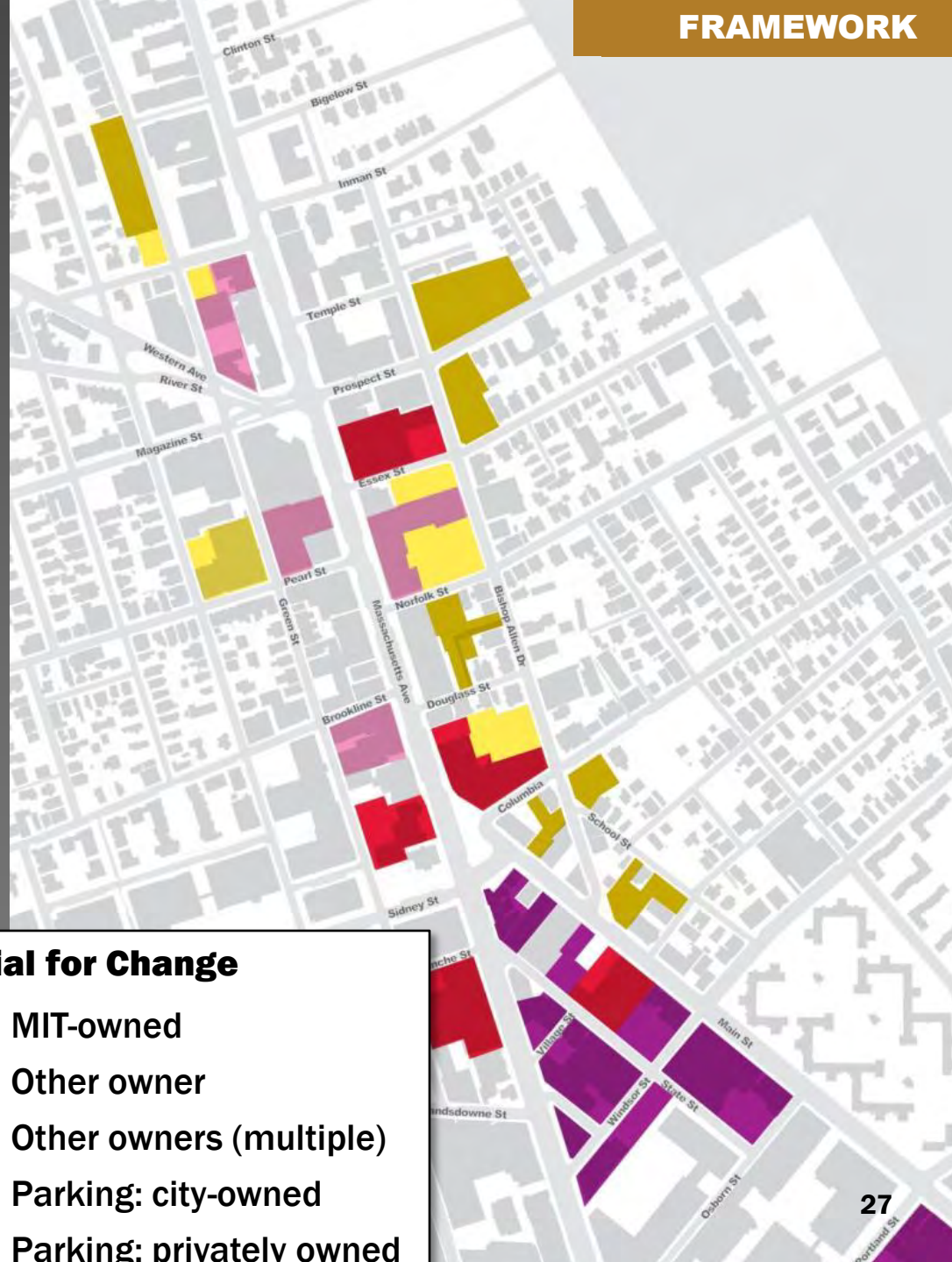
Design Guidelines to shape development

- 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
- Raise 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**



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 additional community benefits
 - For parking



