

2014 Retrospective

Thoughts from my 35-year career

# Cambridge Seems to be a Verb

**J. Roger Boothe**

Director of Urban Design (1979-2014)

In his 1970 book *I Seem To Be a Verb*,  
R. Buckminster Fuller wrote:

“I live on Earth at present,  
and I don't know what I am.

I know that I am not a category.  
I am not a thing—a noun.

I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary  
process—an integral function of the  
universe.”



**Here on Spaceship Earth,  
we want to connect to our Water!**



**Cambridge Seems to be a Verb**

# Create flexible, multi-purpose plans with vision for liveability

- *Excellent buildings and urban settings*
- *Diverse population in good housing*
- *Reduce auto dependency*
- *Healthy economic base with vital and distinctive retail*

*(See Toward a Sustainable Future : Cambridge Growth Policy Document)*



Cambridge Seems to be a Verb

# Reflect upon transformation

1960 Cambridge: economically depressed, tough housing market

2014 Cambridge: world biotech center, challenging housing market



Cambridge Seems to be a Verb

# Think about Cambridge

6.25 sq mi

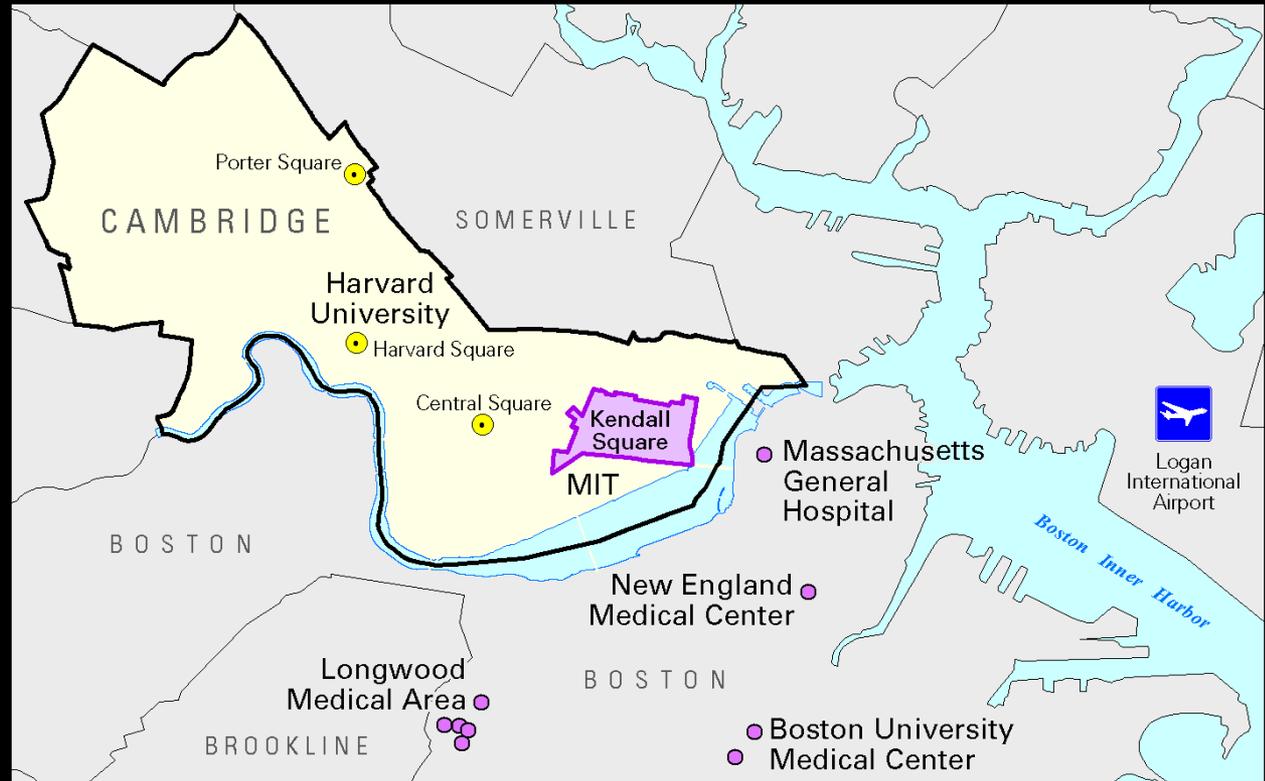
100,000 residents,  
150,000 workers &  
students

Harvard and MIT,  
100 other institutions

6,700 subsidized of  
41,000 total units

One house just sold for  
\$10 million

1 M sq ft developed  
each of last 20 years



Cambridge Seems to be a Verb

**Let us reason together!**

**Citizens**

**Developers**

**City Council**

**The Administration**

**The Planning Board**



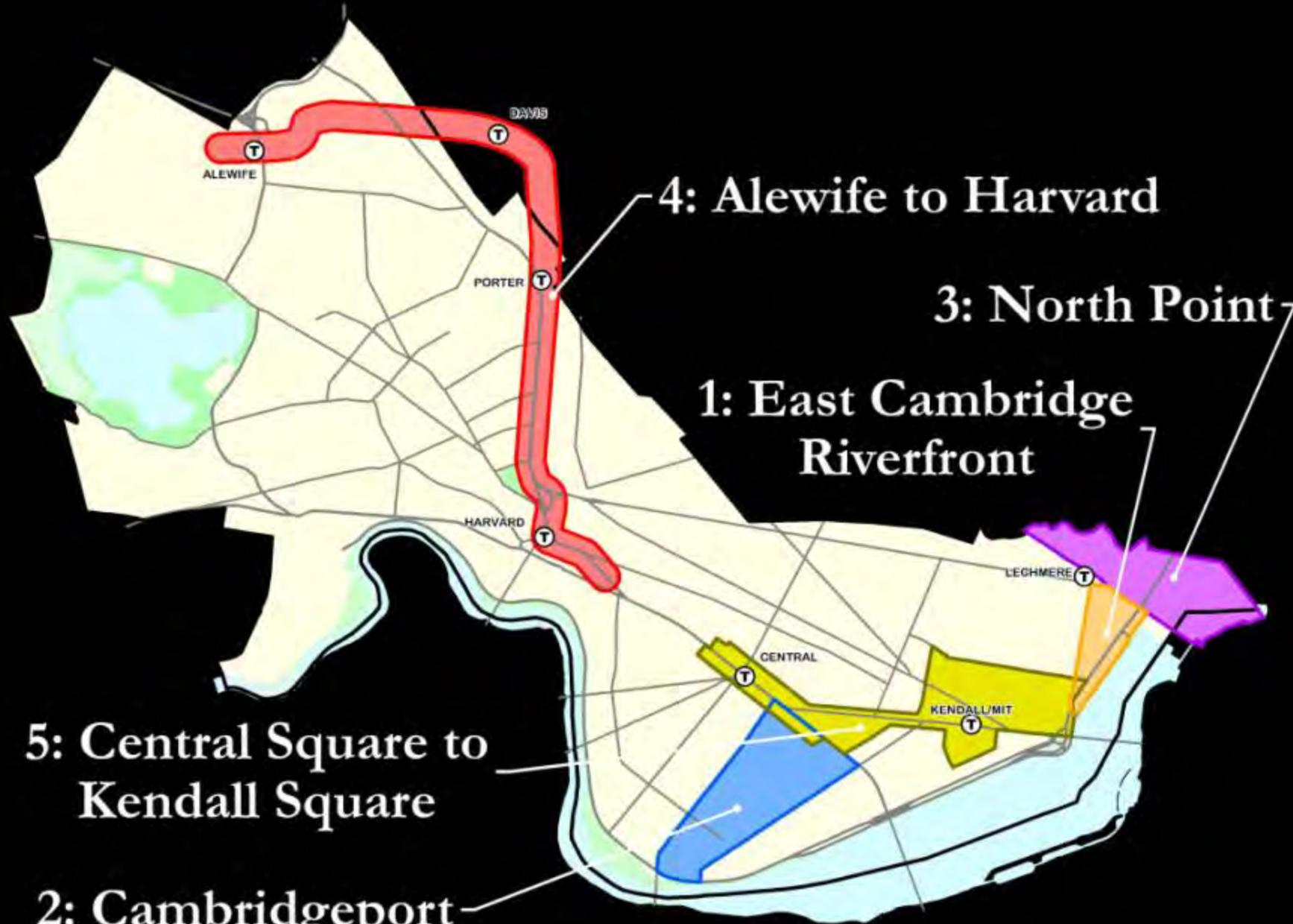
**Cambridge Seems to be a Verb**

# Let us urban design together!



Envision  
Negotiate  
Connect

Cambridge Seems to be a Verb



4: Alewife to Harvard

3: North Point

1: East Cambridge Riverfront

5: Central Square to Kendall Square

2: Cambridgeport

*Envision ~ Negotiate ~ Connect*



# Rezone with Vision

Prior to 1979:

