

Kendall Square

Cambridge Commercial District Assessment



**CITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Community
Development
Department

Economic
Opportunity &
Development

2024

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Kendall Square Business Association

Customer Intercept Survey
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Purpose of the Commercial District Assessment

The purpose of the Kendall Square Commercial District Assessment is to highlight the existing business landscape and consumer characteristics. Understanding the current business landscape provides the City and local business associations with a better understanding of how Kendall Square visitors and residents utilize the district and how they would like the district to evolve in the future. Data in this report will also assist business owners seeking a location in Kendall Square and help current business owners understand potential opportunities for growth.

Key issues and opportunities identified in this assessment will help prioritize City and local business association initiatives and serve as an informational and marketing resource for the neighborhood.

About Kendall Square

Transportation



18 Bluebikes stations



4 Bus routes
1, 64, 68, 69, 80, 83, 85, CT2



6,878
Daily riders
Kendall/MIT
MBTA Red Line



516
Public meter
parking spaces

Transit Scores



97 Bike



87 Walk



71 Transit

Business Association

Kendall Square Association

Background

Kendall Square has long been a hub of industry and innovation. During the 19th and 20th centuries, it was home to numerous factories spanning diverse industries including clothing, candy, soap and candles, musical instruments, furniture, and printing. Over the past three decades, Kendall Square has undergone a remarkable transformation and emerged as a global leader in life sciences and technology, now hosting over 120 biotechnology companies.

Today, the Square features a mix of office, residential, and retail spaces, making it an appealing neighborhood for both visitors and residents. The district also has a bustling restaurant and cafe scene. Additionally, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's proximity to Kendall Square presents many opportunities for students to engage with the area, whether through places to eat, study, or live while studying at the university.

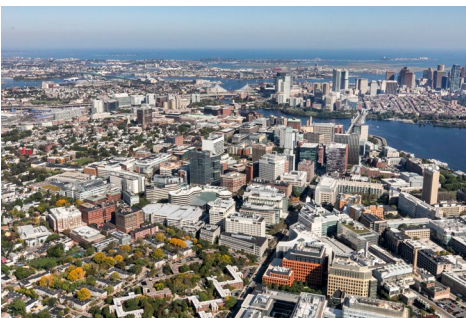
Demographics

With over 74,000 jobs based in Kendall Square, the area has gained a reputation as place for science and industry. However, more people are now calling Kendall Square home. According to the U.S. Census Bureau and Esri, 4,905 residents live in the district. A lower percentage of Kendall Square's population is White (46.3%) as compared to the overall Cambridge population (54.8%). There are slightly fewer Black residents in Kendall (8.1% vs. 10.8%) and residents of Hispanic Origin (9.8% vs. 11%). There are significantly more Asian residents (32.7% vs. 20.8%). The median age of Kendall Square residents is comparable to the rest of Cambridge (31 vs. 31.6). The median household income is higher (\$131,219 vs. \$125,574).

Future Opportunities

Kendall Square has the opportunity to grow. There are active construction projects creating retail, residential, laboratory, office, restaurant, and community spaces. One of the notable developments in progress is Kendall Common. It will provide 1,300 residential units (20% affordable), 125,000 square feet of retail space, 2M square feet of commercial and lab space, a community center, over 2,000 bike parking spots, and open green space.

Neighborhood Context Map



Top row: Kendall Square skyline, Kyle Klein Photography; Main Street, Kyle Klein Photography; yoga class at Urban Park (UP) Roof Garden, Emily Ediger.

Bottom row: networking event at Kendall/MIT Open Space; dog playing at Binney Street Park.

Key Findings



Kendall/MIT MBTA Red Line Station, Jaheim Harding Photography.



Skate @ Canal District Kendall in Henri A. Termeer Square, Kyle Klein Photography.



Cyclists cross the intersection of Hampshire St. and Broadway, Kyle Klein Photography.

We surveyed 300 customers, residents, workers, and visitors in Kendall Square. We also surveyed 34 small, ground floor businesses in Kendall Square. The geographic boundaries and the survey methodology can be found in the Data Appendix (p.12). We found several themes in survey responses.