Potential for Change

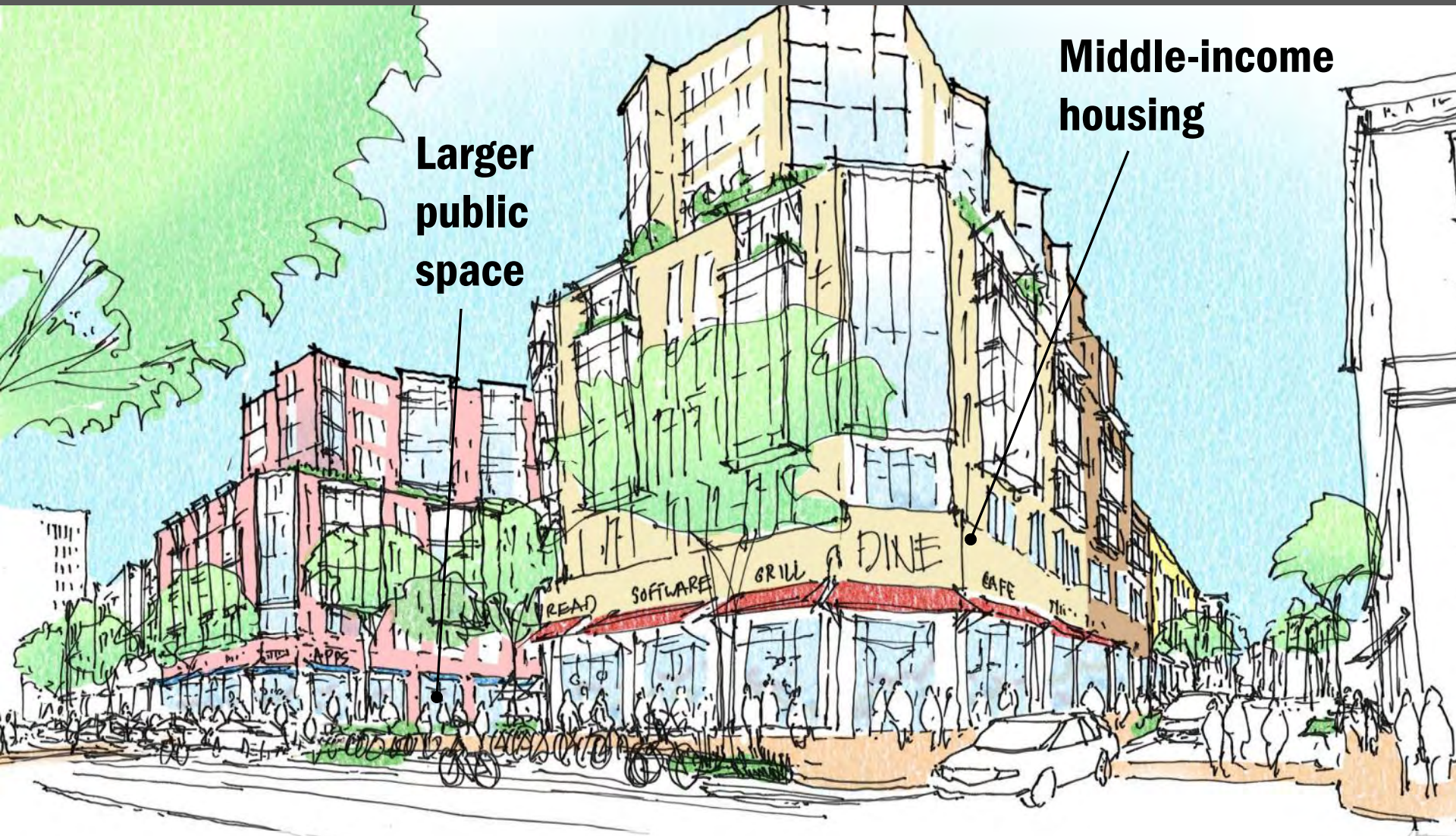
- MIT-owned
- Other owner
- Other owners (multiple)
- Parking: city-owned
- Parking: privately owned