No height limits in higher density districts

No housing allowed in former industrial districts

No parking maximum

No review process

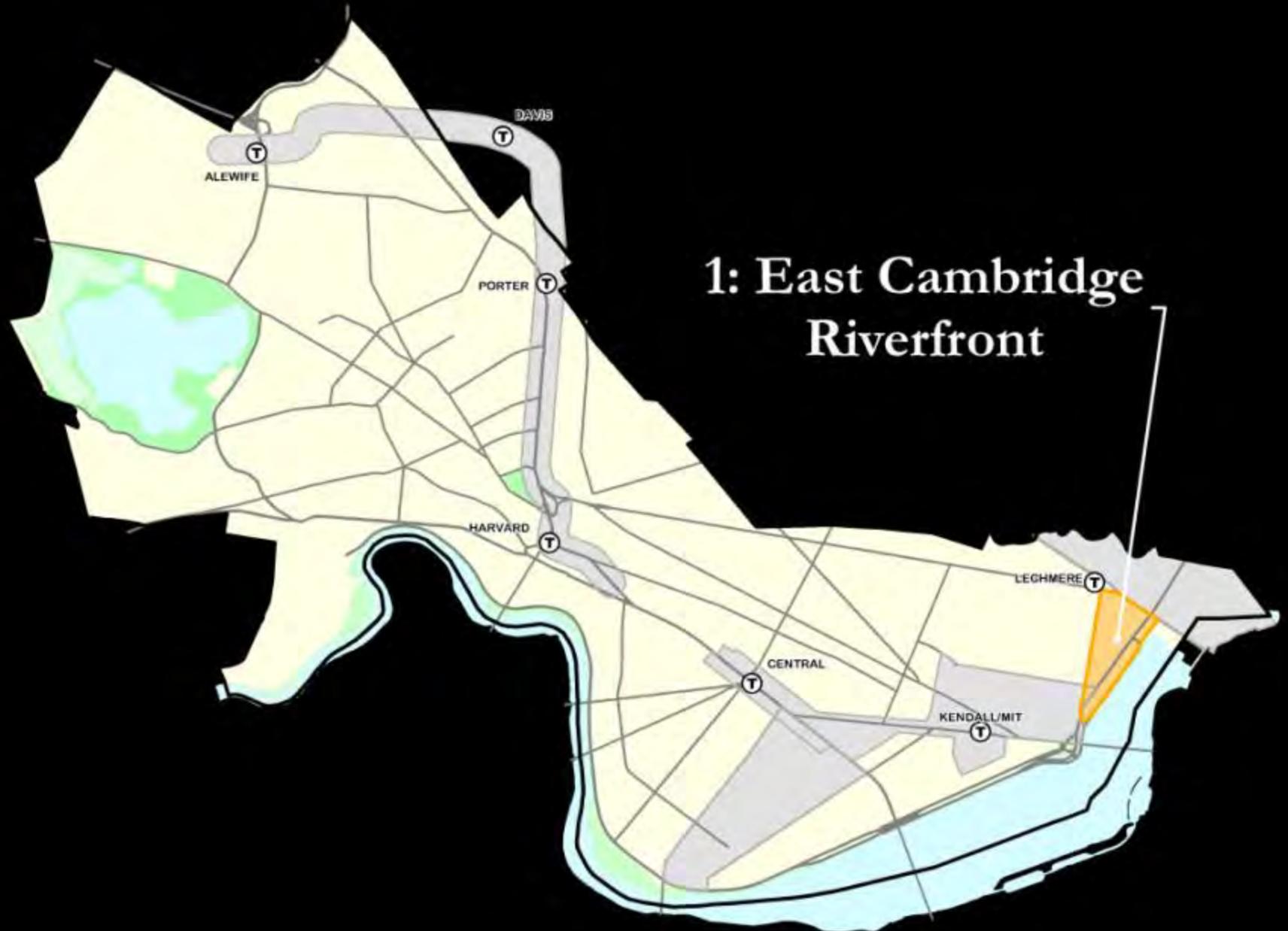


*Envision~Negotiate~Connect*

# 1<sup>st</sup> Special Permit in 1979; 290<sup>th</sup> coming up



*Envision~Negotiate~Connect*



# 1: East Cambridge Riverfront

*Envision~Negotiate~Connect*

# East Cambridge Riverfront

1978-1991

Envision new mixed-use  
district

Negotiate 800 units of  
housing, 1 M sq ft of  
retail and of office

Connect 10 Acres of new  
open space



*Envision~Negotiate~Connect*



Riverfront 1978



Riverfront 1982



Riverfront 1986



Riverfront 1988



Riverfront 1991



Riverfront 1991

**Negotiate, sometimes for many years!**



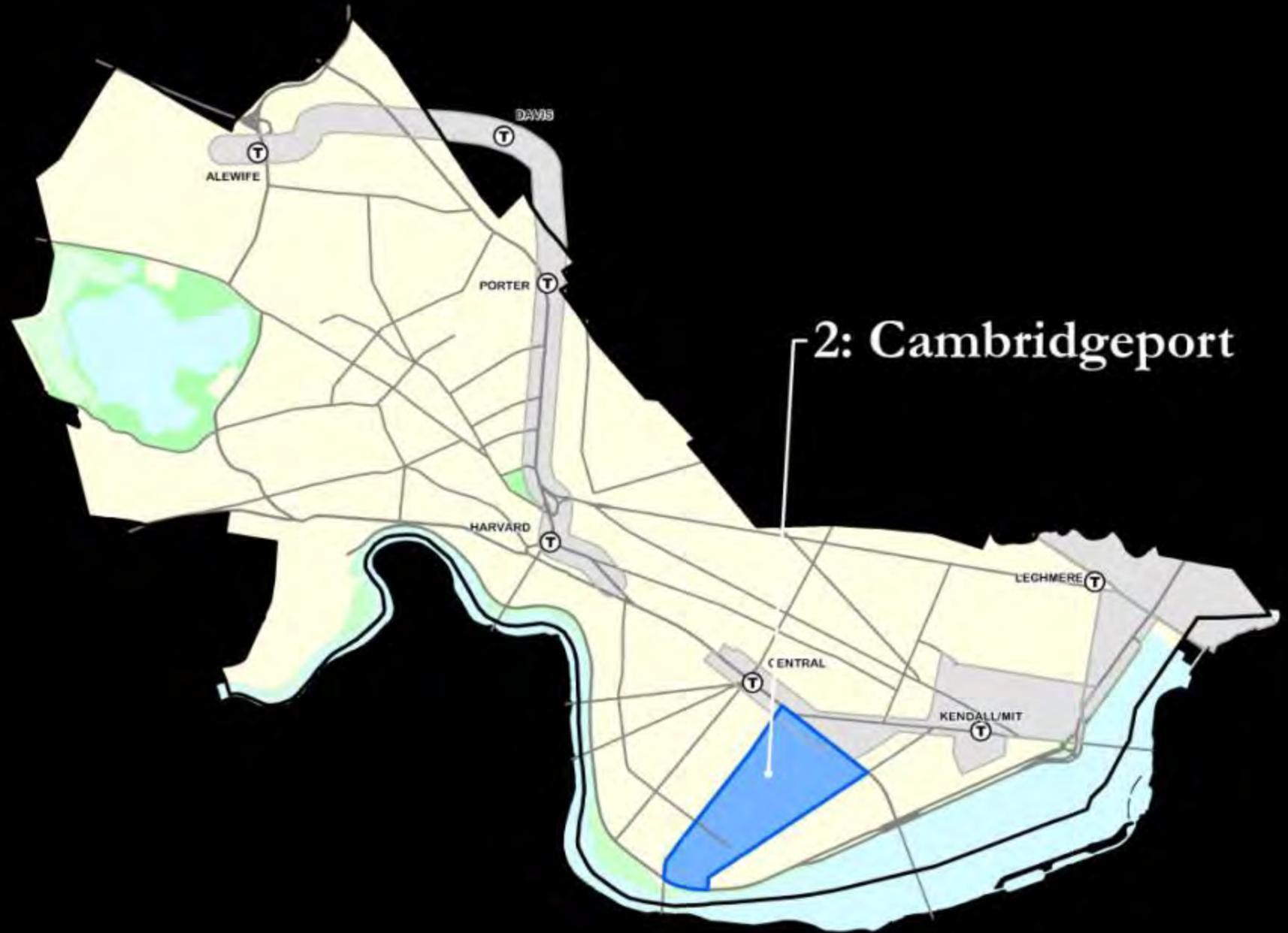
**Please take our zoning seriously: Keep to 120-foot height limit, negotiate materials, get housing instead of office**



**Create great open space system**

**4 parks totaling about 10 acres**





2: Cambridgeport

*Envision ~ Negotiate ~ Connect*

# Cambridgeport 1979-2004

Envision transition  
from Simplex to  
University Park

Negotiate housing:  
674units /200  
affordable

Connect with new  
100,000 sq ft open space



*Envision~Negotiate~Connect*



**Key Agreements  
(instead of Special  
Permits!)**

- 1. Design Review**
- 2. Housing Plan**
- 3. Traffic Mitigation**
- 4. Infrastructure**

# 1. Agreement for Design Review

Use Patterns and General Plan

Open Spaces and Streetscape

Building Heights

The Building Wall

Parking and Circulation



**Create great open space system**

**100,000 sq ft total required, 50,000 sq ft in one space**



# Design Guidelines

Require well-articulated facades, base, middle, & top



## 2. Housing Plan

- 400 units required with 25% affordable
- Some new, some reuse of industrial
- Mostly along neighborhood edge, some in rest of project



**Green, glassy housing  
contrasts with red  
brick surroundings**



Area south of Pacific used to be home for Pat's Tow



# Change continues south of Pacific



### 3. Agreement for Traffic Mitigation

Became a model for Citywide mitigation effort

- Encourage flex time
- Limit trip generation
- Promote use of transit



# 4. Infrastructure Agreement

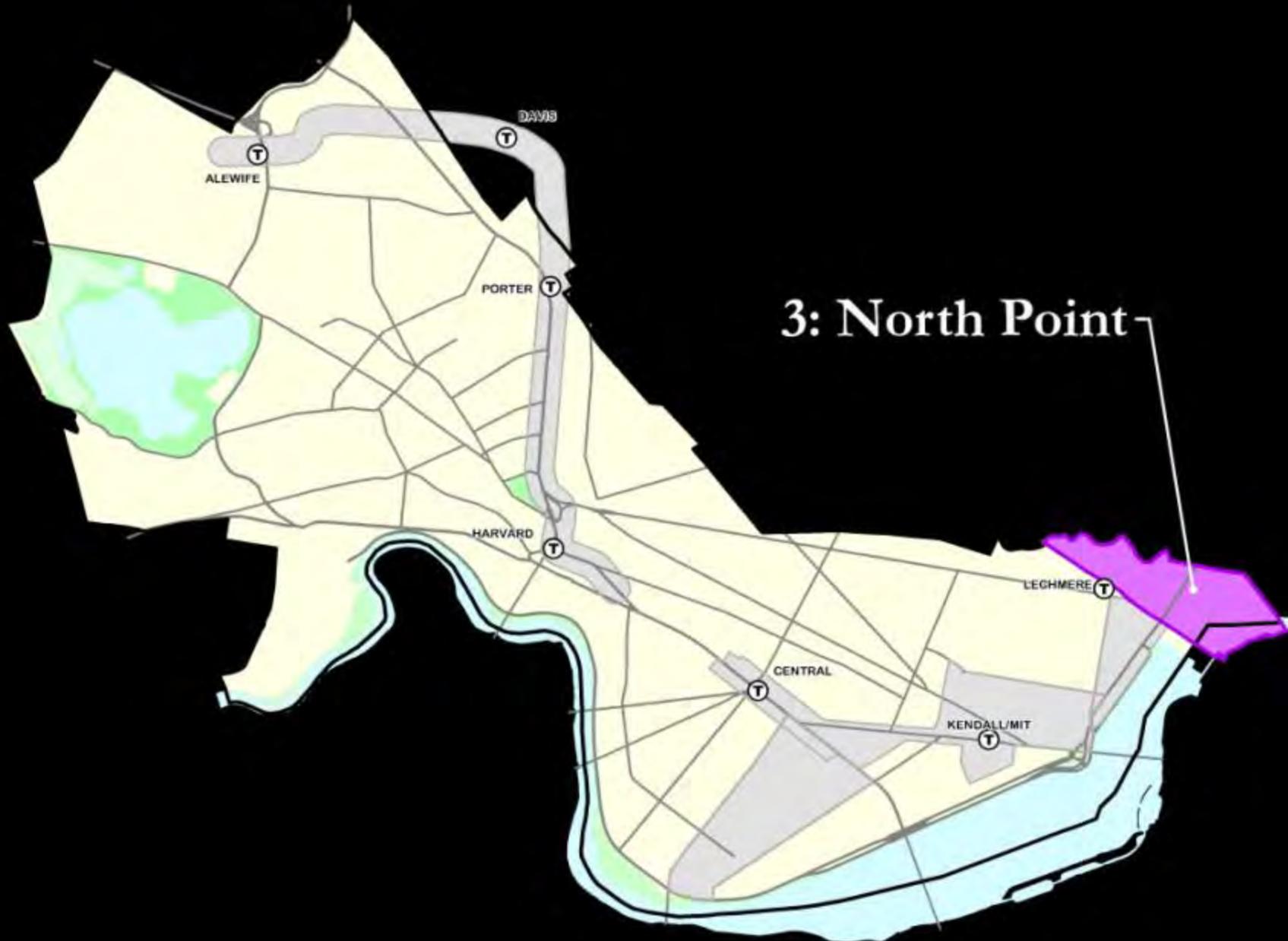
Outlines cost sharing

- Some public spaces, such as Lafayette Sq
- Streets & sidewalks



# Create Lafayette Sq/ Jill Brown-Rhone Park





### 3: North Point

*Envision ~ Negotiate ~ Connect*

# North Point 1988-present

Envision  
reclaiming the  
Lost Half Mile

Negotiate Zakim,  
open space,  
rezoning for  
private works

Connect people to  
the new North  
Point



*Envision~Negotiate~Connect*

# Negotiate rezoning in 1988 (EF and Museum Towers were pioneers)



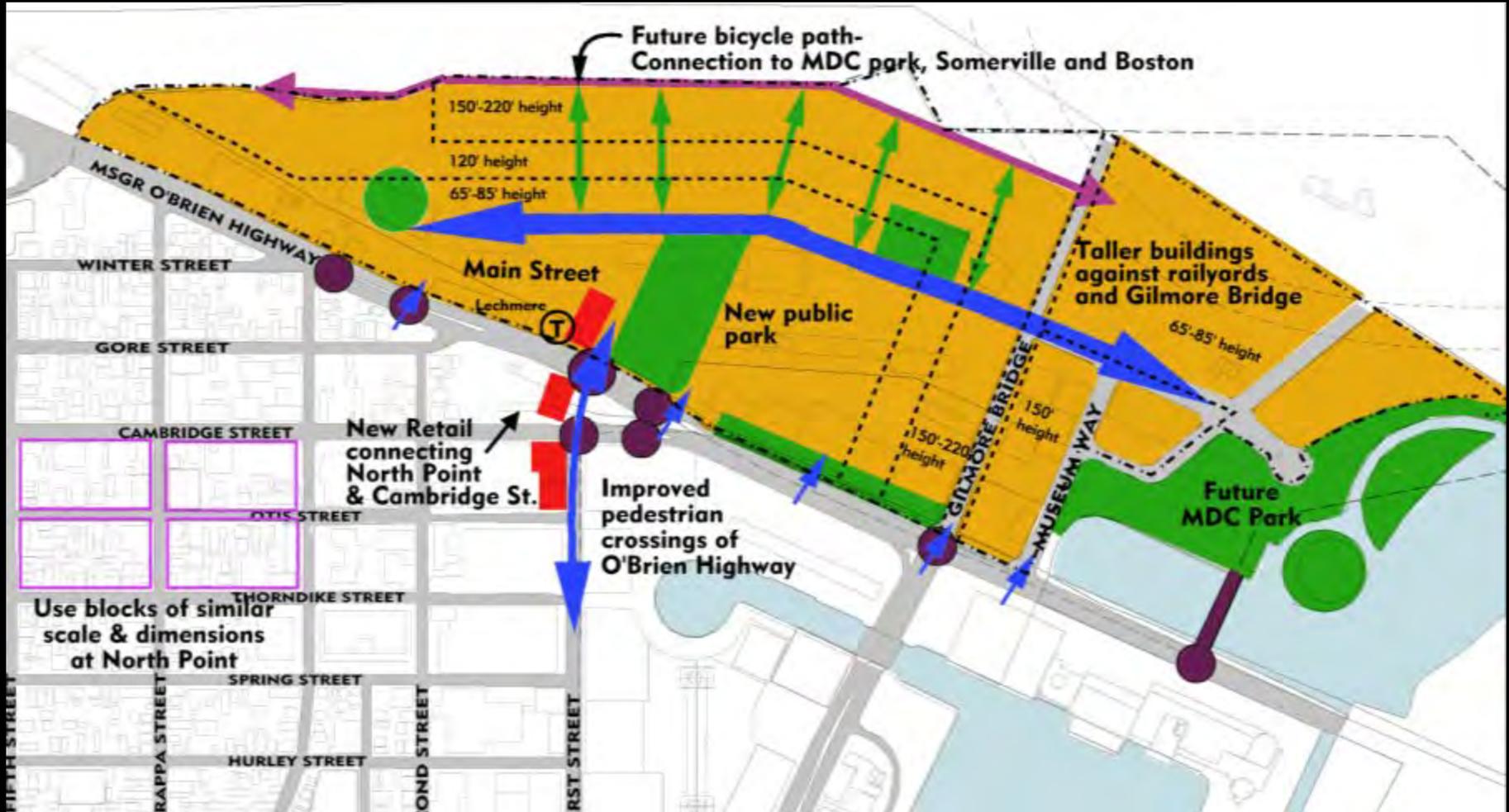
# Connect people to the Lost Half Mile

**New Charles River Basin, Zakim Bridge (opens 2003)  
result from City lawsuit opposing Scheme Z**



# Envision structure for North Point (2001)

## ECaPS plan emphasizes connections



# Reorient open space, suggest mix of uses (2003)

2.2M sq ft commercial, 2700 units of housing, 10 acres of parkland



# Envision new district connected to its region



Now add active center, more height in exchange for better open space (2013)



# Connect walk from Gilmore Bridge down to central park



# Connect EF's new building to new ped/bike bridge and upcoming skatepark



**New ped/bike bridge opens new horizons!**







Logan International Airport

Boston Harbor

Downtown Boston



North Point Park

Charles River

CambridgeSide Galleria Mall

North Point Development Site

22 Water Street

New Lechmere Station

Existing Lechmere Station

Migr. O'Brien Highway



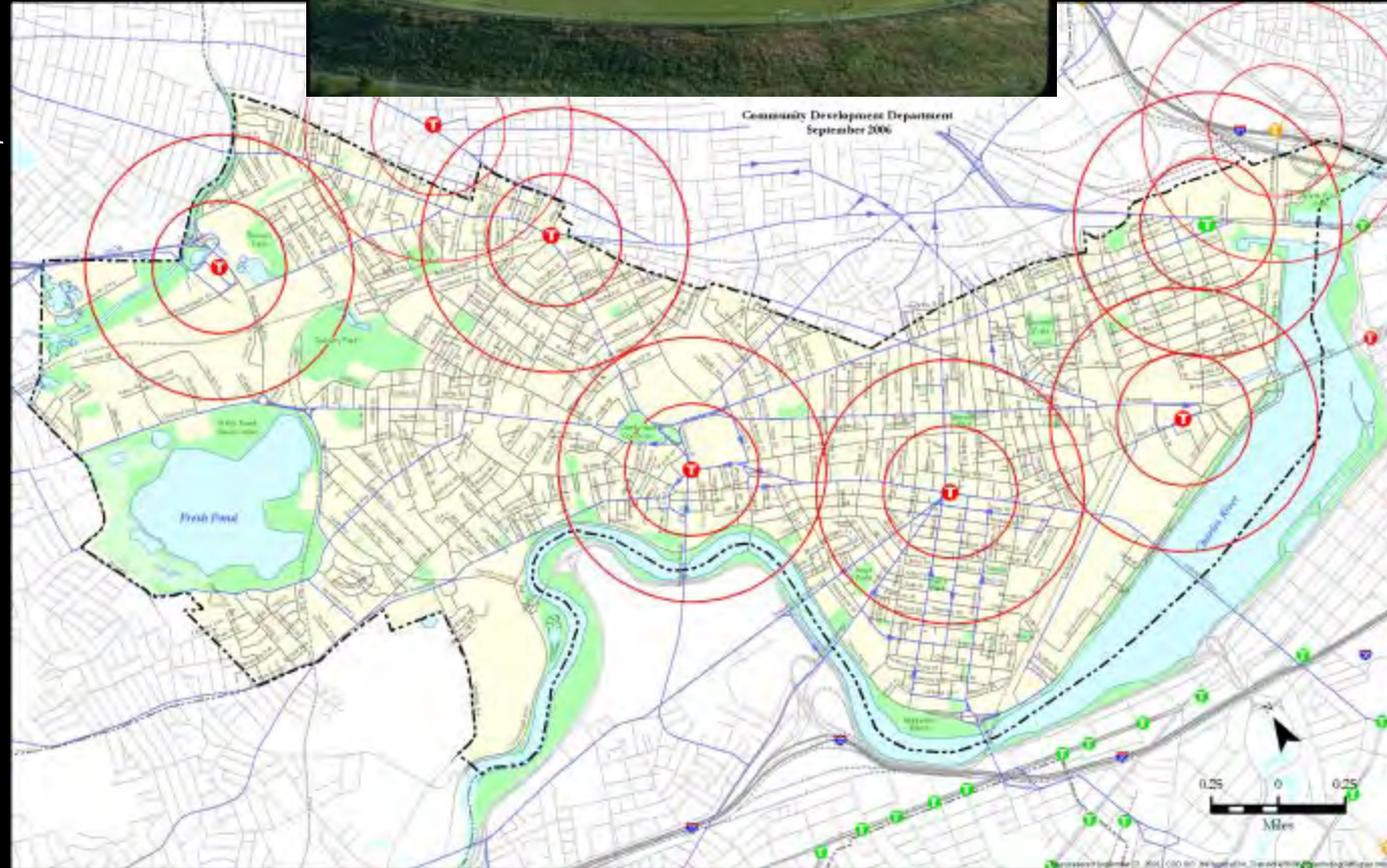
4: Alewife to Harvard

# Alewife to Harvard

Envision growth  
around transit  
nodes

Negotiate station  
designs,  
linear connector,  
Danehy Park

Connect west to  
east



*Envision ~ Negotiate ~ Connect*

# Alewife

Balance traffic  
concerns with need  
for housing



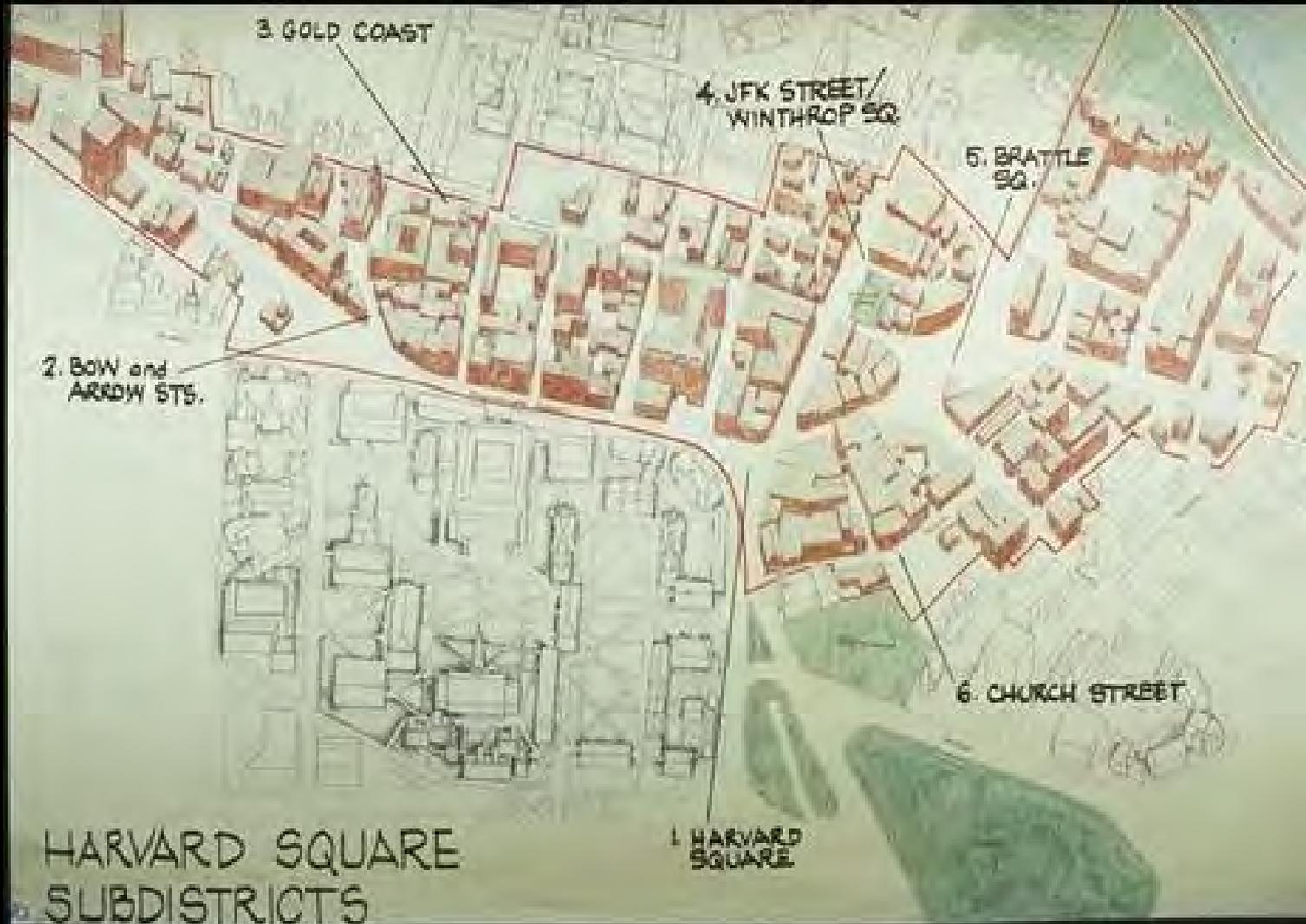
# Porter Square

With new MBTA Station, expand  
retail and presence of Lesley



# Harvard Square

Guide evolution of buildings  
and open spaces



# Redefine the heart of the Square



Connect people to the River  
through former carbarns site



**Charles Square  
PUD SP #2 and  
Kennedy School**



**Build atop an MBTA bus tunnel,  
build atop an MBTA transformer!**



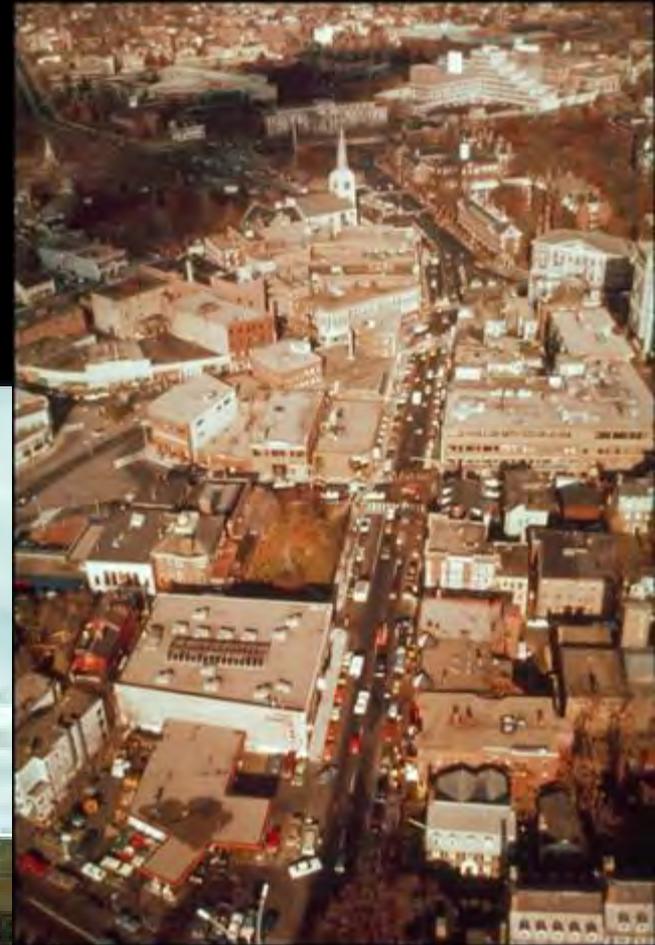
# Invent a new square at Quincy



# Quincy Square

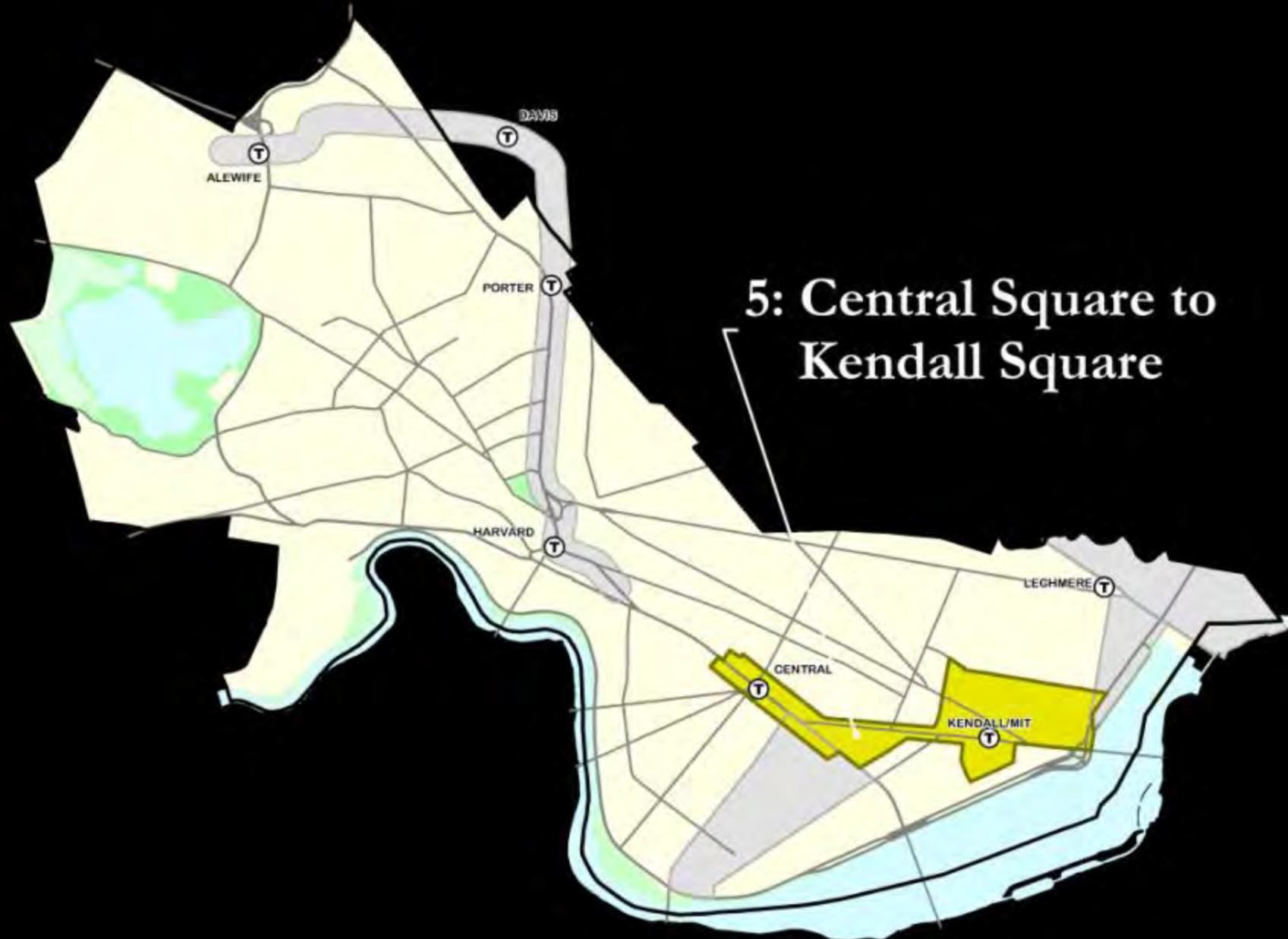


Connect a neglected historical open space to its urban setting



# Winthrop Square





5: Central Square to Kendall Square

*Envision ~ Negotiate ~ Connect*

# C2 to K2

Envision each square as unique

Negotiate the amount and types of growth

Connect each to the other, connect to the river



*Envision~Negotiate~Connect*

# Central Square 1979-1999





Wider  
sidewalks  
facilitate  
outdoor  
dining



# Central Square transition towards MIT and Kendall



# Novartis saves NECCO from becoming dead “telecom hotel”



Site: Novartis, 181 Mass Ave, Cambridge, MA  
Date: 9/23/11 Image # 57883  
Aerial by lesyants.com

# Novartis addition picks up on outdoor dining scene from Central Square



**Novartis expands again, to other side of Mass Ave, with ground floor retail**



**Envision new infill that  
acknowledges its Mass Ave setting**



**Forest City building for  
Takeda to continue  
better pedestrian  
environments**

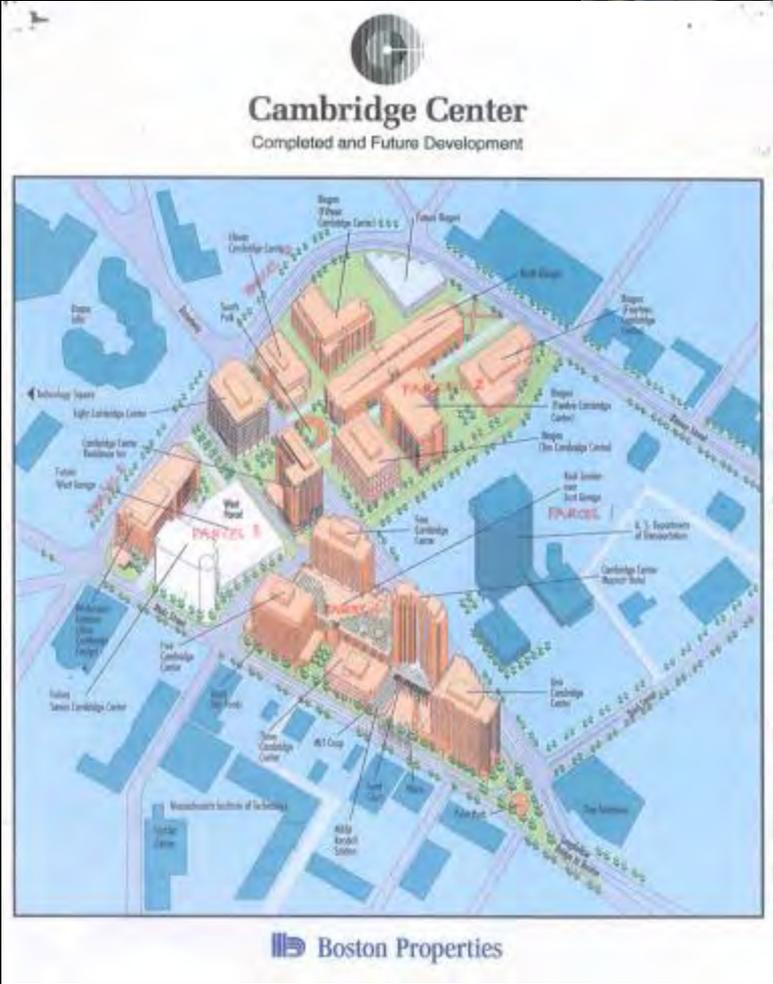
**How to make a biotech  
building also a Central  
Square building?**



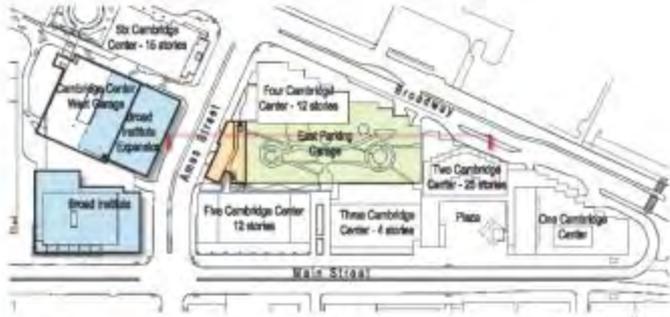
# Kendall Square 1950-2000



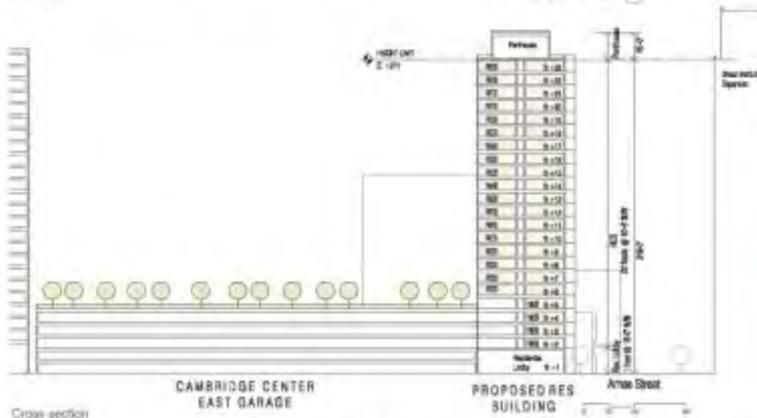
# Refresh urban renewal effort (“Cambridge Center” or “Kendall Square?”)



# Build housing (finally) in the heart of Kendall!



Site Plan



Cross-section

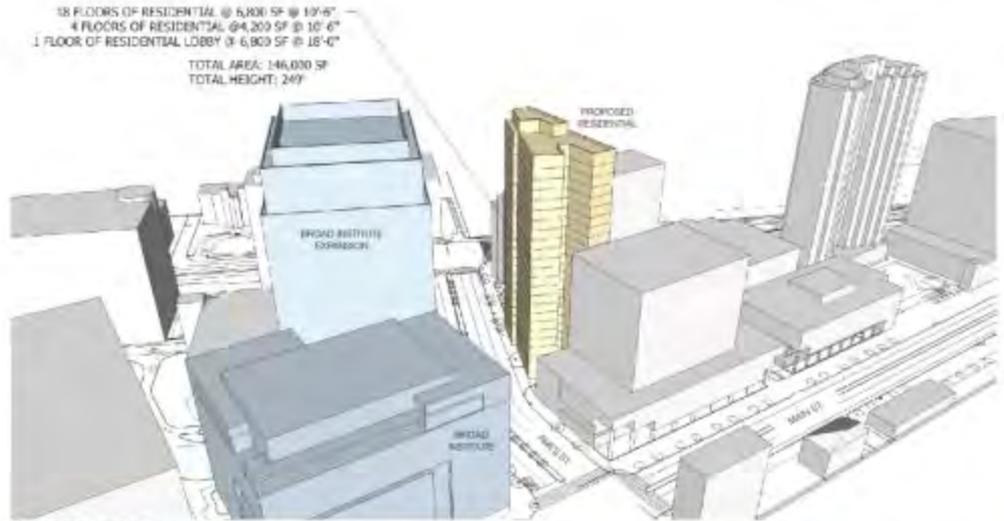
CAMBRIDGE CENTER EAST GARAGE

PROPOSED RES BUILDING



Existing View from Ames Street

Existing View from Ames Street



Missing Program Diagram



Proposed View from Ames Street

# The “Other” Kendall Square: Convert brownfield into mixed-use, on 10 acres (SP #141 1999)

465 housing units

.8 M sq ft biotech

70,000 sq ft open space



# Reach higher LEED Standards



# Housing comes to Kendall Square!



# The coming together of decades of work



# MIT to add housing at Broad Canal Way

## Try to find a more direct way to the River

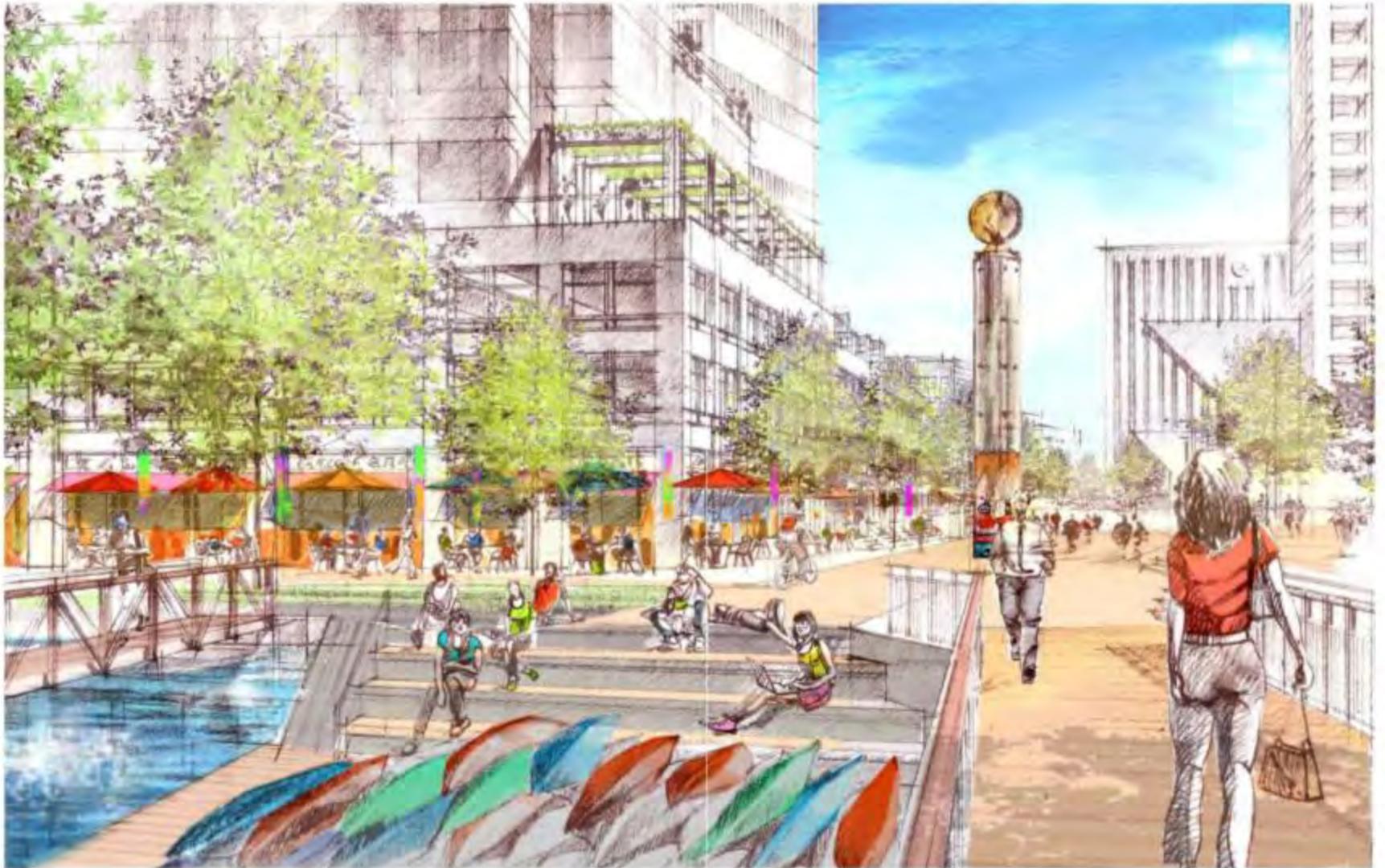


**THE POSSIBILITIES**

Connected Mixed-Use Environments

# Broad Canal Way has a future!

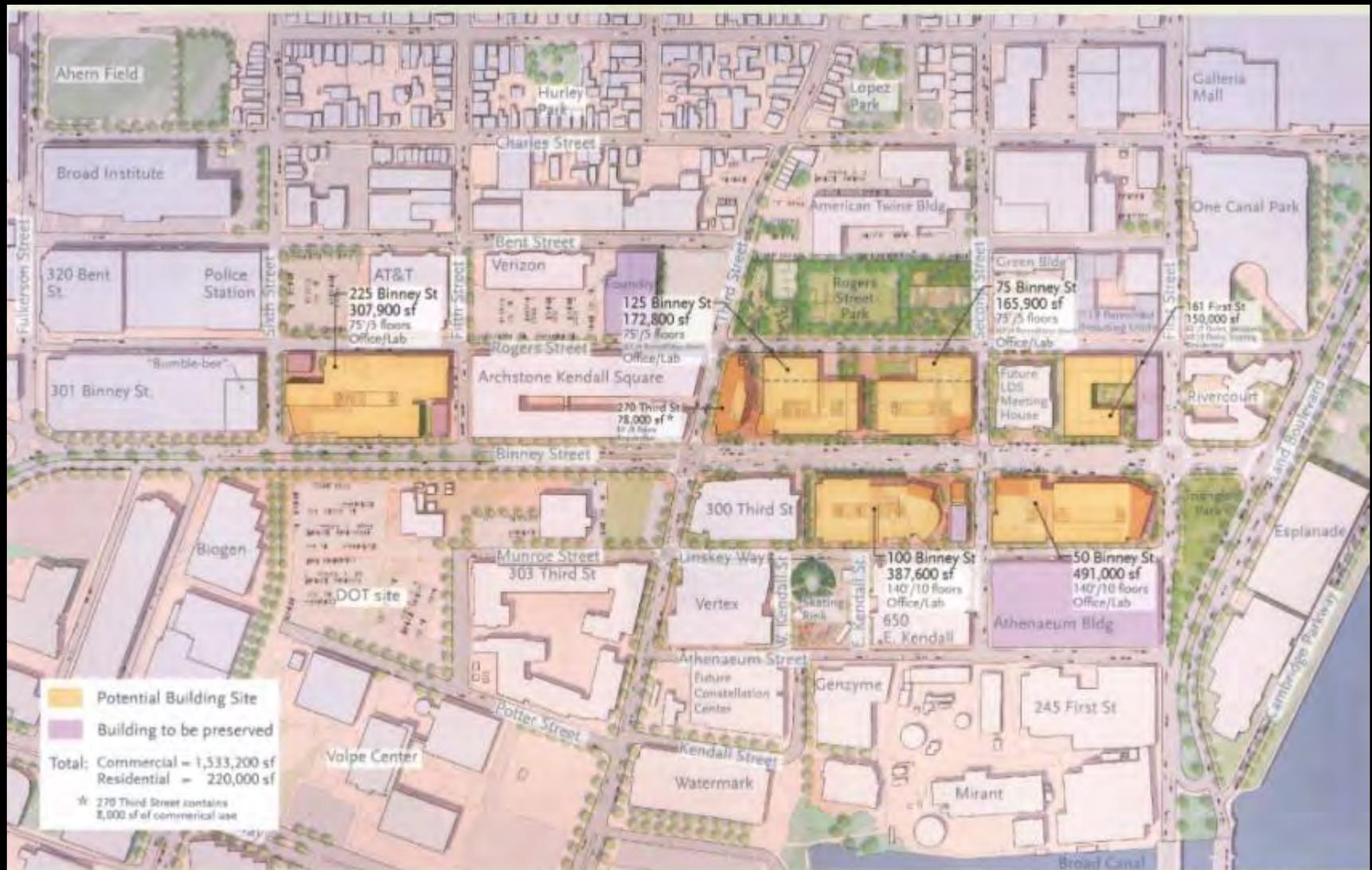




**BROAD CANAL WAY: VISION**

View from Canal

# Alexandria work with neighbors to create more great new parks



Potential Building Site  
 Building to be preserved  
 Total: Commercial = 1,333,200 sf  
 Residential = 220,000 sf  
 \* 270 Third Street contains 8,000 sf of commercial use

Imagine an urban Binney Street with great open space connections



# Imagine all of Kendall Square/East Cambridge with great open space connections



Imagine all the actors in Kendall working together



# Please urban design together!



Envision  
Negotiate  
Connect

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# Envision

A Cambridge that retains its  
liveability



# Negotiate

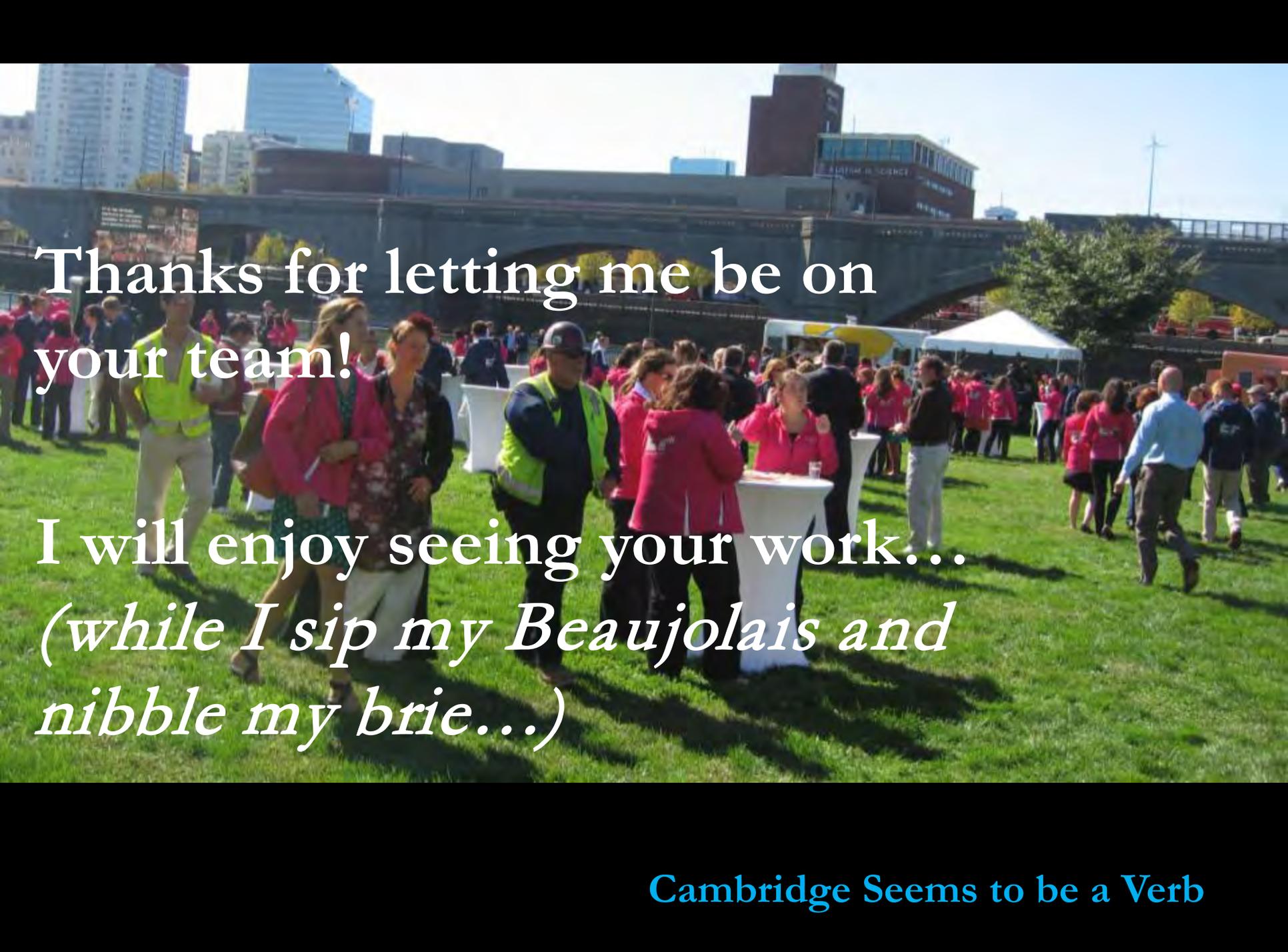
With respect for  
different points  
of view



# Connect

So that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts





Thanks for letting me be on  
your team!

I will enjoy seeing your work...  
*(while I sip my Beaujolais and  
nibble my brie...)*

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