Wayfinding

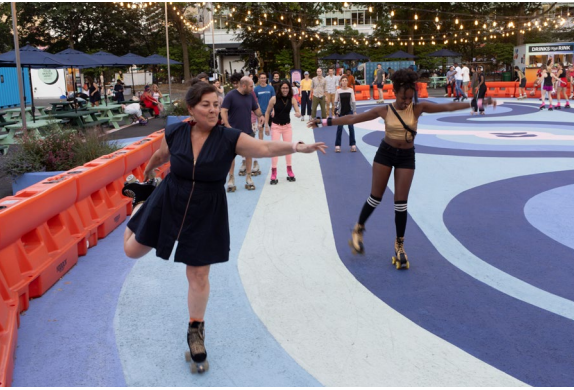
Customers (“customers” includes residents, workers, and visitors) and small ground floor businesses wish Kendall Square was easier to navigate. Small businesses want support marketing their business and they want to see more people in the area (p.9). Customers want clear signage and maps of where clusters of retail and restaurants are located (p.11). Through signage and other directional cues, wayfinding can encourage people to visit local businesses and create a better experience for those spending time in Kendall Square.

Community Space

Customers and small businesses are interested in more welcoming parks, plazas, and other outdoor spaces for the community (p.9, p.11). Customers specifically wanted more green space, more shade, and more seating options (p.11). There are more than 20 public green and open spaces in Kendall Square. Many of these are privately owned, but were designated for public use. The City of Cambridge and the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority have developed “Open to All” signage to bring attention to these spaces (p.7). When people stay in the area for longer, there are more opportunities to engage with local businesses.

Mobility Improvements

Customers and small businesses want more infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, and cars (p.9, p.11). In particular, they want to see more Bluebikes, improved bike safety, improved pedestrian safety, reduced car traffic, and more bike and car parking. They also want more reliable public transportation. Everyone benefits when it is easier to get to and around Kendall Square.



Rollerama at Kendall Common, Steve Dunwell Photography. Courtesy of MITIMCo.



The Foundry, Olivia Fone.



The Urban Park (UP) Roof Garden, Kyle Klein Photography.

Strengths

- Many visitors daily for work
- Existing open and green spaces
- Ongoing investments in the neighborhood

Challenges

- Lack of affordable retail and housing options
- Lack of variety of food options
- Difficulty navigating from place to place
- Disruption from construction

Opportunities

- Clear signage and directions to retail and restaurant clusters and to public parks and plazas
- Grocery, restaurant, and retail options at more price points
- More spaces for entertainment and nightlife
- More emphasis on shopping at small, local businesses
- More welcoming public spaces and privately owned public spaces (POPS)
- More shade and seating
- Mobility improvements for pedestrians, cyclists, and cars



Privately owned public spaces (POPS) are spaces for community members and visitors to use that are privately owned and maintained. POPS are created through land use restrictions, development agreements, or zoning. There are currently 17 POPS in the Kendall Square area. The Urban Park (UP) Roof Garden (pictured left) is one example. Look for the “open to all” signs around Kendall Square. For a map, please visit: <https://www.cambridgeredevelopment.org/pops>.