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

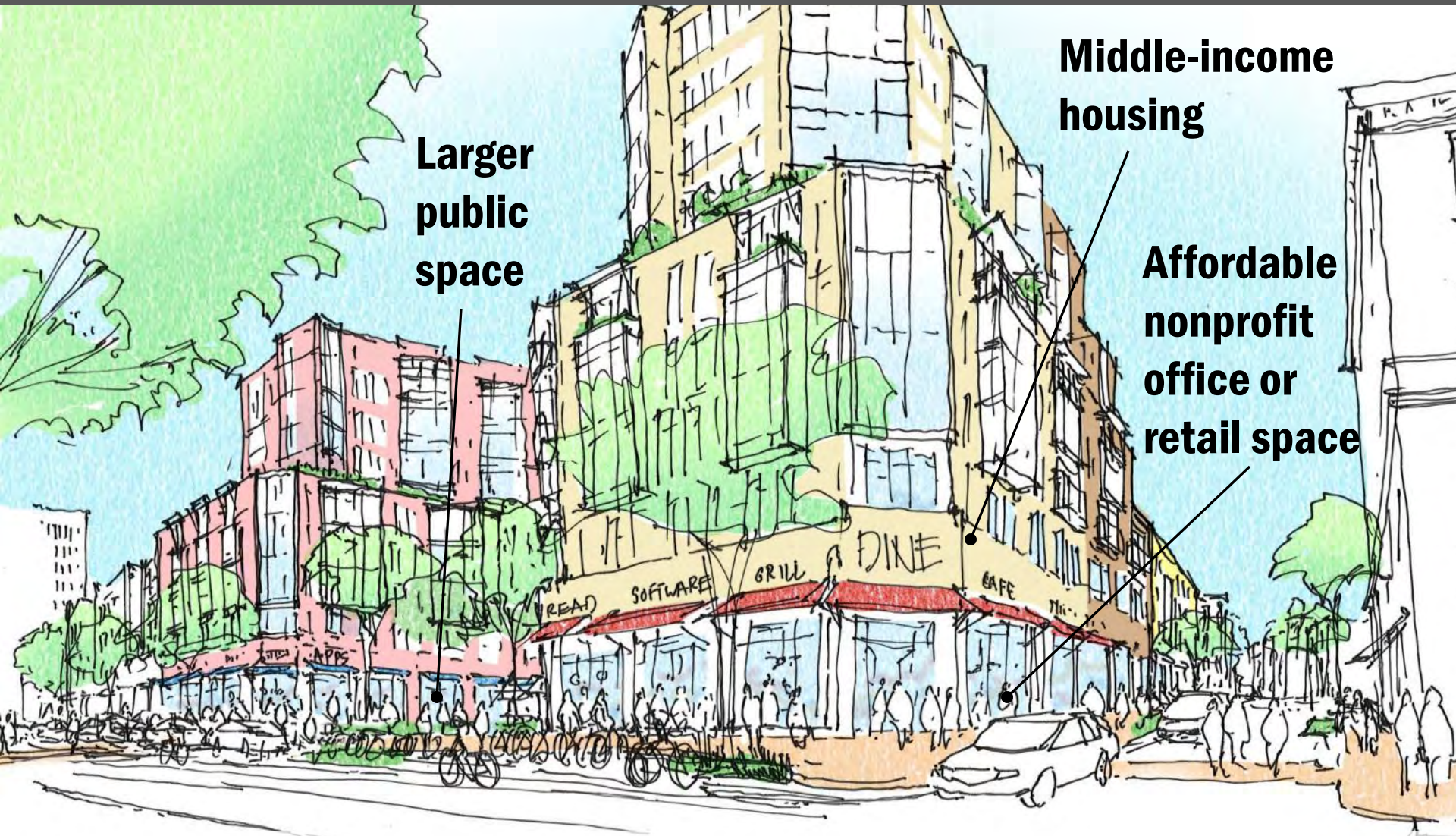


Larger
public
space

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

DISCUSSION

A PLACE FOR LIVING



PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE



RETAIL/CULTURAL/NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY