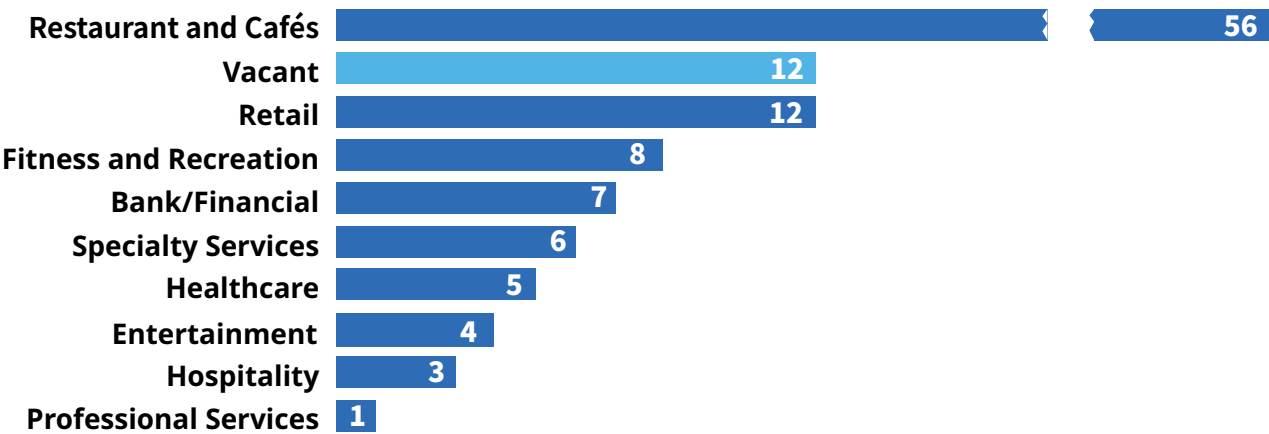
Business Landscape

Ground Floor Business Inventory



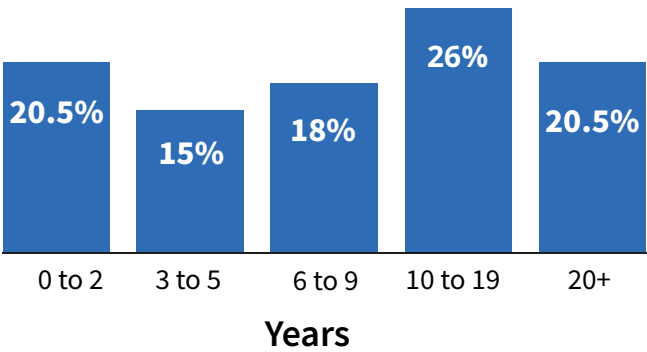
*Note: Numbers are based on a ground floor storefront survey conducted in August 2024. Some of the vacant properties were under lease negotiations or construction at time of the survey. For a more information about vacancies, please go to: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economicopportunityanddevelopment/vacantstorefrontresources>

Storefront & Retail Mix



Characteristics of Small Businesses Surveyed

Years in Business



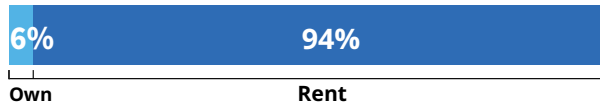
Number of Employees



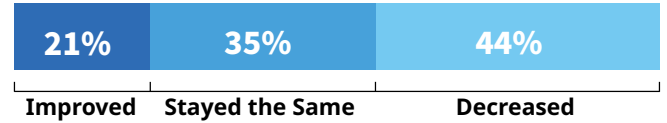
Source: Kendall Square Storefront Inventory (August 2024); Kendall Square Small Business Survey (August 2024)

What We Heard From Kendall Square Small Business Owners

Do you own or rent your property?



Over the past year, has your business improved, stayed the same, decreased?



What changes (if any) need to occur in Kendall Square to attract more shoppers?*

	% Businesses
Parking	38%
Storefront Improvements	16%
Community Events or Marketing	28%
Sanitation	3%
Safety	6%
Business to Business Communication	9%

What kind of resources would help you grow your business?*

	% Businesses
Marketing Support	45%
Financing	32%
Assistance with Regulatory Compliance	3%
Legal or Lease Support	11%
Training for Staff	9%

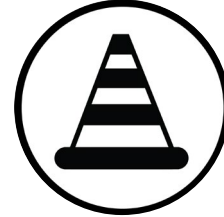
As a business owner, what changes would you suggest to improve Kendall Square for residents, pedestrians, and shoppers?



Improved Mobility
22.5%



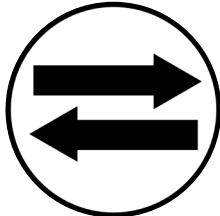
More Foot Traffic
20%



Construction Mitigation
10%



Parks and Green Spaces
7.5%



Wayfinding
7.5%



More Emphasis on Shopping Local
7.5%

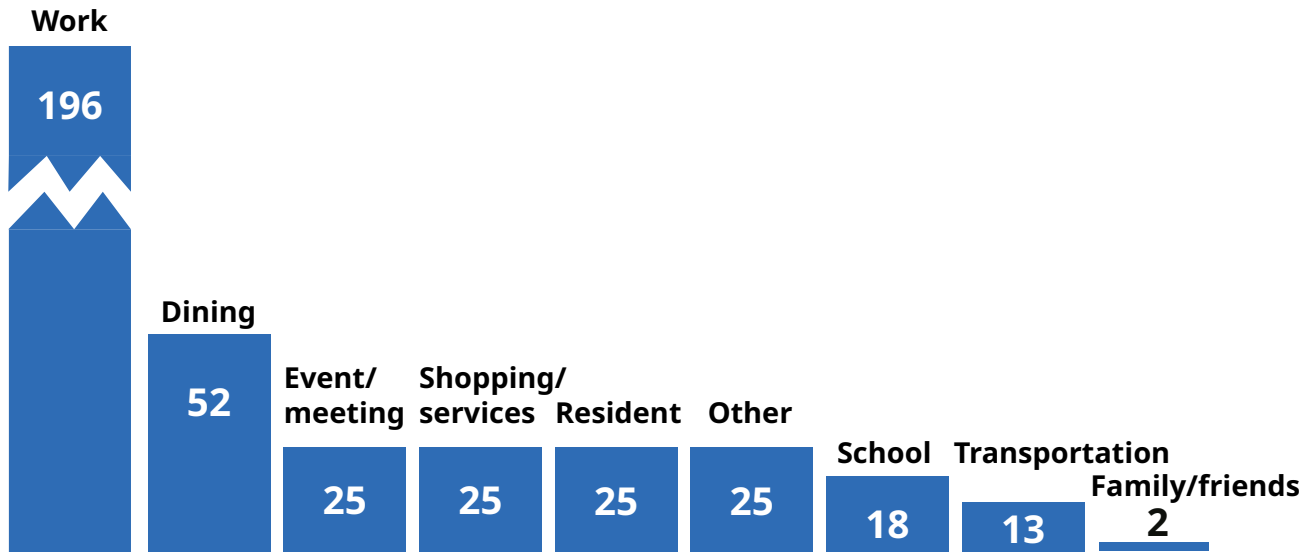
Source: Kendall Square Small Business Survey (August 2024); Improved Mobility icon from artshuvo - stock.adobe.com.

*Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer, totals may be more than 100%

Customer Outlook

What We Heard from Customers in Kendall Square

What is your primary purpose for being in Kendall Square?*



✓ 99% responded ⓧ 1% did not respond

What are the most common items you purchase in Kendall Square*

	% Customers
Food or Groceries	73%
Electronics or Gifts	13%
Wine, Beer, or Spirits	9%
Clothing	6%
Beauty or Personal Care Products	5%
Arts or Crafts	3%
Home goods	2%

✓ 91% responded ⓧ 9% did not respond

What are the most common services you use in Kendall Square?*

	% Customers
Restaurant (Take-out)	43%
Restaurant (Sit-down)	28%
Pharmacy	10%
Music or Performing Arts Venue	4%
Medical	4%
Dental	2%
Hair Salon/Barber	2%
Other	7%

✓ 88% responded ⓧ 12% did not respond

If not Kendall Square, where do you shop?

Elsewhere in Cambridge (including Central)	Central Square	Online	Greater Boston Area (including Somerville)	Somerville
36%	21%	19%	53%	18%

✓ 66% responded ⓧ 33% did not respond

Source: Kendall Square Storefront Inventory (August 2024), Kendall Square Customer Intercept Survey (June 2024)

Note: Each percentage is based on the total responses for a question.

*Respondents could choose more than one answer so totals may be more than 100%.

How do you usually travel to get to Kendall Square?*

	% Customers
Walk	26%
MBTA	29%
Bus	13%
Subway	16%
Bike	22%
Own	15%
Bluebikes	7%
Drive	22%
Alone	14%
Uber/Lyft/Taxi	5%
Carpool	3%
Company Shuttle	<1%

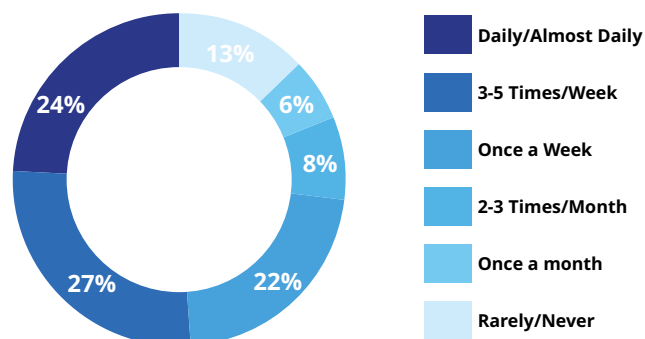
✓ 99% responded ⓧ 1% did not respond

When do you usually go shopping in Kendall Square?

	% Customers
Weekdays	46%
Weekday Nights	11%
Weekend Days	13%
Weekend Nights	4%
No Set Time	26%

✓ 94% responded ⓧ 6% did not respond

How often do you usually go shopping in Kendall Square?



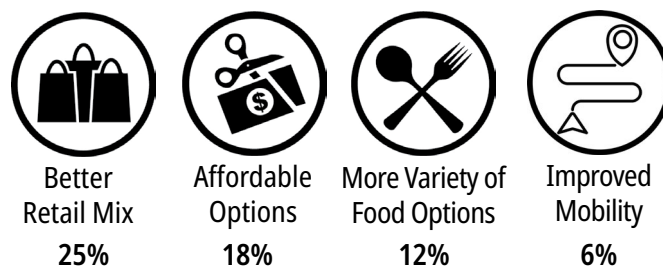
✓ 99% responded ⓧ 1% did not respond

What new businesses would you like to see?*



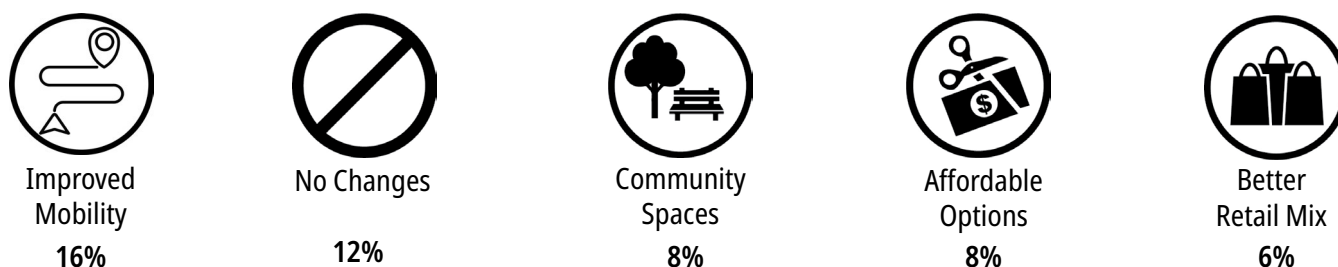
✓ 77% responded ⓧ 23% did not respond

What would make you shop here more?*



✓ 79% responded ⓧ 21% did not respond

What changes would you like to see in Kendall Square?*



✓ 64% responded ⓧ 36% did not respond

Source: Kendall Square Customer Intercept Survey (June 2024); Improved Mobility Icon from artshuvo - stock.adobe.com.

Note: Each percentage is based on the total responses for a question.

*Respondents could choose more than one answer so totals may be more than 100%.

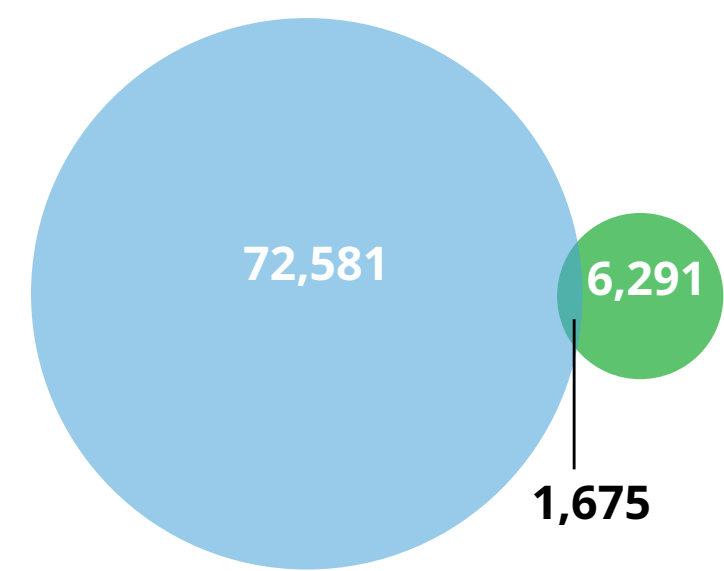
Data Appendix

Survey Methodology

City staff conducted two surveys in Kendall Square. The first survey was the Customer Intercept Survey. It was conducted by talking with people on sidewalks and in plazas around Kendall Square. Surveying was done in May and June 2024 during peak times: morning, mid-day, and late afternoon. We received 300 survey responses. The second survey was the Small Business Survey. It was conducted by talking with owners of small brick-and-mortar retail and restaurant business located on the ground floor. Surveys were collected by emailing, calling, and visiting business owners at their storefront. The business survey was available May through August 2024. We received 34 survey responses.

Demographics

Commuting Patterns



Work in Kendall Square, live elsewhere	75,185
Live and work in Kendall Square	1,735
Live in Kendall Square, work elsewhere	6,831

Data is based on the trade area.

Total Population

Kendall Square	4,905
Cambridge	122,356
Massachusetts	7,076,572

Average Household Size

Kendall Square	1.82
Cambridge	2.06
Massachusetts	2.45

Median Household Income*

Kendall Square	\$131,219
Cambridge	\$125,574
Massachusetts	\$99,650

*Data does not include people who live in group quarters

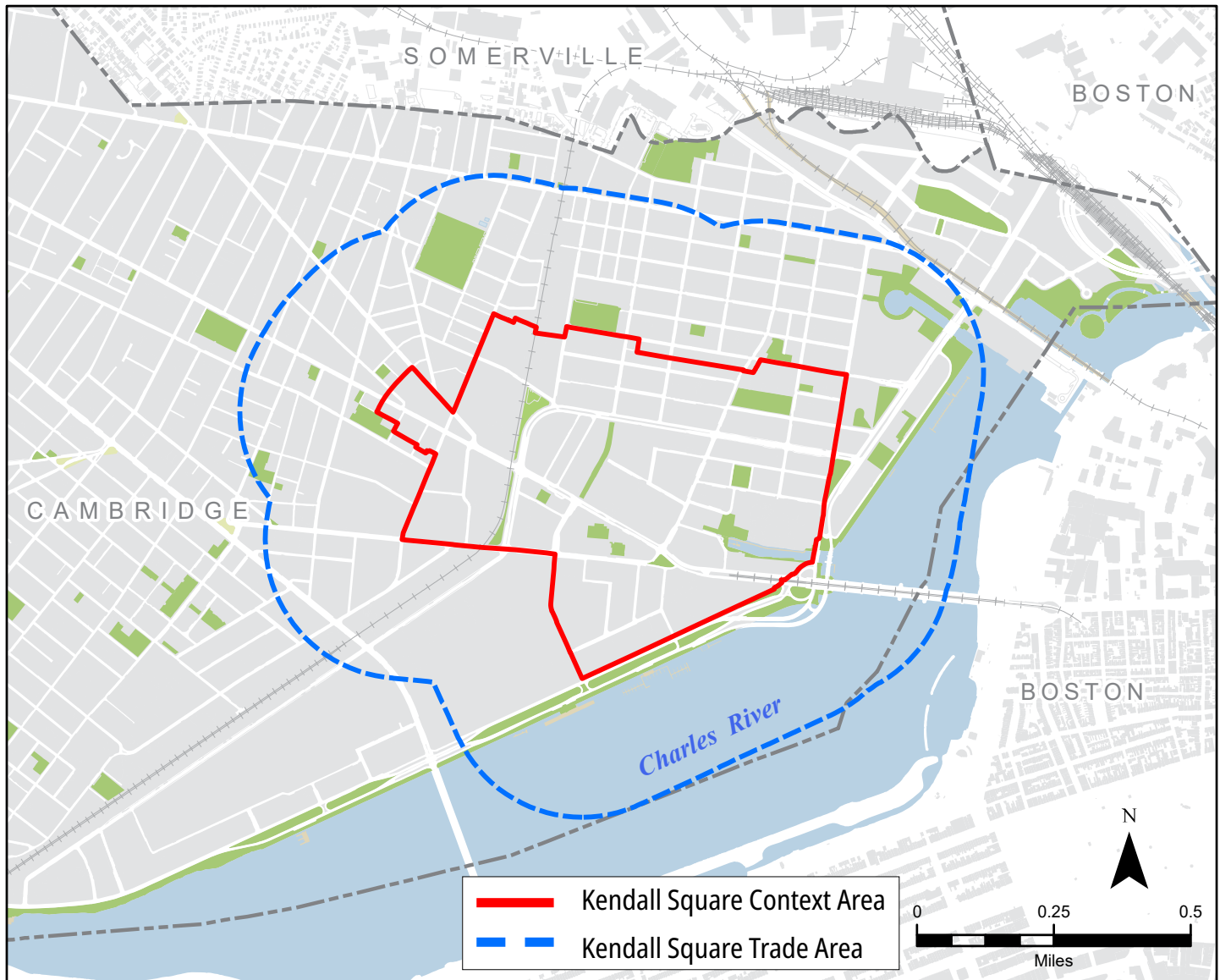
Data is based on context area.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Esri forecasts for 2024 and 2029. Esri converted Census 2010 into 2020 geography and Census 2020 data; U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2022).

Trade Area and Context Area

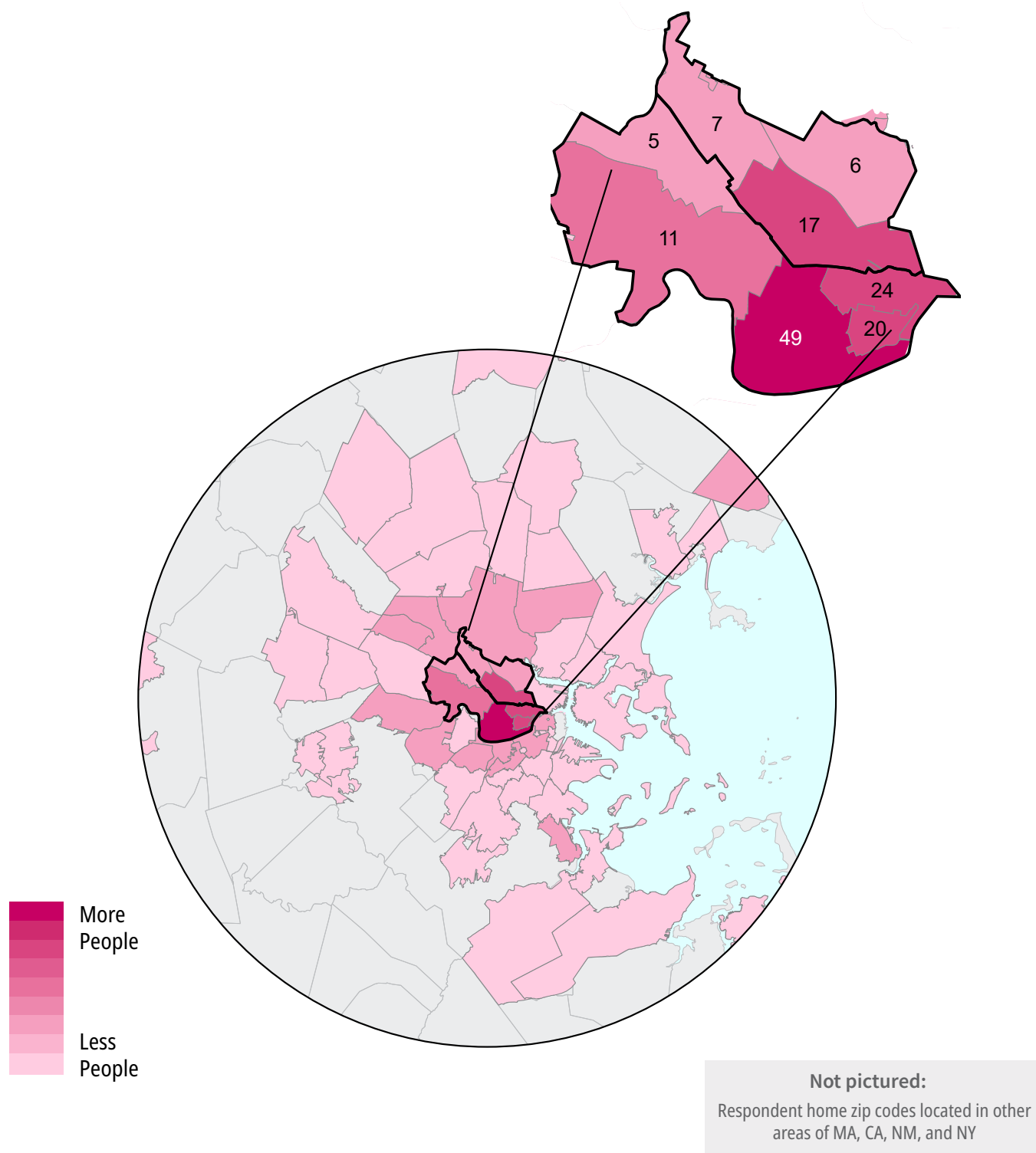
Kendall Square is defined in two ways in this report. The “context area” outlined in red on the map below refers to the commercial district boundaries. It identifies the greatest concentration of businesses in the Kendall Square area. The data presented in the Business Landscape (p.8) and Customer Outlook (p.10) each refers to businesses located in the context area. All surveys were conducted within this boundary. The “trade area” represents the location of the residents who live within a quarter mile from the context area and are most served by the commercial district.

Trade Area and Context Area Map



Customer Locations

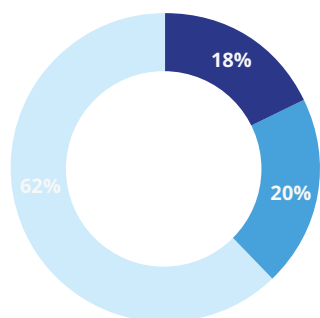
The map below shows the home location of survey respondents. They provided their home location by zip code and the most frequent are mapped here. Of all 300 respondents, 280 (93.33%) shared their zip code. The majority of survey respondents live outside of Cambridge, and 36.33% live in Cambridge.



Source: Kendall Square Customer Intercept Survey (June 2024)

Customer Demographics

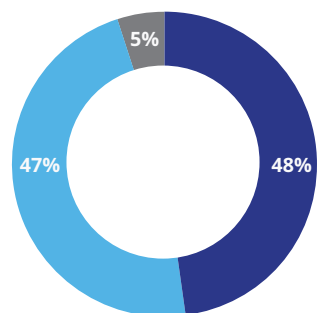
What is your relationship to Kendall Square?



	% Customers
Resident	18%
Other	20%
Worker	62%

✓ 96% responded ⓧ 4% did not respond

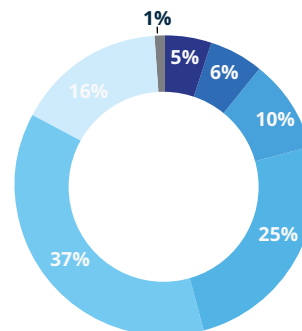
What is your gender?



	% Customers
Female	48%
Male	47%
Other	5%

✓ 96% responded ⓧ 4% did not respond

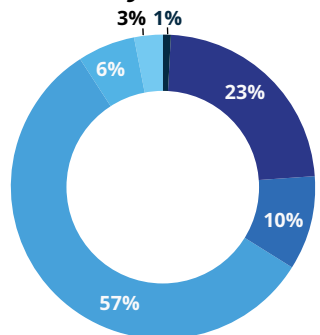
What is your age?



	% Customers
65+	5%
55-64	6%
45-54	10%
35-44	25%
25-34	37%
18-24	16%
<18	1%

✓ 98% responded ⓧ 2% did not respond

What is your race or ethnicity?



	% Customers	% Kendall Square	% Cambridge
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%	0.4%	0.2%
Asian	23%	33.5%	20.8%
Black or African American	10%	13.9%	10.8%
Caucasian or White	57%	38.5%	54.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mixed or Multi-racial	6%	7.9%	9.6%
Other	3%	5.8%	3.6%

✓ 93% responded ⓧ 7% did not respond

Are you Hispanic or Latino?

	% Customers	% Kendall Square	% Cambridge
Yes	11%	9.6%	9.8%
No	89%	90.4%	90.2%

✓ 99% responded ⓧ 1% did not respond

Source: Kendall Square Customer Intercept Survey (June 2024); U.S. Census Bureau. Esri forecasts for 2024 and 2029. Esri converted Census 2010 into 2020 geography and Census 2020 data

Kendall Square

The Community Development Department (CDD) is the planning agency for the City of Cambridge. Our mission is to foster a livable, sustainable, just, and equitable community. We work to enhance the character and diversity of the city's neighborhoods, preserve and increase affordable housing, create and promote accessible and sustainable mobility, build environmental resilience, and support sustainable economic growth. Through these initiatives, we strive to enrich the lives of residents, expand their opportunities, and contribute to a healthy urban environment. CDD takes an interdisciplinary approach to manage and guide evolution of our urban environment in a manner consistent with the City's priorities. We engage and collaborate with community partners, other government agencies, businesses and residents to make Cambridge a desirable place to live, work, learn, play, and innovate.

The Economic Opportunity and Development Division is committed to building an inclusive and sustainable economy in the City of Cambridge. The Division is responsible for a wide range of activities designed to meet the City's need for a vibrant, innovative, diverse, and thriving economic base that ensures economic opportunity for all. We offer a variety of resources and services, including site search and selection assistance, one-on-one meetings with staff, business workshops and classes, expert consulting services, and grants for accessibility, interior, and storefront improvements.

For more information:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/economicopportunityanddevelopment>

Sources

City of Cambridge Open Data
Kendall Square Customer Intercept Survey (2024)
Kendall Square Small Business Survey (August 2024)
Kendall Square Storefront Inventory (August 2024)
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
U.S. Census Bureau. Esri forecasts for 2024 and 2029. Esri converted Census 2010 into 2020 geography and Census 2020 data
U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (2022)
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Images

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Jaheim Harding Photography
Kyle Klein Photography
Olivia Fone

[cambridgema.gov/CDD](https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD)