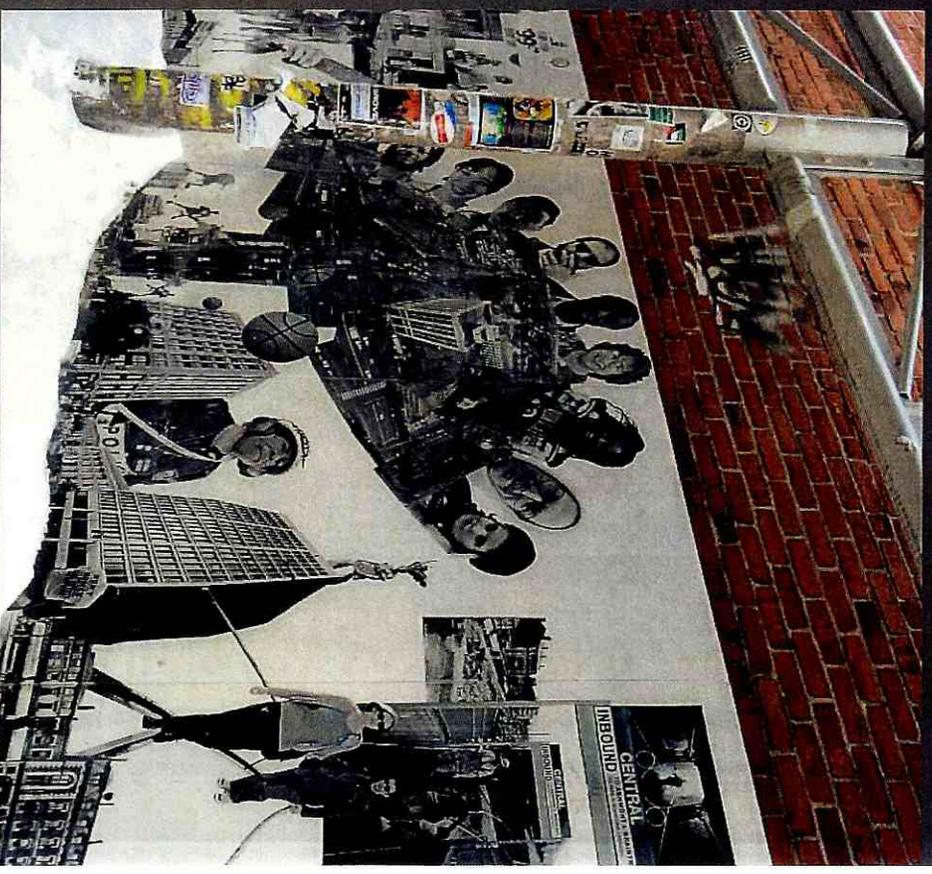


# Central Square: Nurturing culture and community in Cambridge's downtown

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



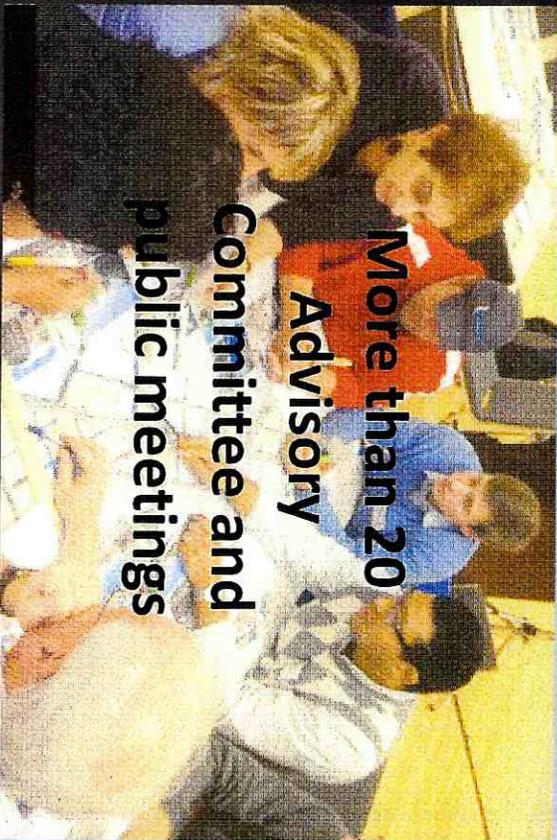
**Red Ribbon Commission process**

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

**Develop draft plan strategies for each area of analysis**

**Vision**

**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

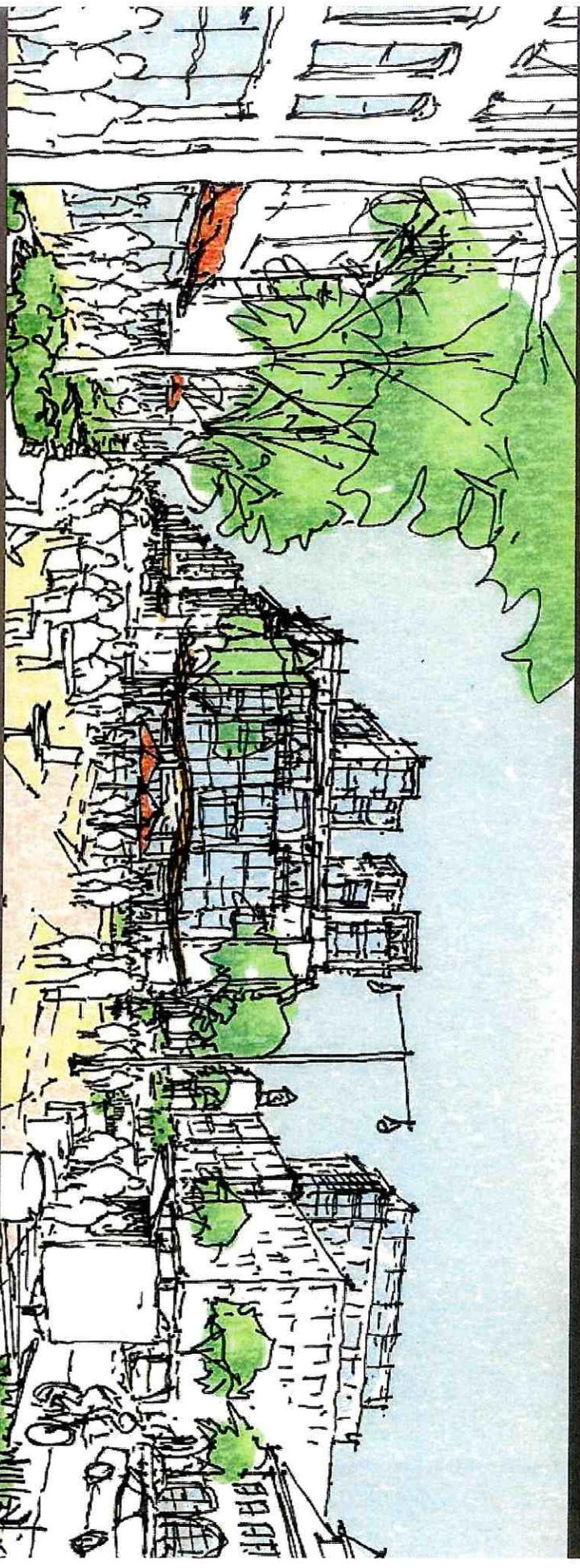
## VISION



**CENTRAL SQUARED**  
The Mayor's Red Ribbon Commission on the Delights and Concerns of Central Square  
December 2011

## VISION: statement

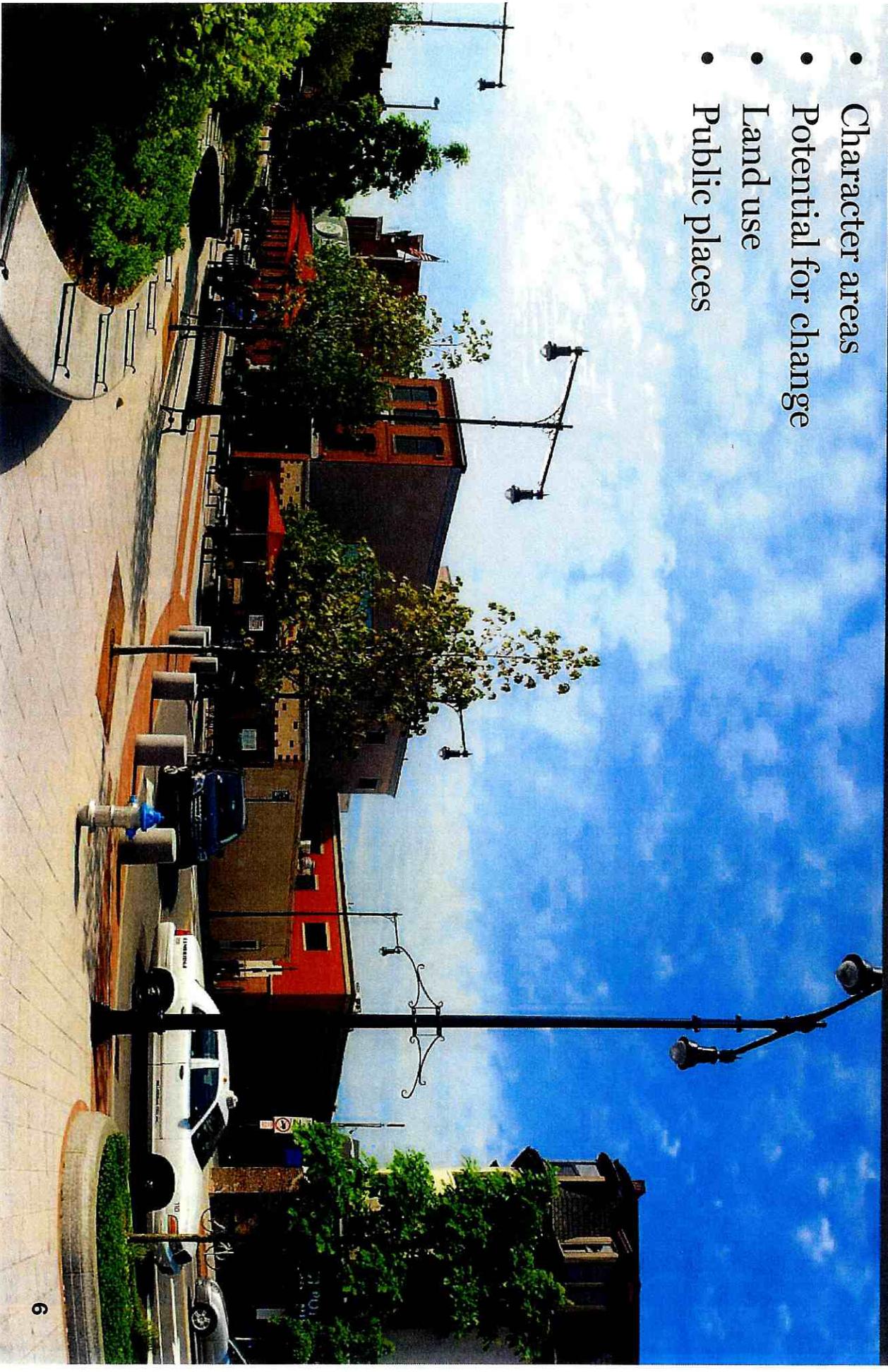
*Central Square is Cambridge's downtown and a center for nearby neighborhoods; a vibrant cultural district; a sustainable urban environment that invites people from all walks of life to shop, live, enjoy entertainment and the arts, find community together; and more.*



# FRAMEWORK

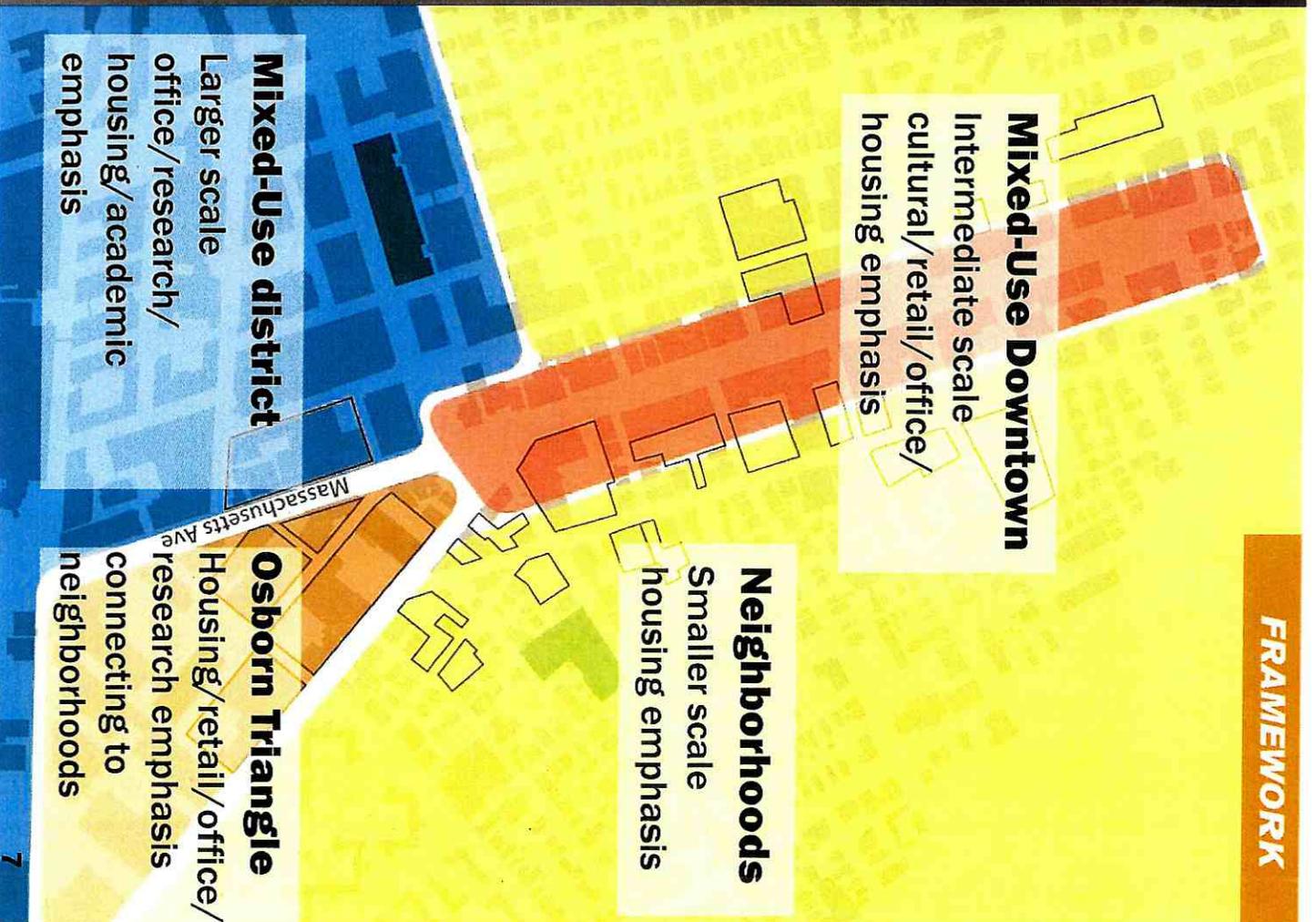
## FRAMEWORK

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



# Context: character areas

FRAMEWORK



## Mixed-Use Downtown

Intermediate scale  
cultural/retail/office/  
housing emphasis

## Neighborhoods

Smaller scale  
housing emphasis

## Mixed-Use district

Larger scale  
office/research/  
housing/academic  
emphasis

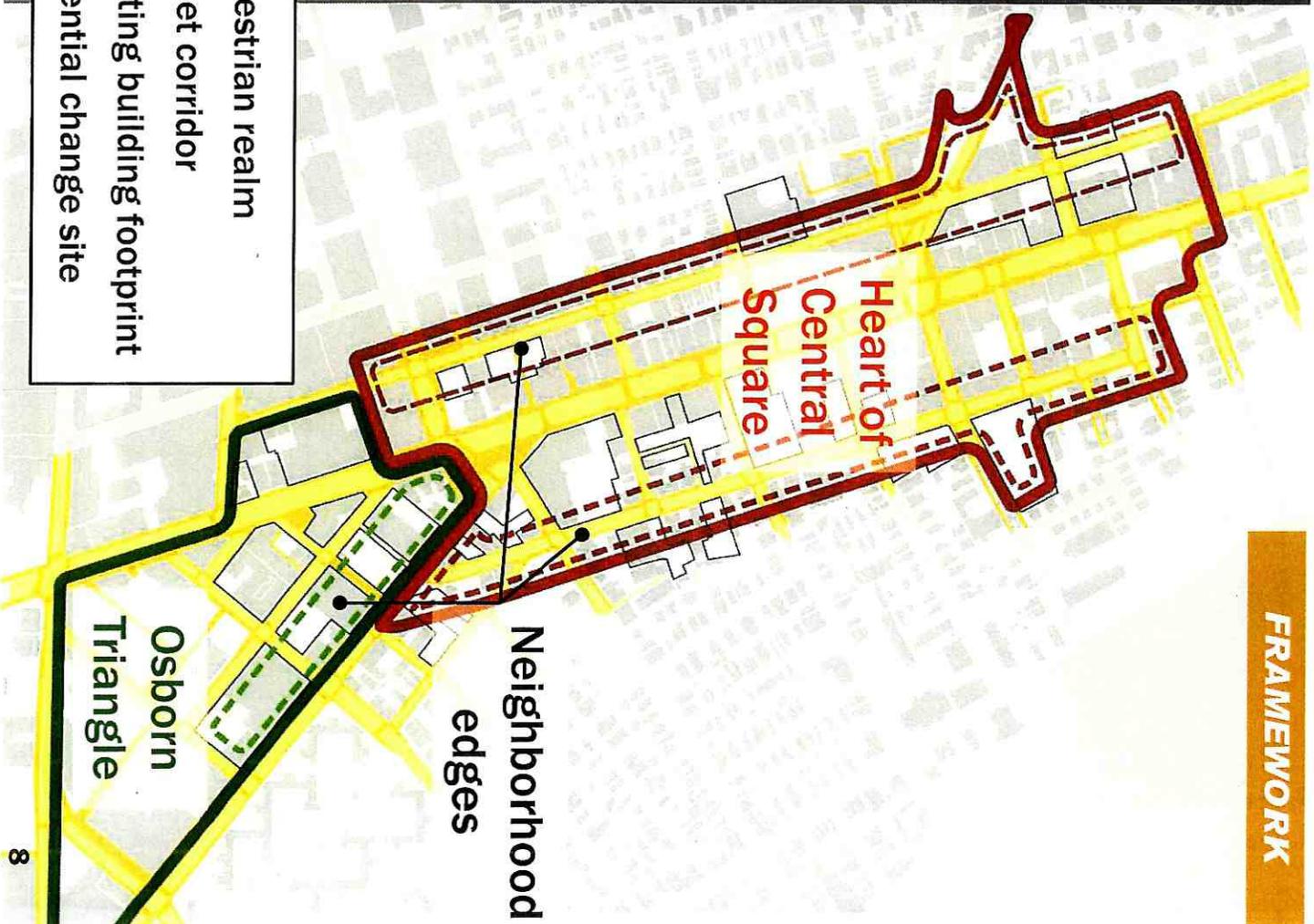
## Osborn Triangle

Housing/retail/office/  
research emphasis  
connecting to  
neighborhoods

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

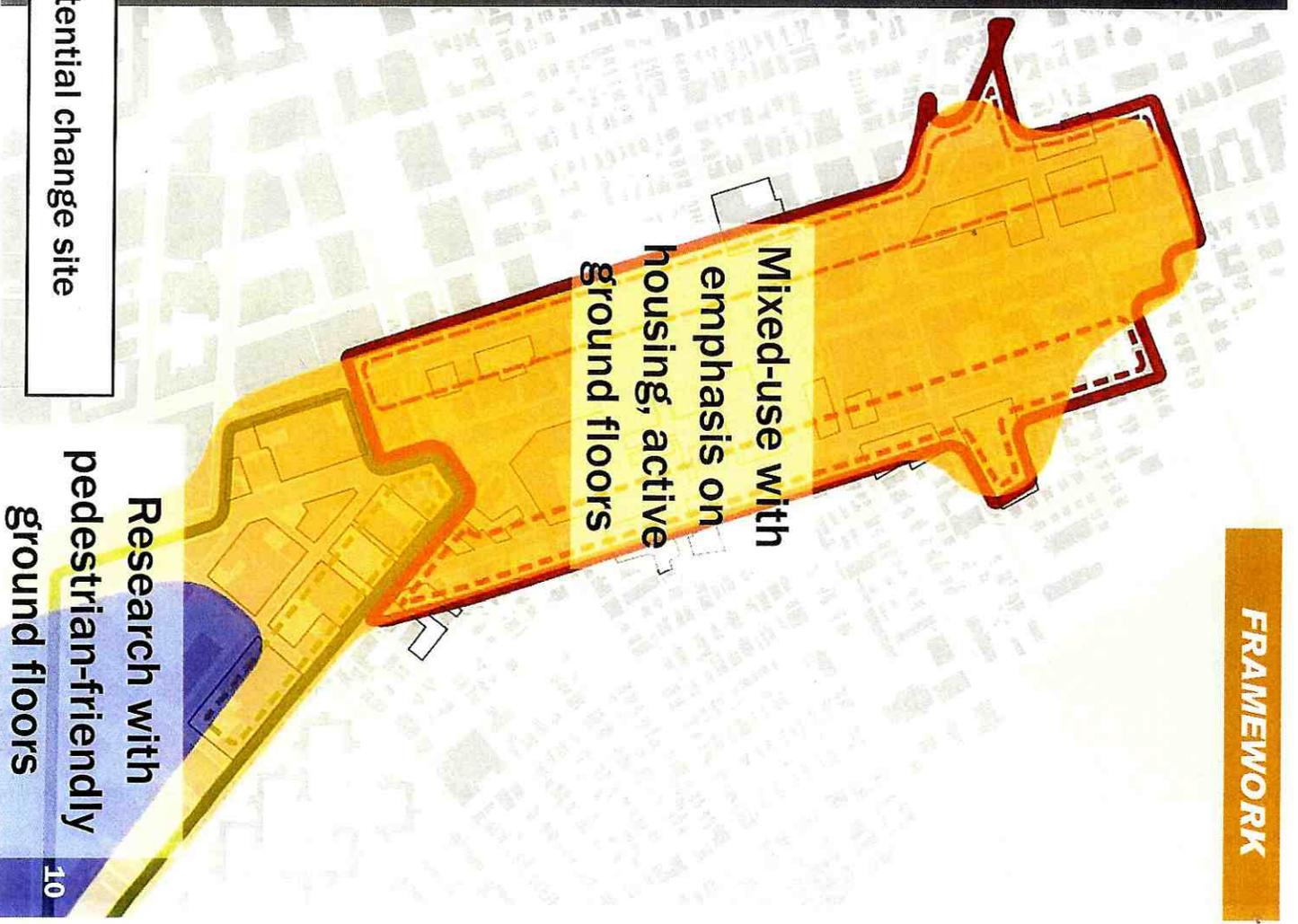
**Greater development potential**

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



# Vision framework: land use

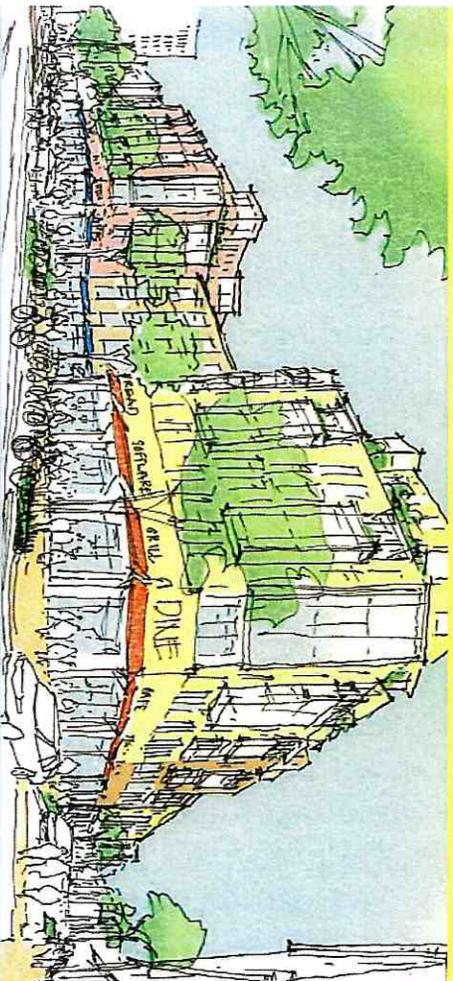
- Add or enhance ground floor active edges where needed
- Accommodate a lively mix of uses
  - Prioritize housing on upper floors
  - Encourage non-profit office/business use
  - Generally limit large-scale research uses west of Windsor Street corridor
- Accommodate comfortable use and scale transitions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



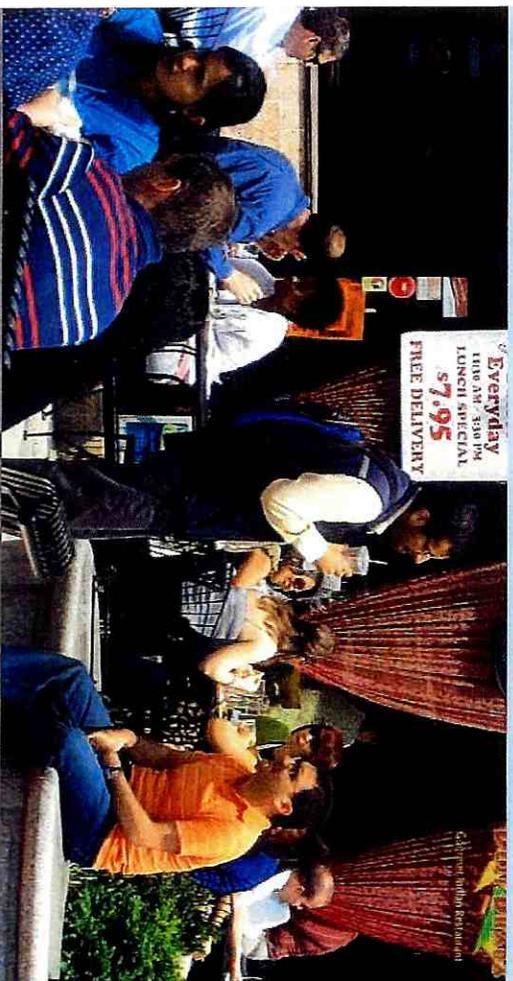
# VISION GOALS & STRATEGIES

VISION

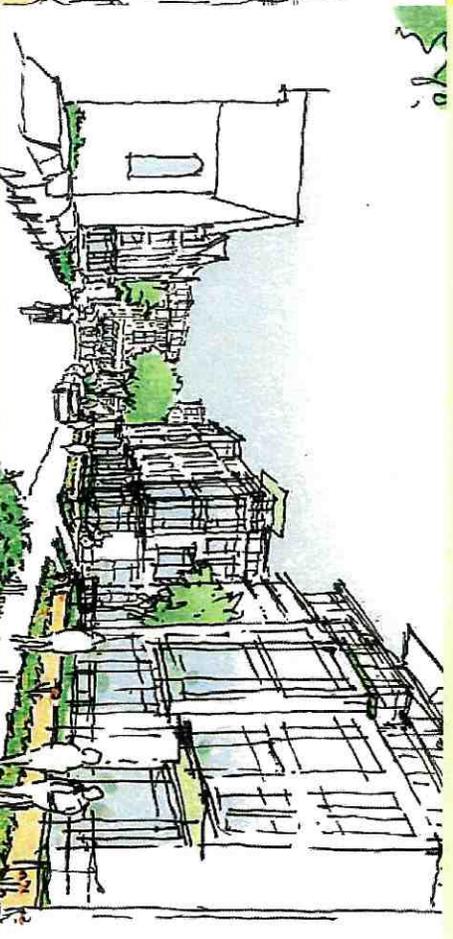
A PLACE FOR LIVING



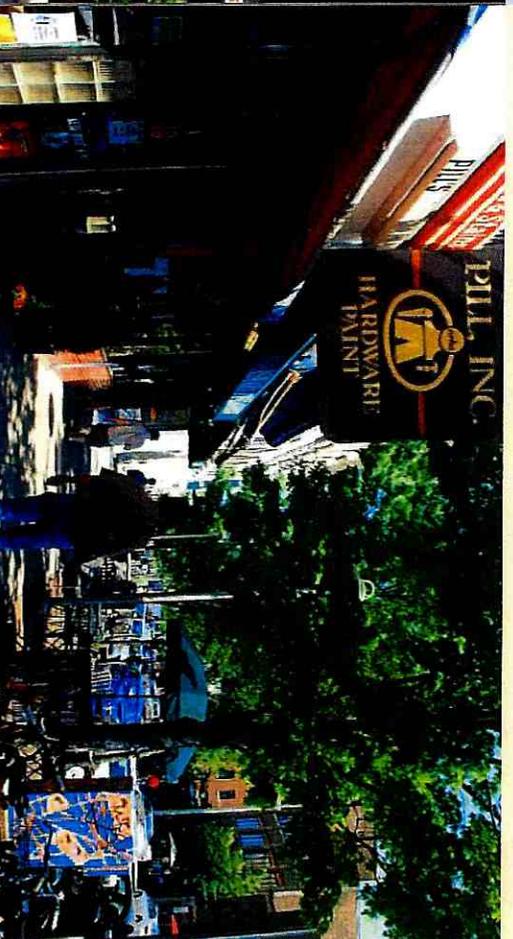
PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY



CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE



RETAIL/CULTURAL/NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY



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

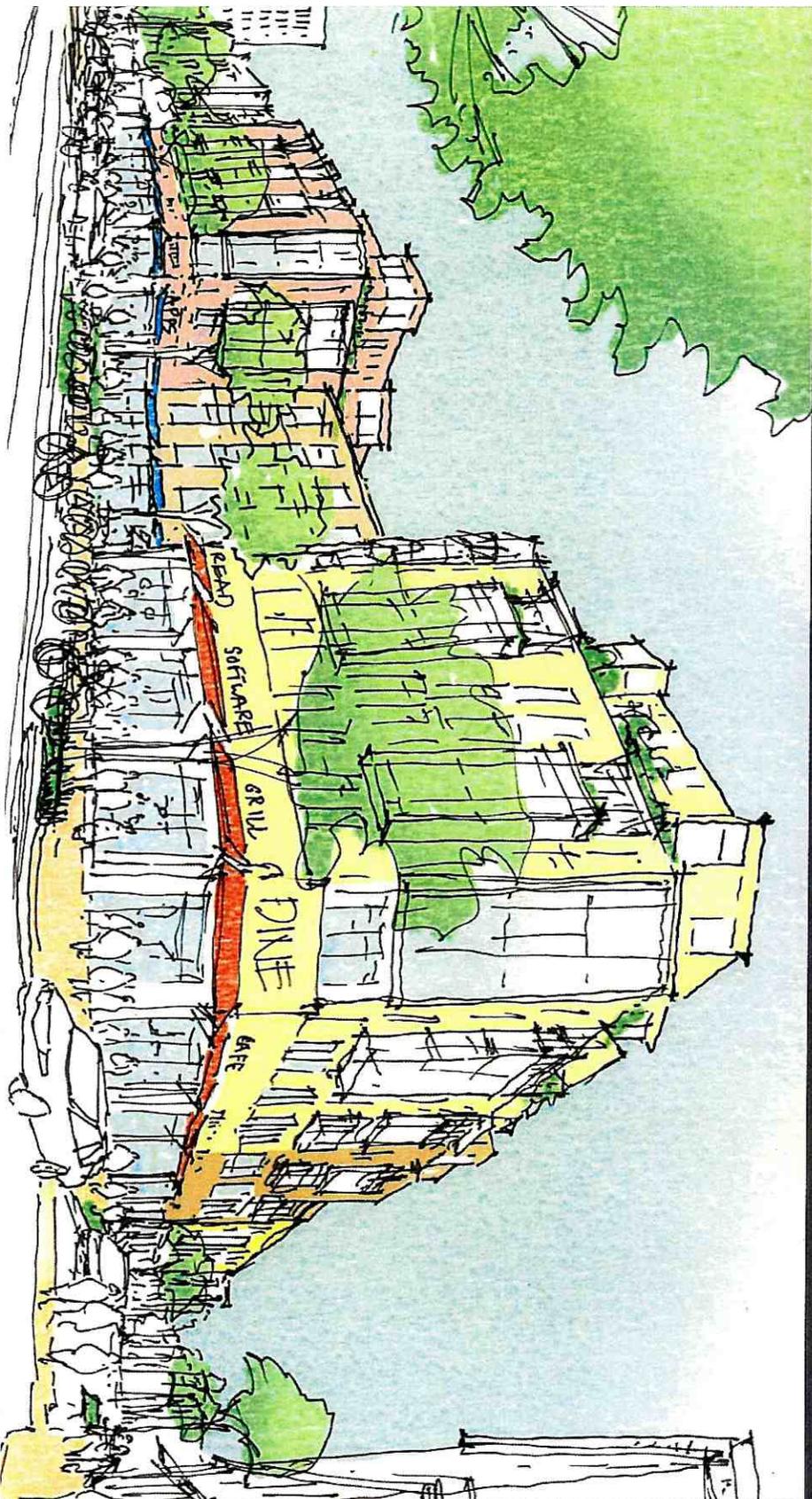
## Goals

# A PLACE FOR LIVING

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

## OBJECTIVE

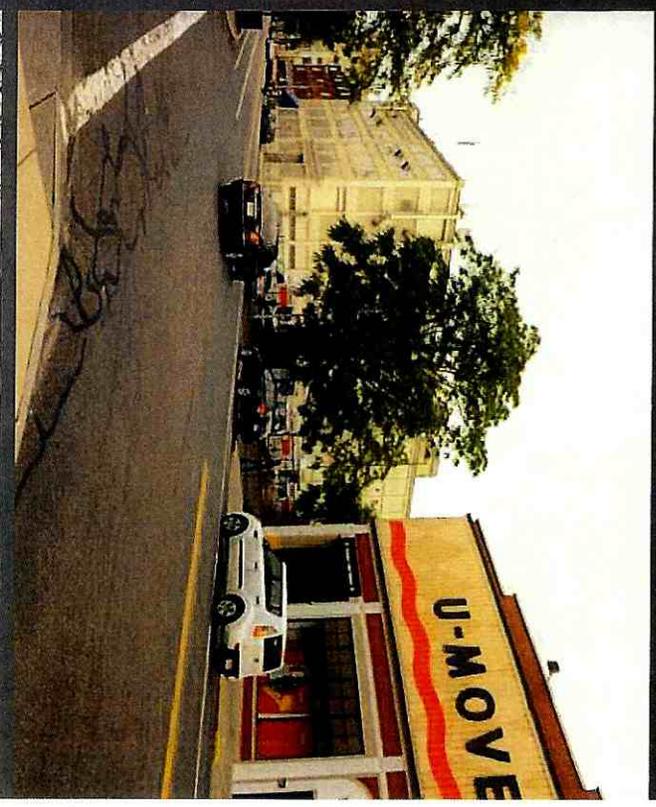
- Expand housing stock and increase the range of housing choices to serve a broad spectrum of incomes, ages and household sizes



## VISION

# 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

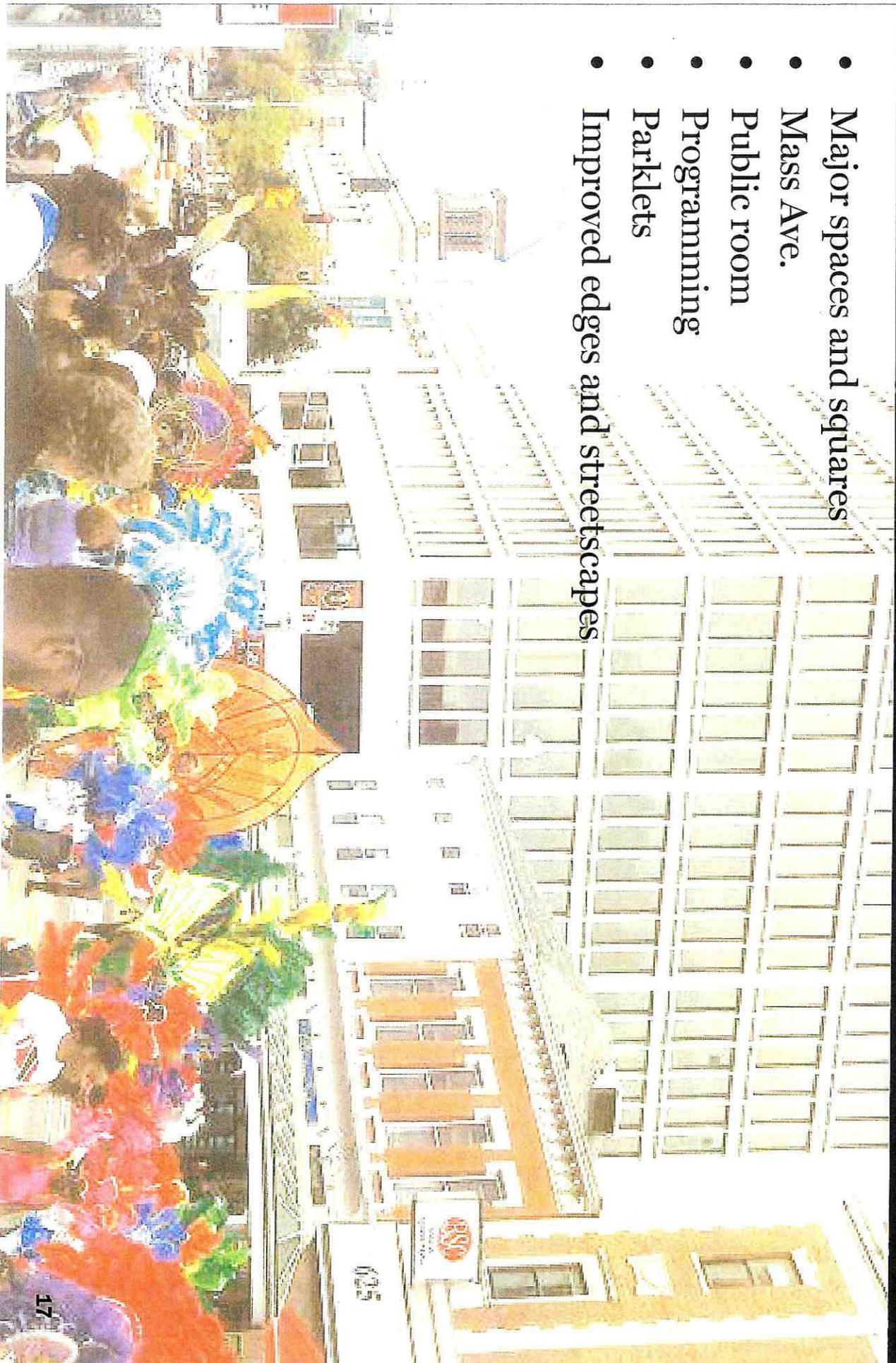
Opportunities to improve, expand public spaces

- 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”

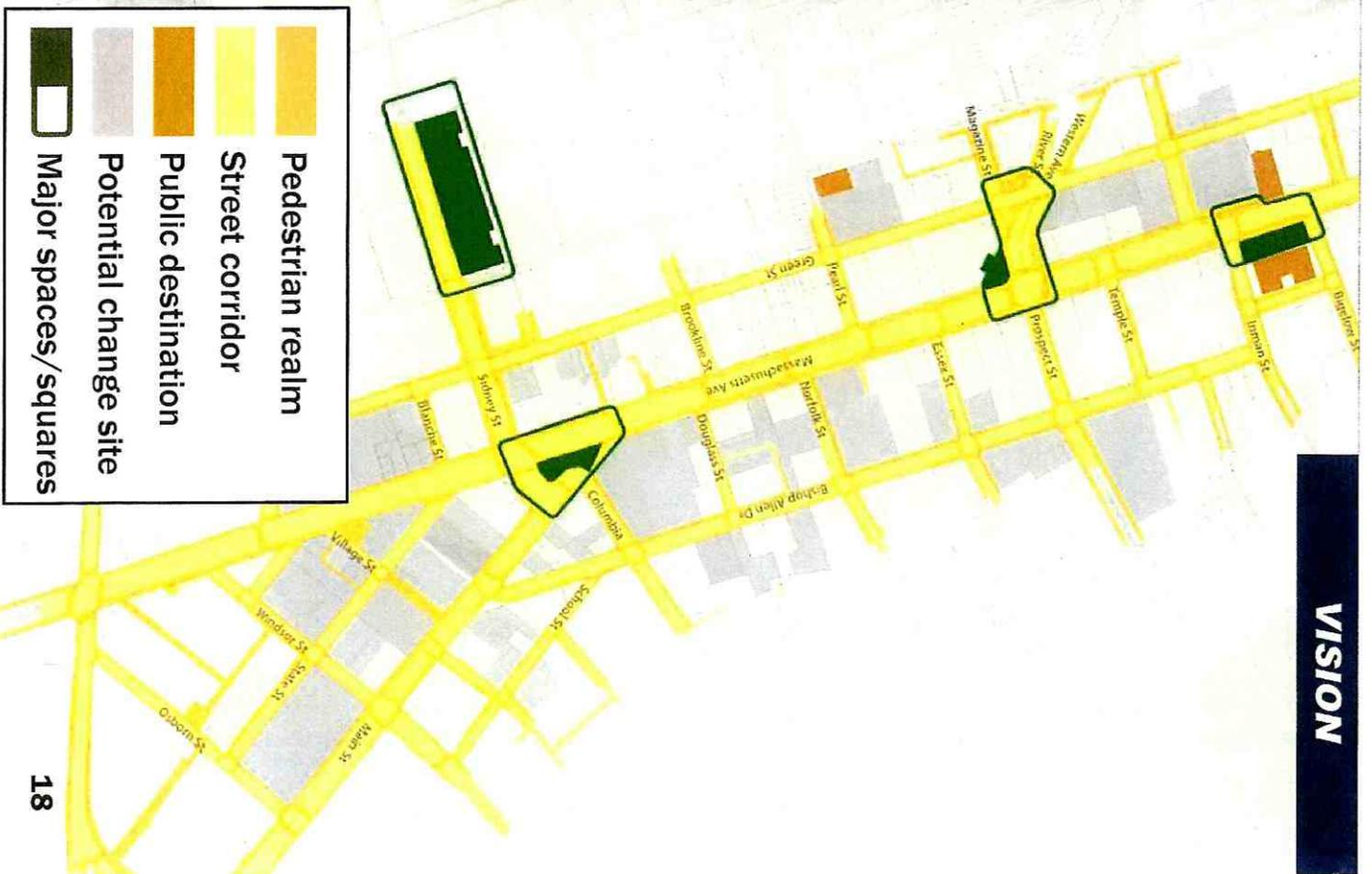


# Public realm framework

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



# Major spaces



**VISION**

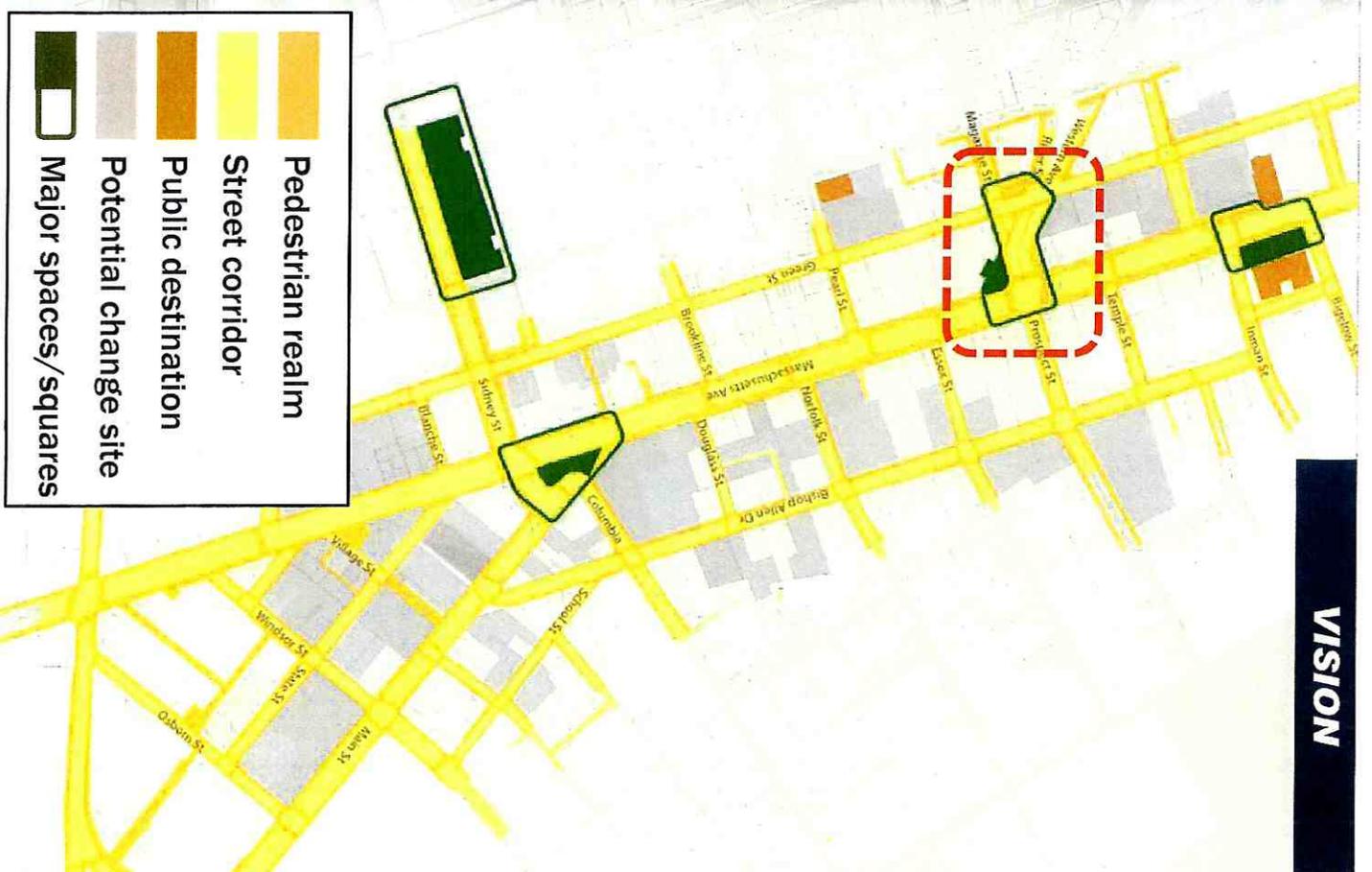
# Major spaces: Carl Barron Plaza

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*)



## VISION

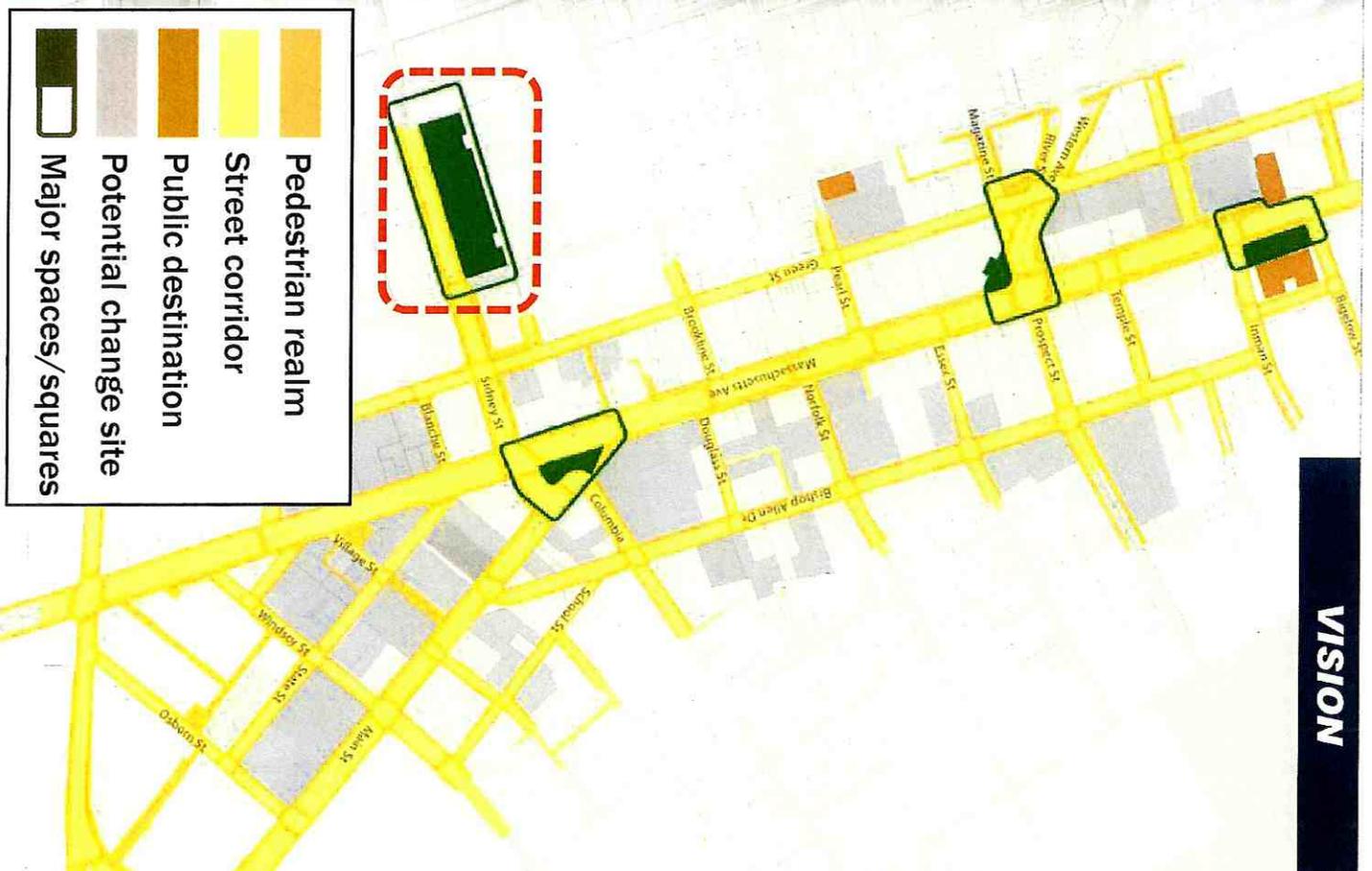




# Major spaces: University Park Plaza

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

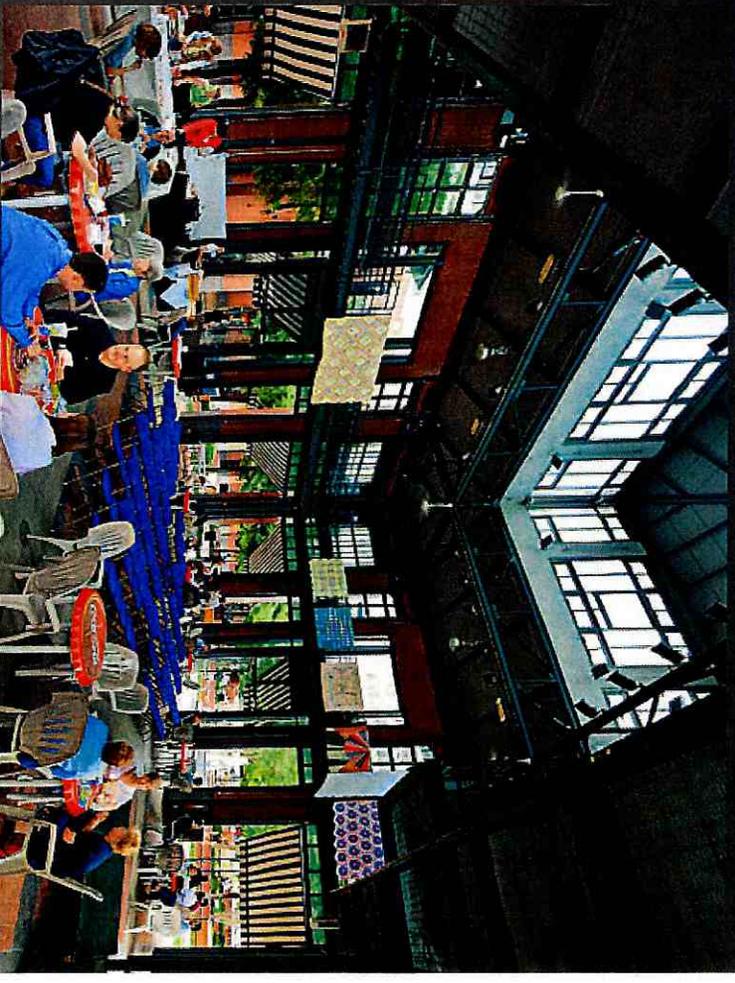


# Public room

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

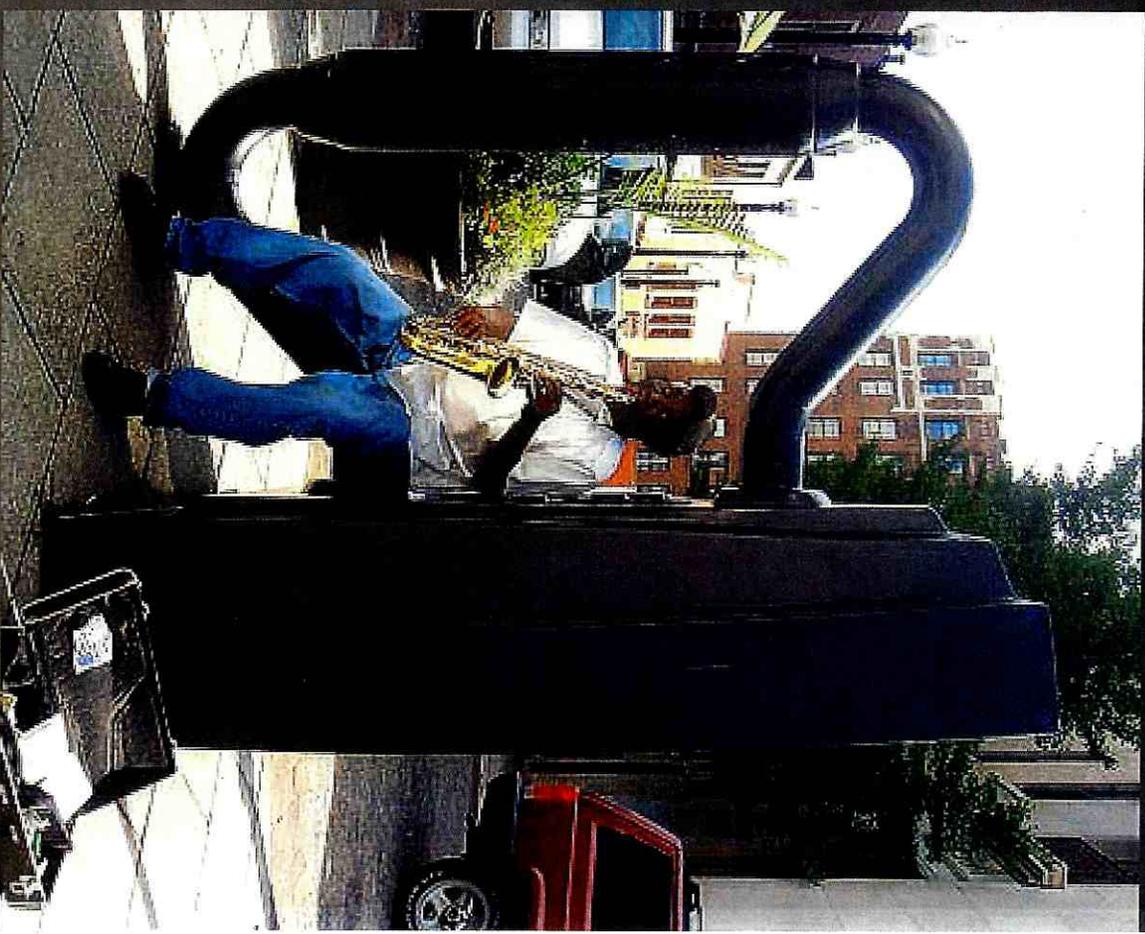
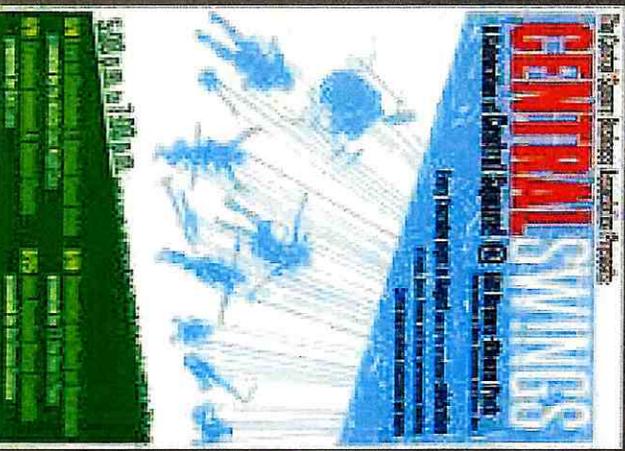


VISION



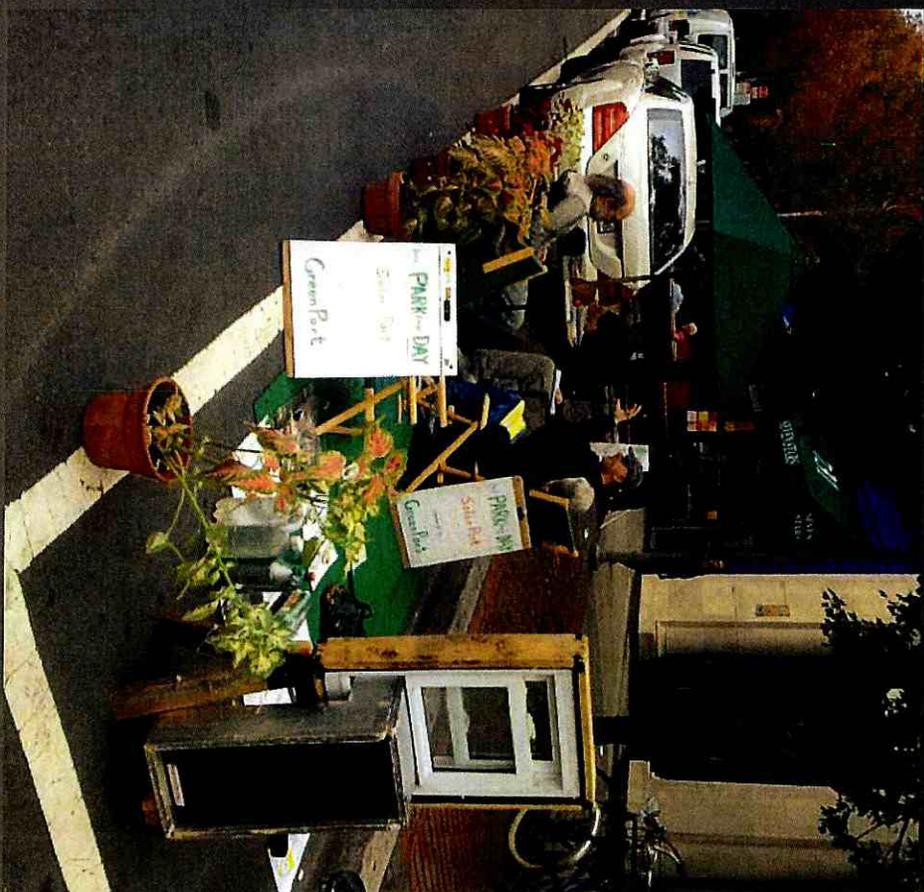
# Programming

- 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)



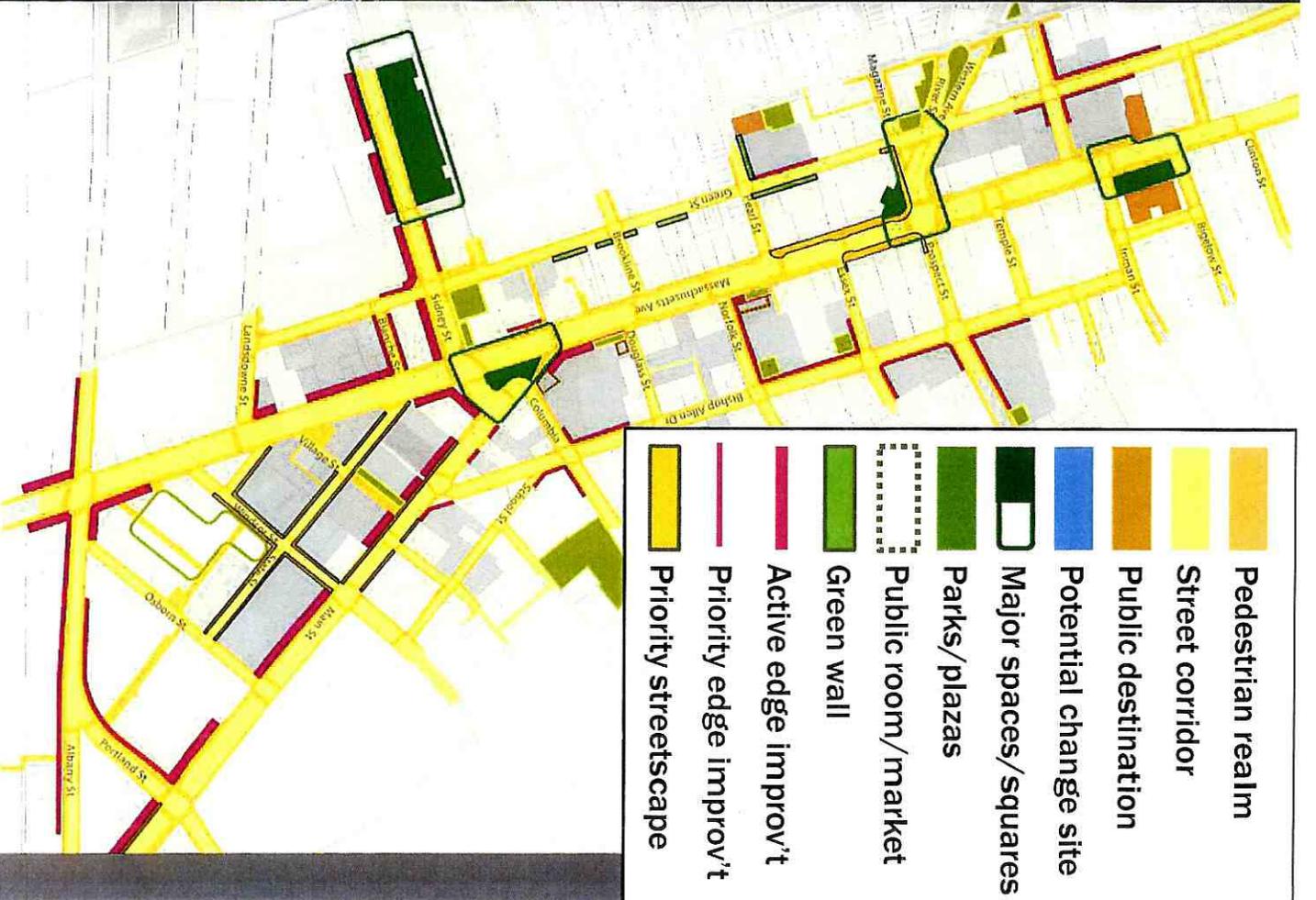
# Parklets

- 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

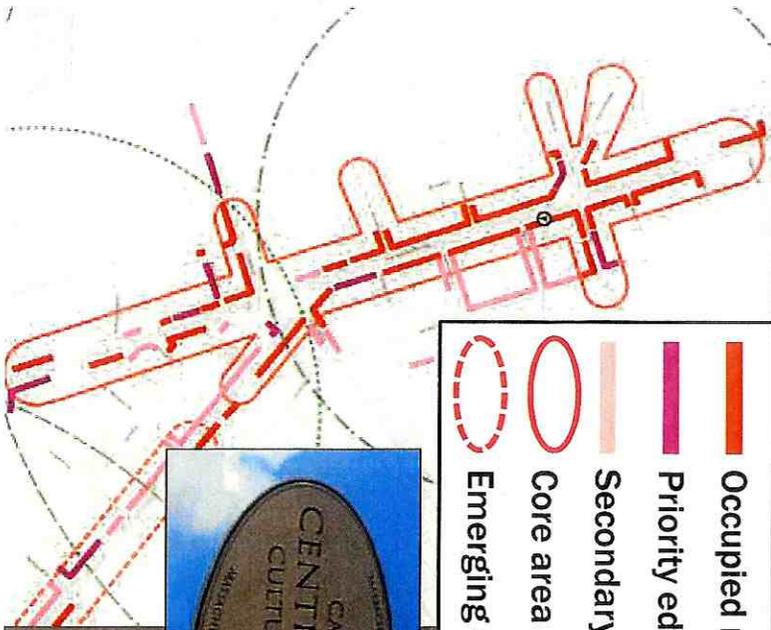
# RETAIL, CULTURAL AND NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY

## VISION

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

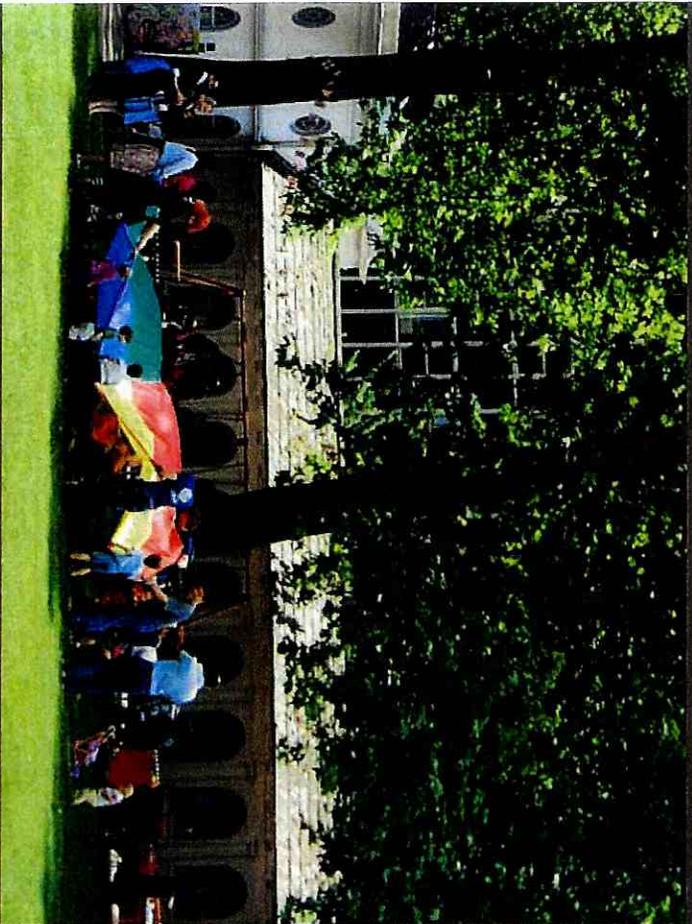


Minimum one-third of space

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**

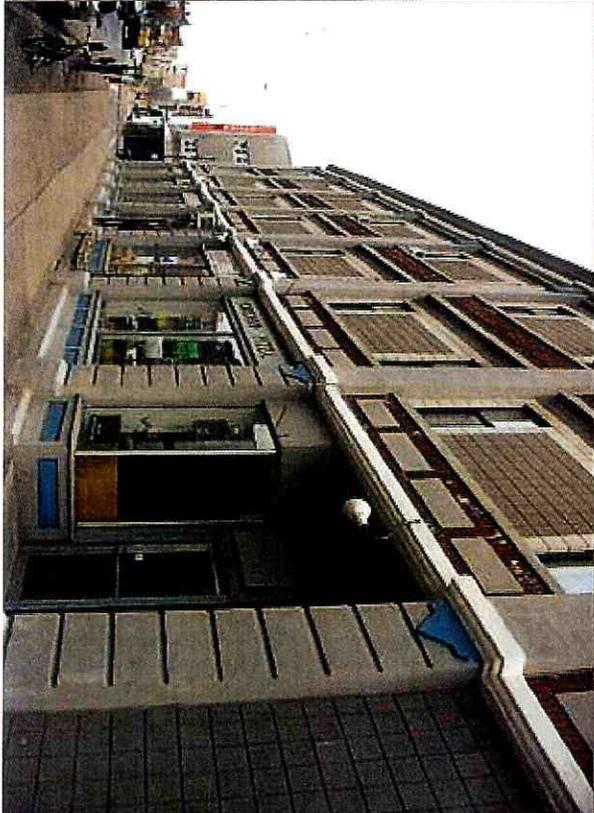
**Wicked Local.com**

# Continue façade improvement grants

Before



After

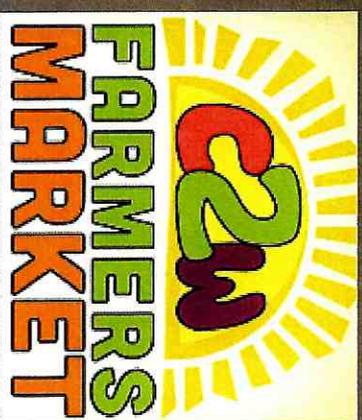
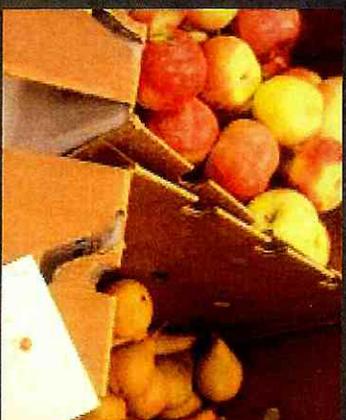


# Proactively keep storefronts occupied

- 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



CENTRAL  
SQUARE  
BUSINESS  
ASSOCIATION

Please check back  
this Fall to see us  
strut our new stuff.



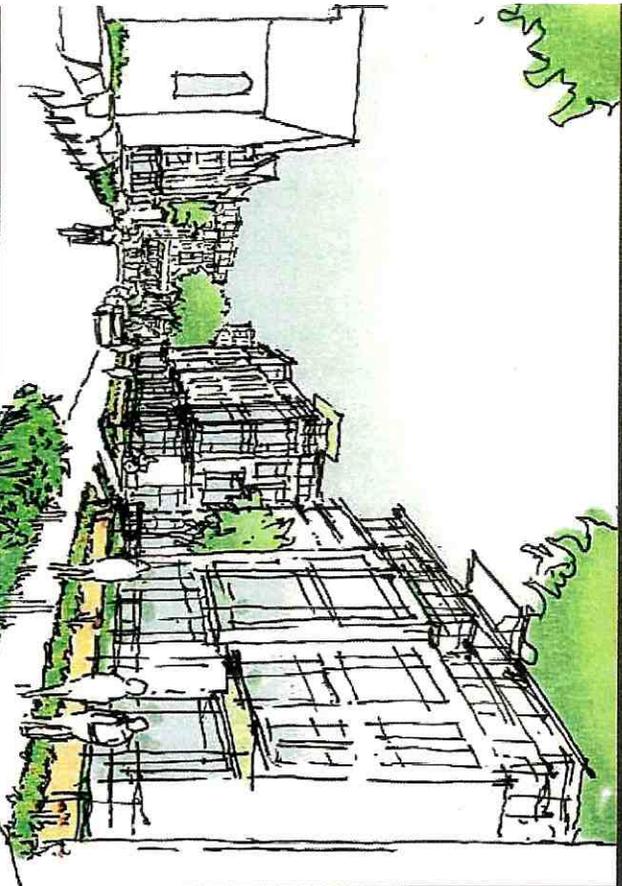
**Goals**

# CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE

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

**OBJECTIVES**

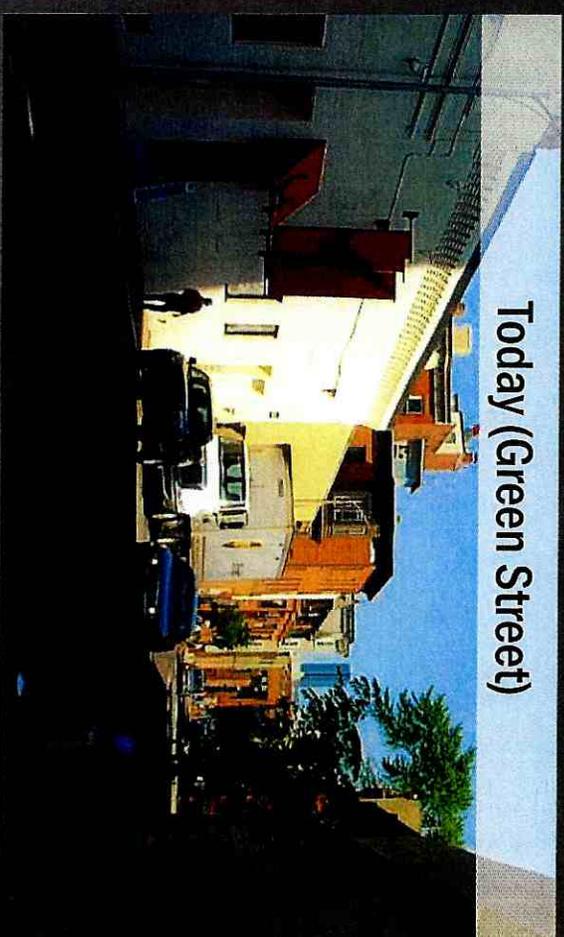
- Enhance the street network to make walking and biking more convenient, safe and fun
- Maintain and improve a variety of good transportation choices
- Update parking requirements to reflect increased preferences for alternatives to driving
- Add plantings and green infrastructure to encourage a healthier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



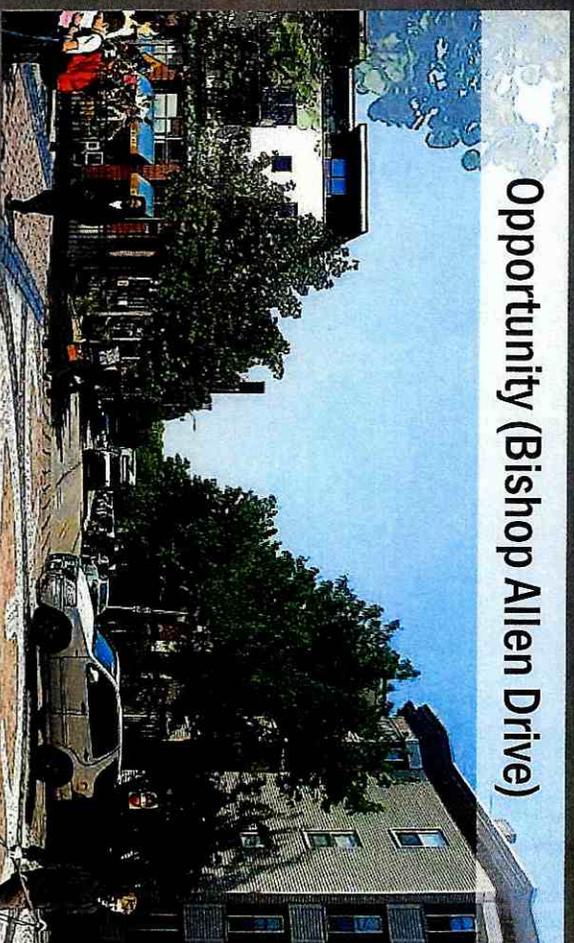
# Enhance side street walkability

## 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



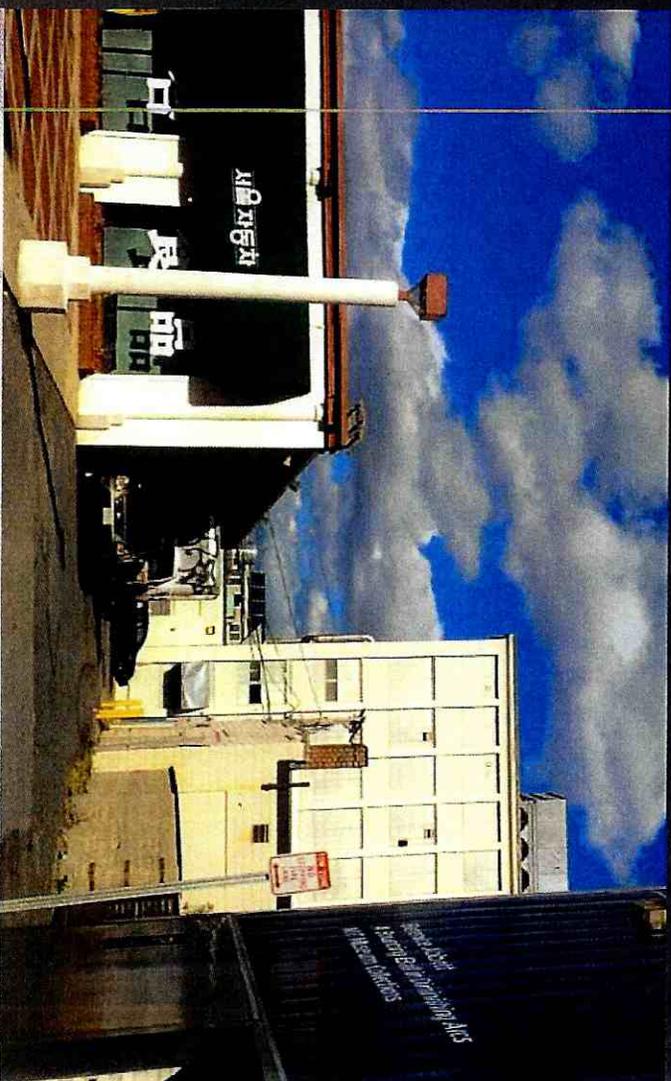
Today (Green Street)



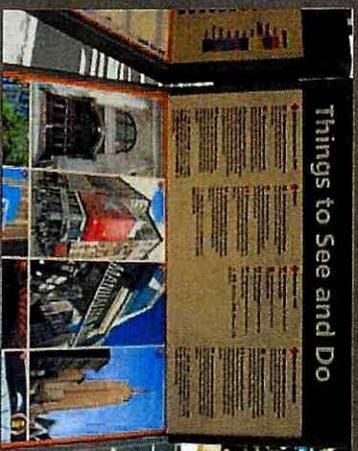
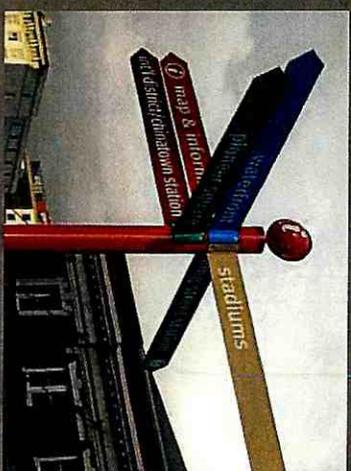
Opportunity (Bishop Allen Drive)

# Improved wayfinding and connections

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



Potential Mass Ave-State-Main connection



## Goals

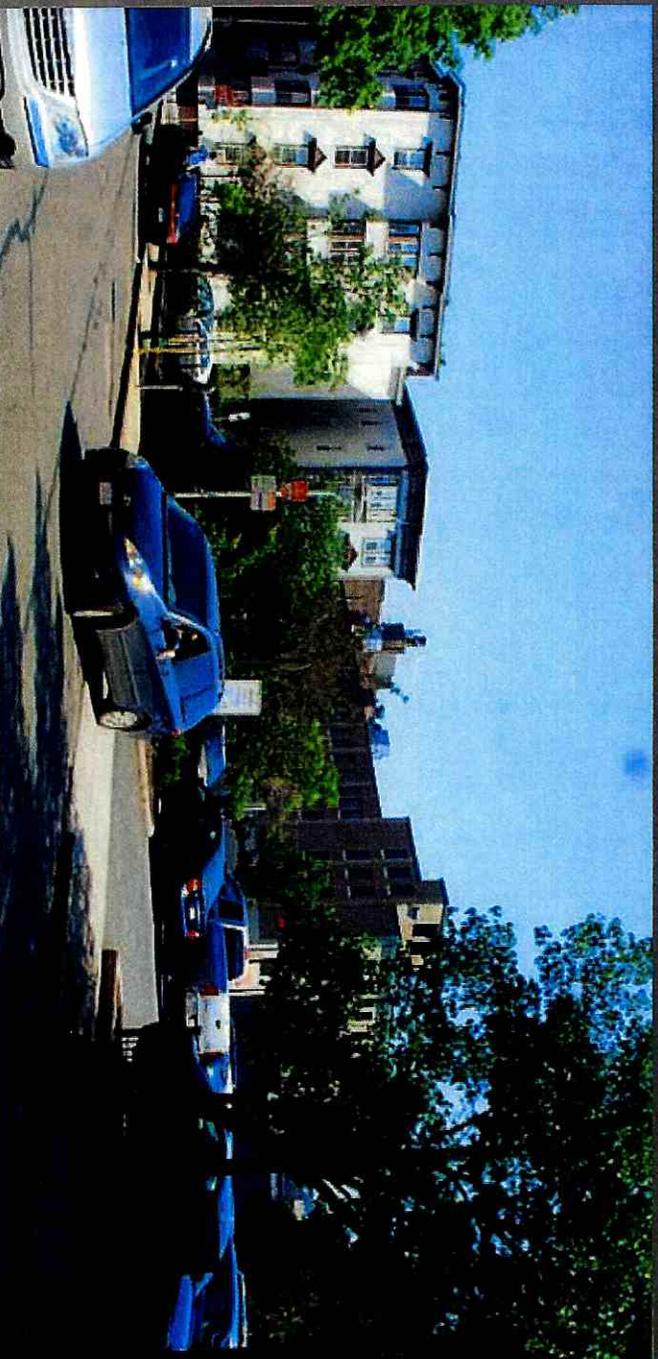
## VISION

# LEVERAGE FUTURE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INVESTMENTS, as appropriate

Mitigate neighborhood impacts.

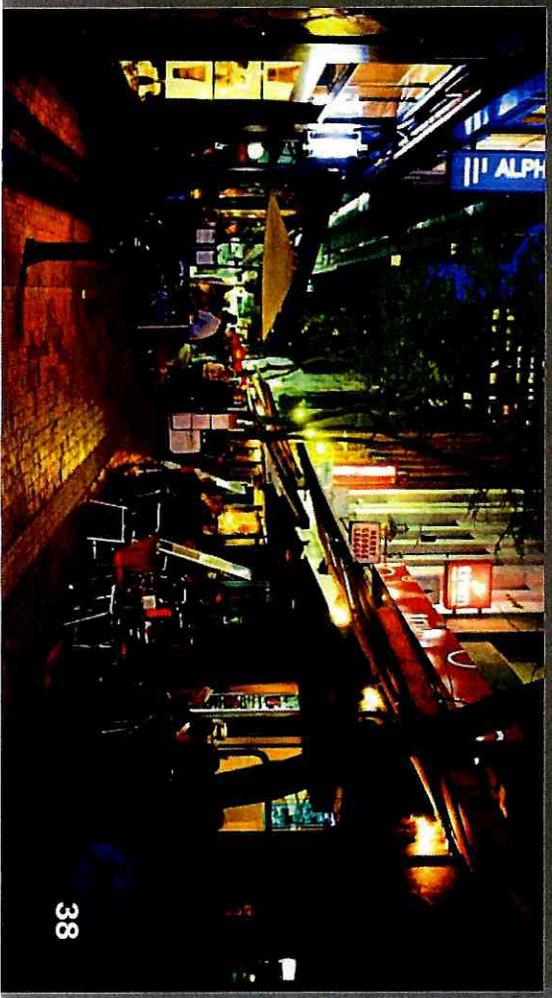
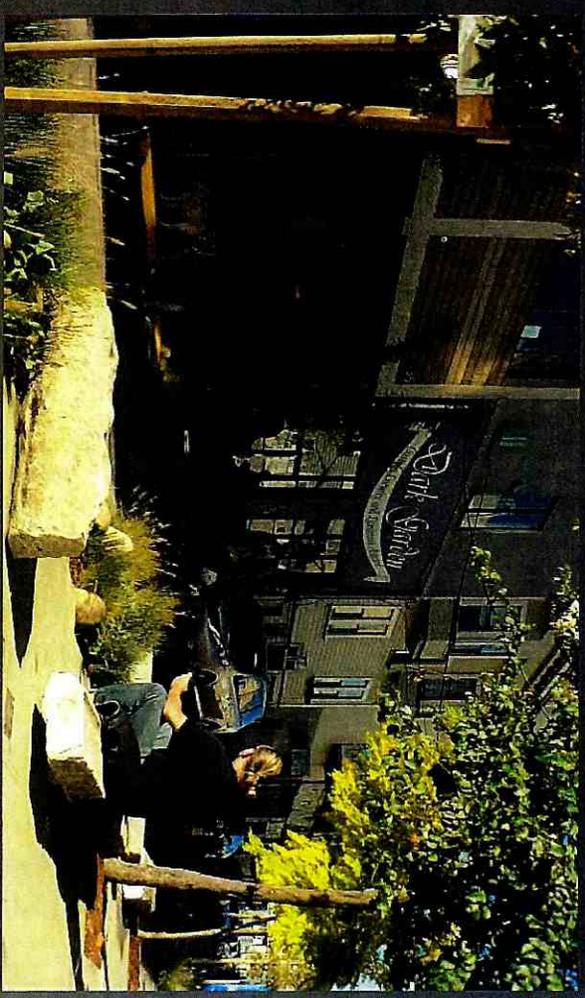
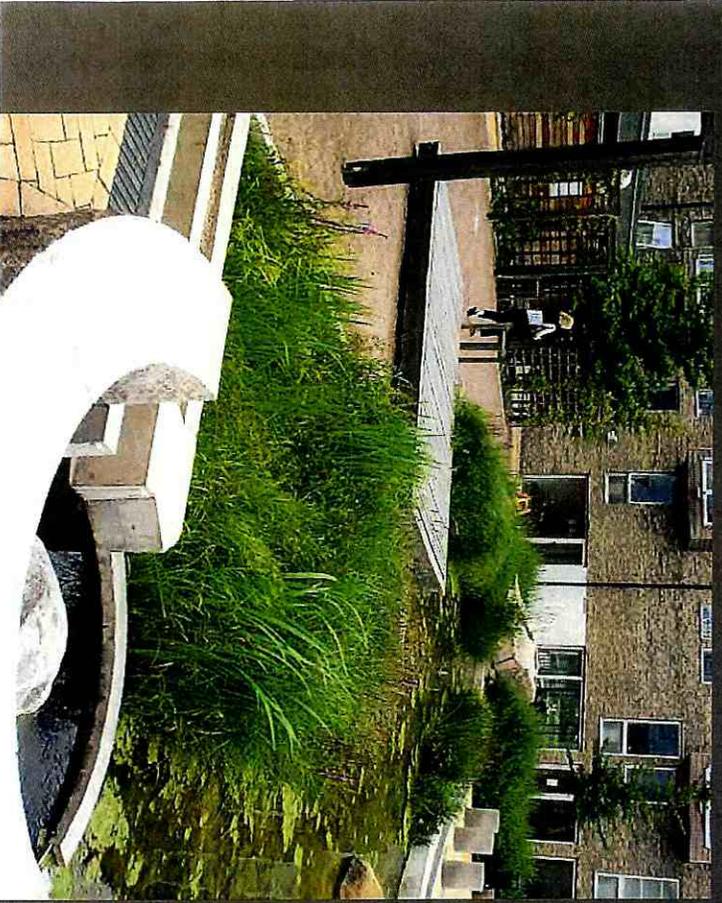
### OBJECTIVES

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



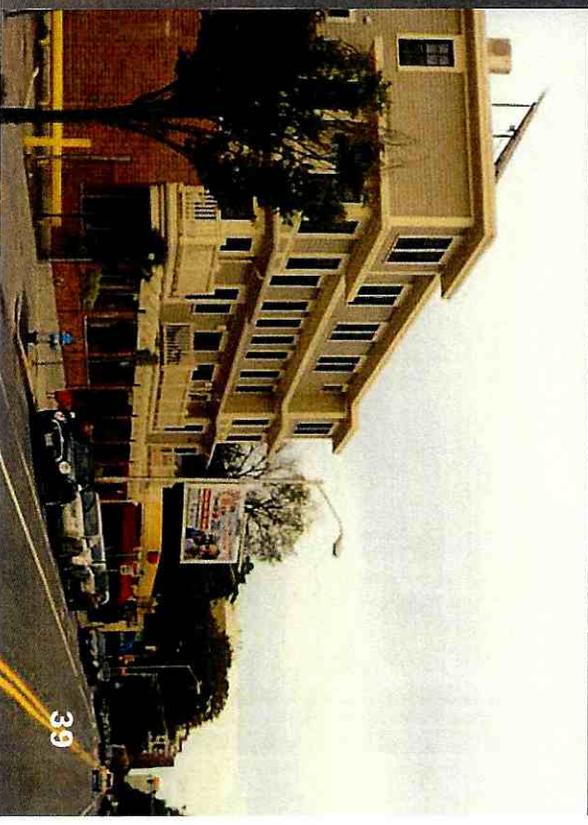
# Leverage city parking lots as a unique benefit opportunity

- 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

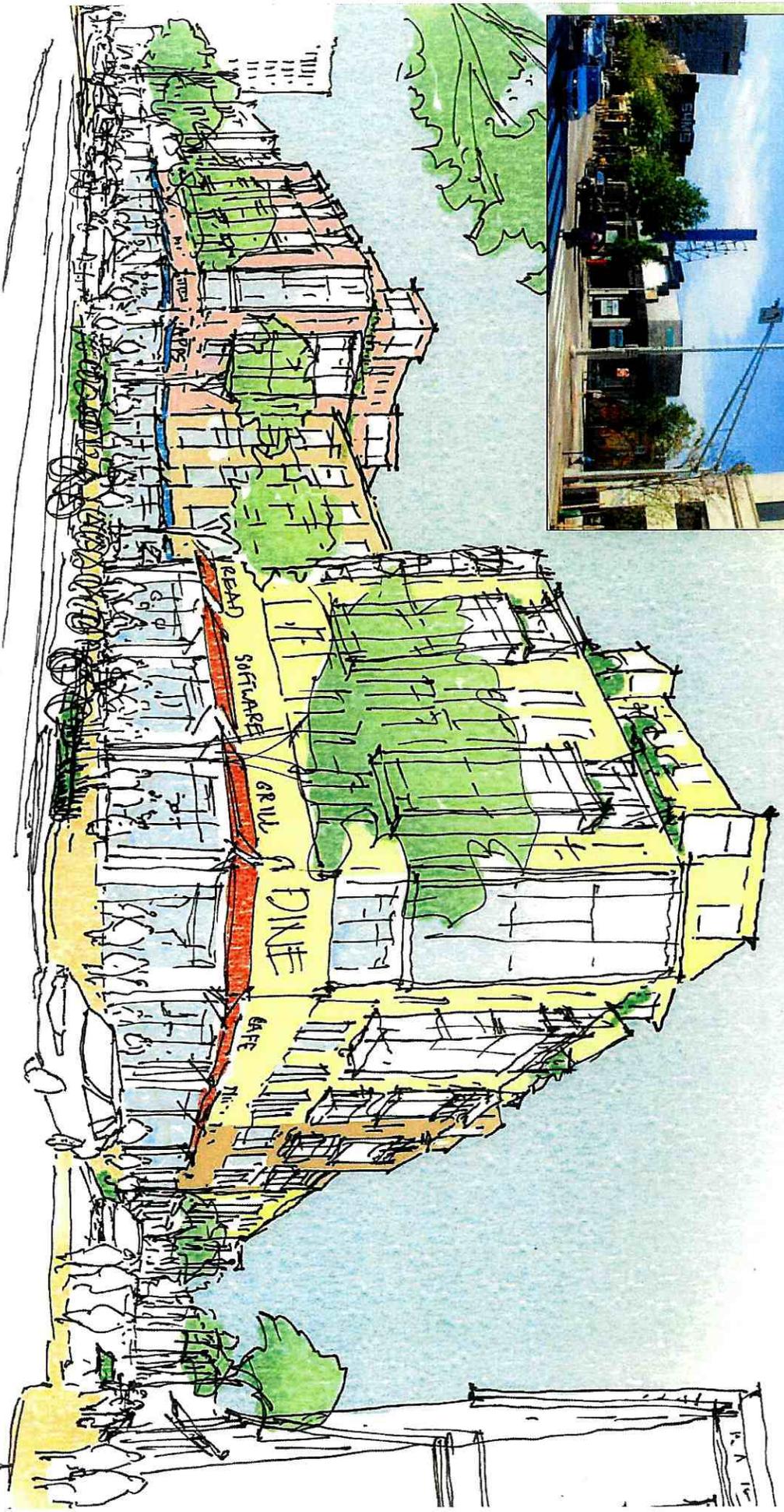
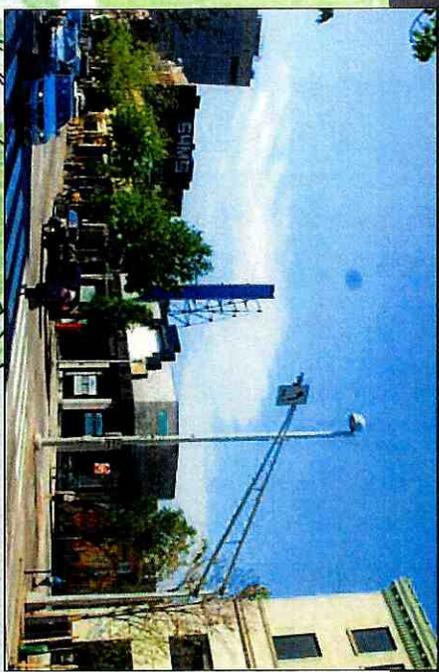
- Encourage smart growth
  - Mix of uses
  - Emphasize housing within  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of Central Square station
- Encourage walking, biking, transit use, car-sharing
- Regularly update sustainable development standards to the state of the art. Selected new thresholds include:
  - LEED Gold for commercial 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**

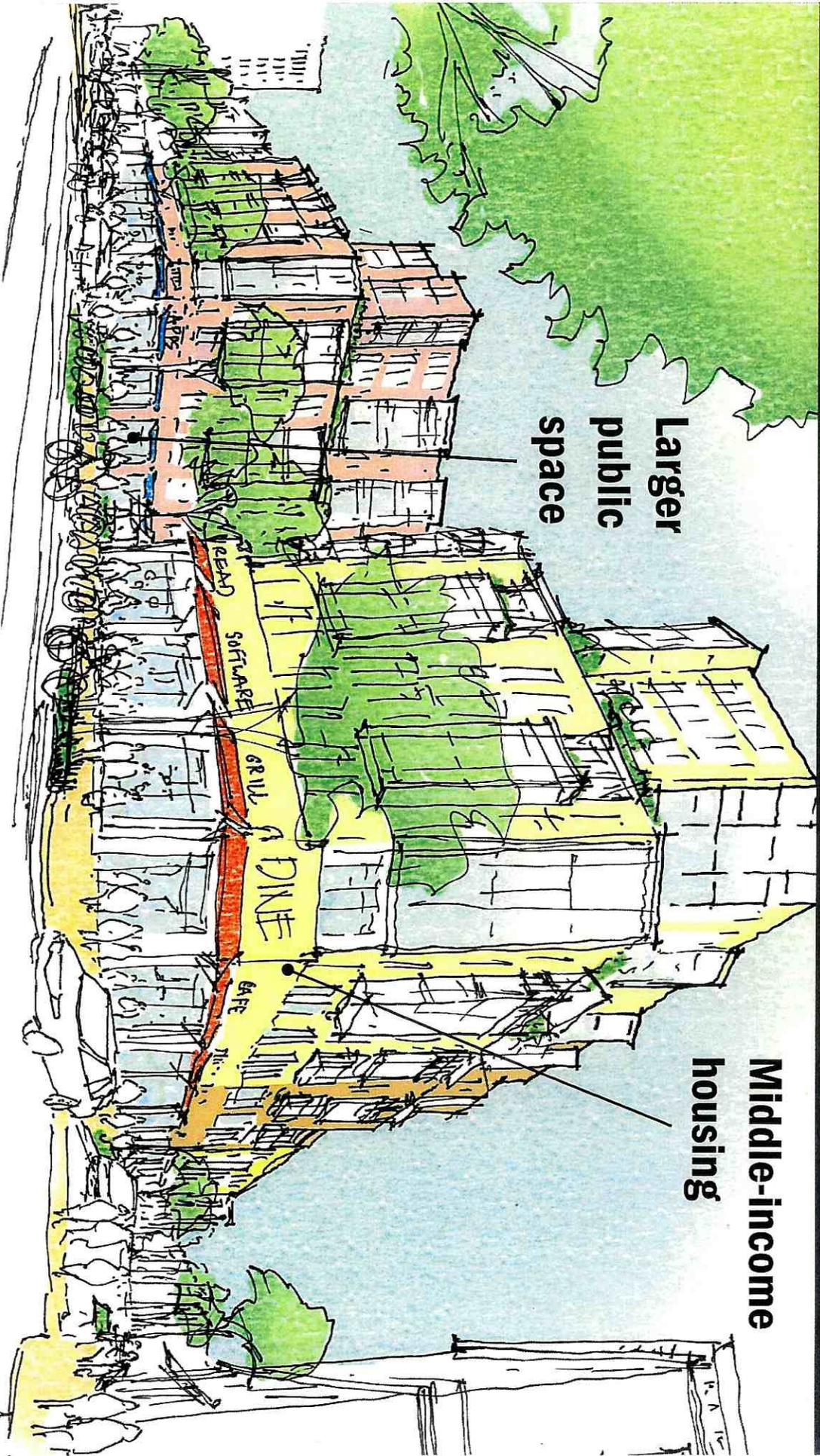
- Ensure mix of lower and taller buildings along Mass Ave with guidelines and floor size limits
- Continue policy of stepping building volumes down toward neighborhoods along side streets
- Consider raising height limits from 80' to 140'-160' to encourage housing and other community benefits
- Enable 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

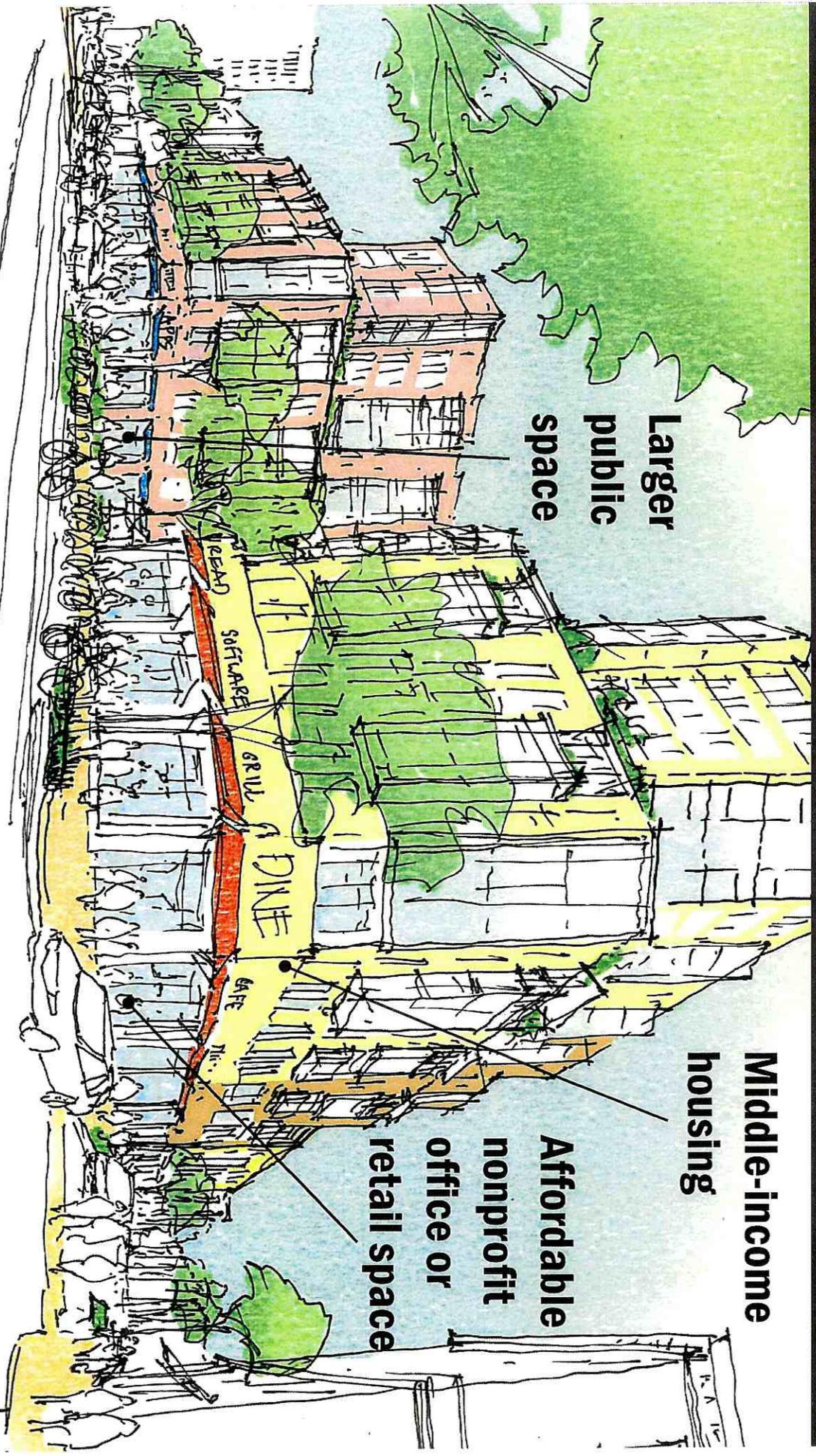


Larger  
public  
space

Middle-income  
housing

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

# Opportunity: greater density and height increase

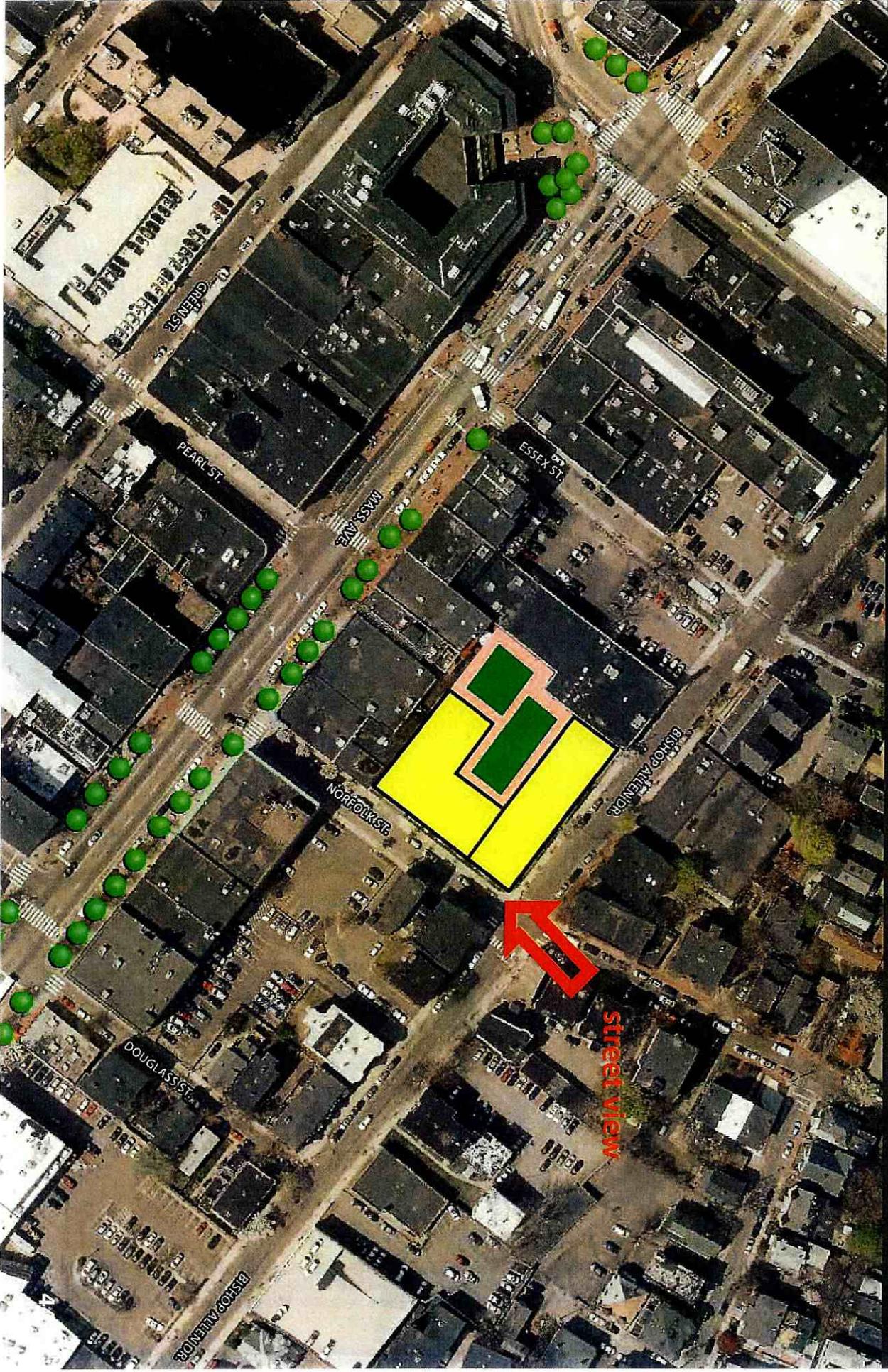


**Larger  
public  
space**

**Middle-income  
housing**

**Affordable  
nonprofit  
office or  
retail space**

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



# Neighborhood view: Norfolk St. at Bishop Allen

VISION

street view



**VISION**

**Opportunity: current height and density limits**

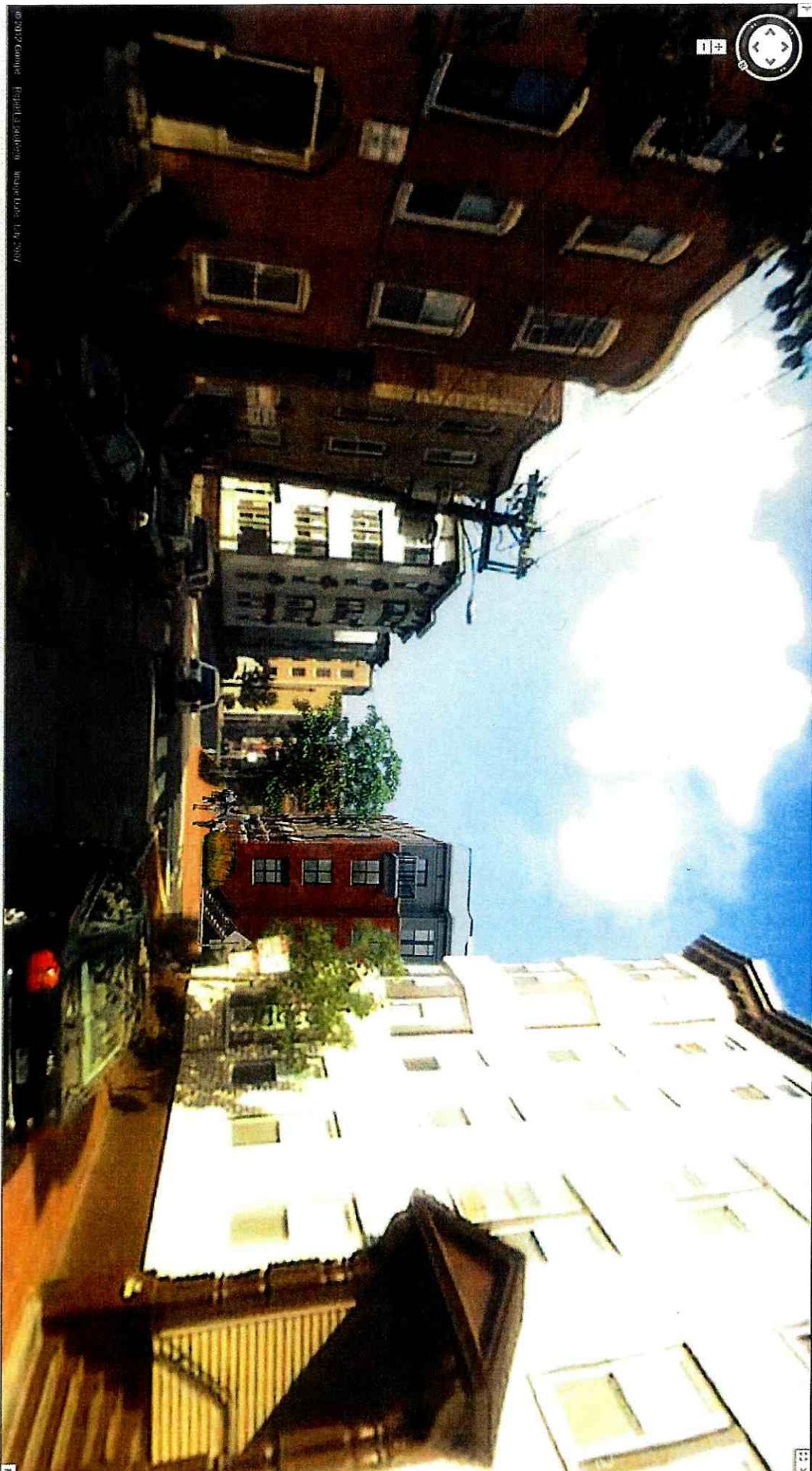
**Existing Street View**



**VISION**

**Opportunity: current height and density limits**

**New Development at City Parking Lot 5**



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

**VISION**

**Opportunity: current height and density limits**

Redevelopment at Naggar Property only



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

**VISION**

**Opportunity: current density, increased height**

**New Development at City Parking Lot 5 + Naggar site**



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

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**VISION**

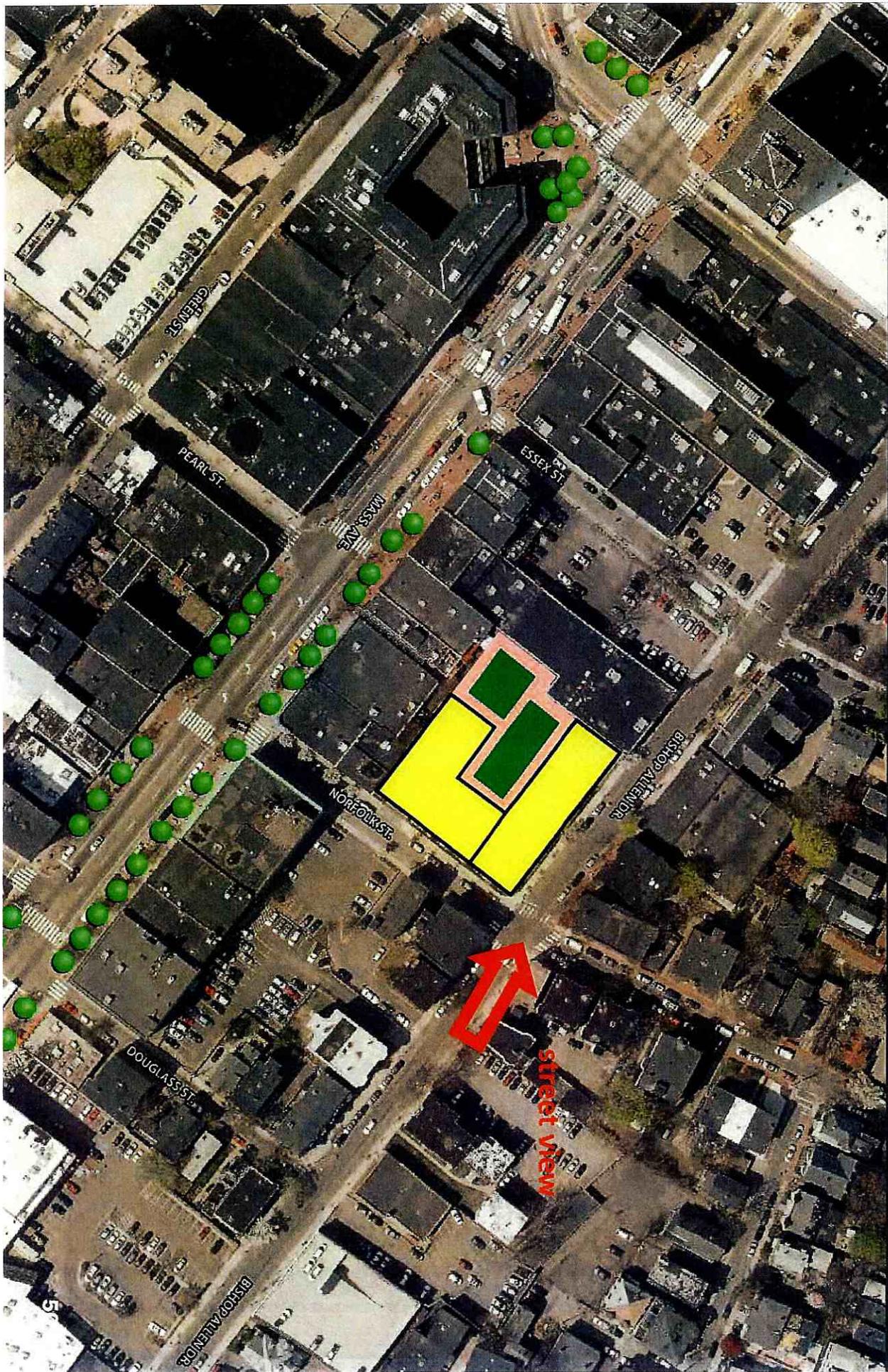
# Opportunity: bonus density, increased height

New Development at City Parking Lot 5 + Naggar site



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

# Bishop Allen at Norfolk St.



VISION

# Bishop Allen at Norfolk St.

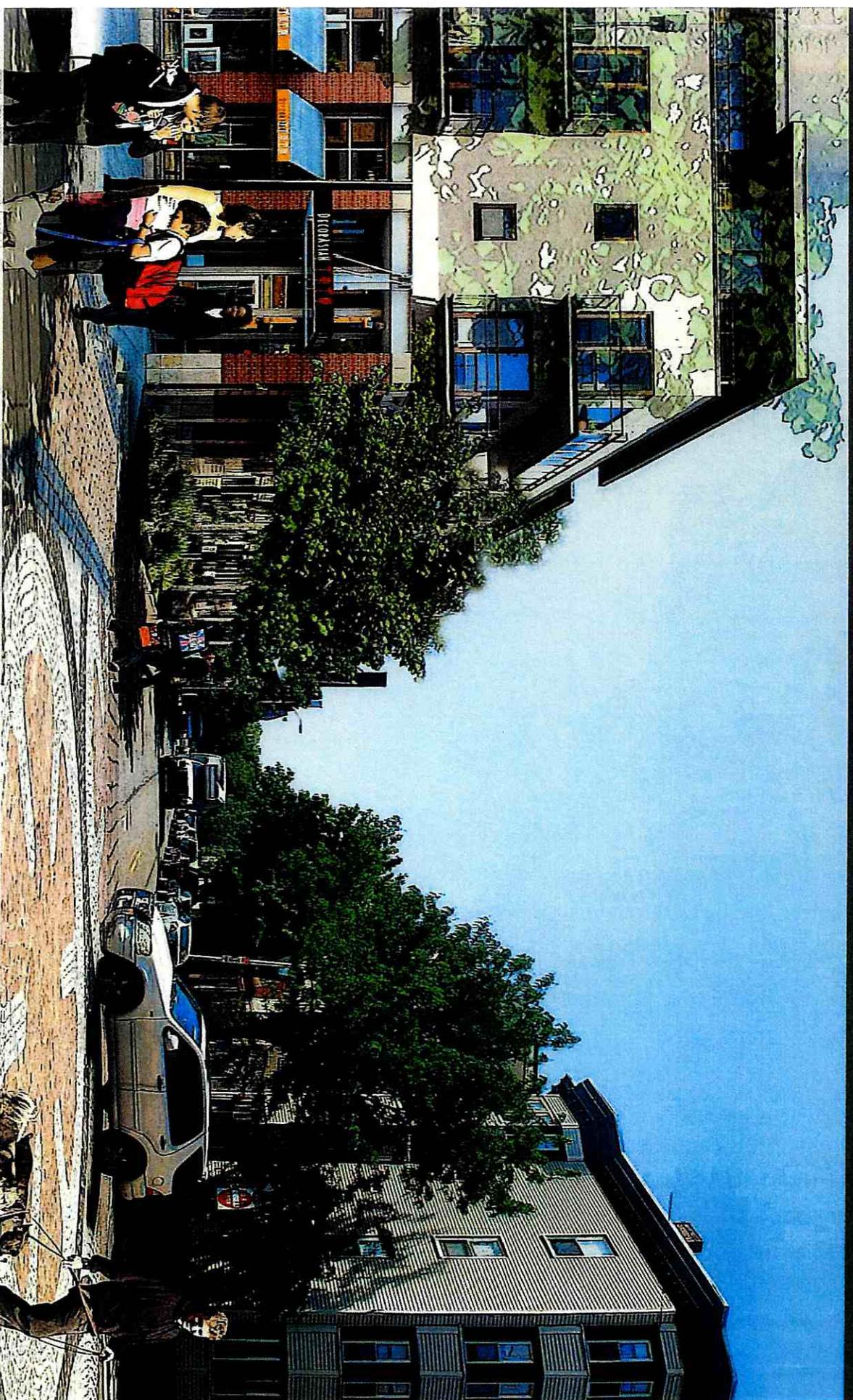


# City parking lot 5 today



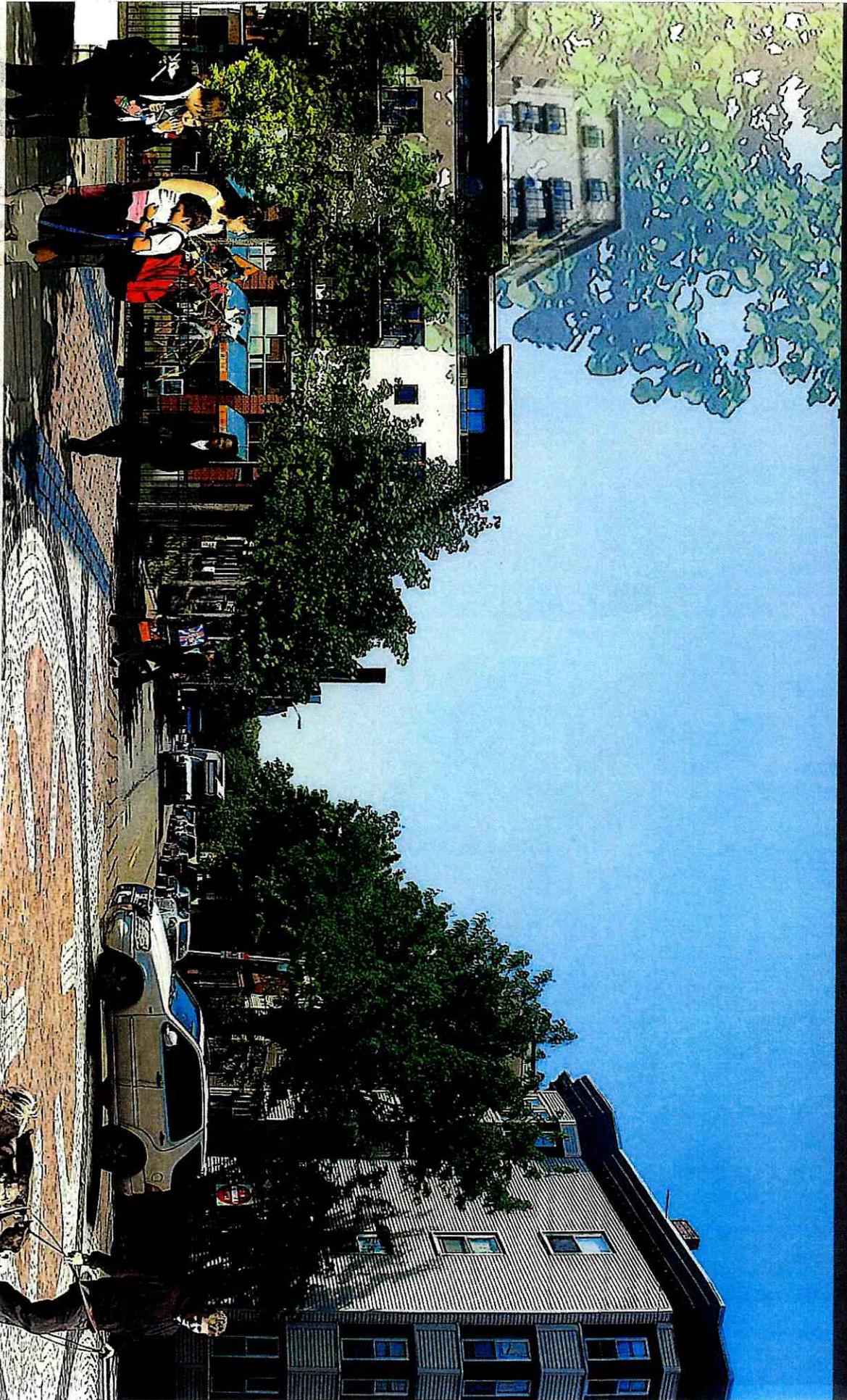
**45' facade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.**

# City parking lot 5 with housing over storefronts



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

# City parking lot 5 with housing and public park



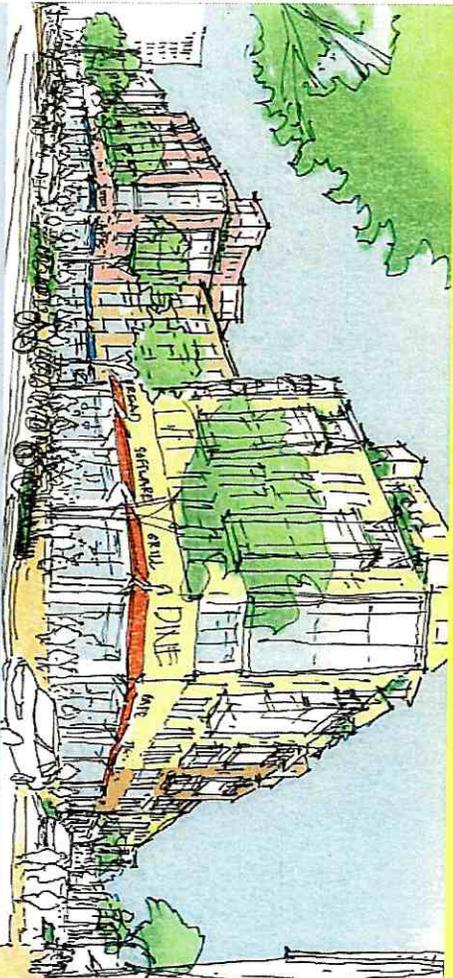
**45' facade height limit at Bishop Allen. 45 degree height limit plane tapers back above.**

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

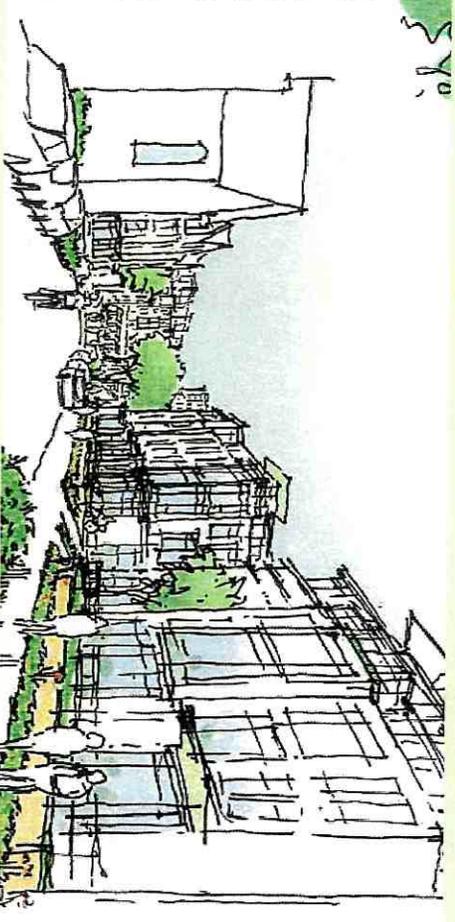
- Ensure mix of lower and taller buildings along Mass Ave with guidelines and floor size limits
- Continue policy of stepping building volumes down to neighborhoods along side streets
- Consider raising height limits from 80' to as much as 140'-160' at selected Mass Ave locations in return for affordable housing or other community benefits
- Enable transfer of development rights to encourage additional housing in Osborn Triangle and Central Square (typically along Mass Ave) while preserving historic structures and keeping densities lower near neighborhoods
- Update design guidelines

# DISCUSSION

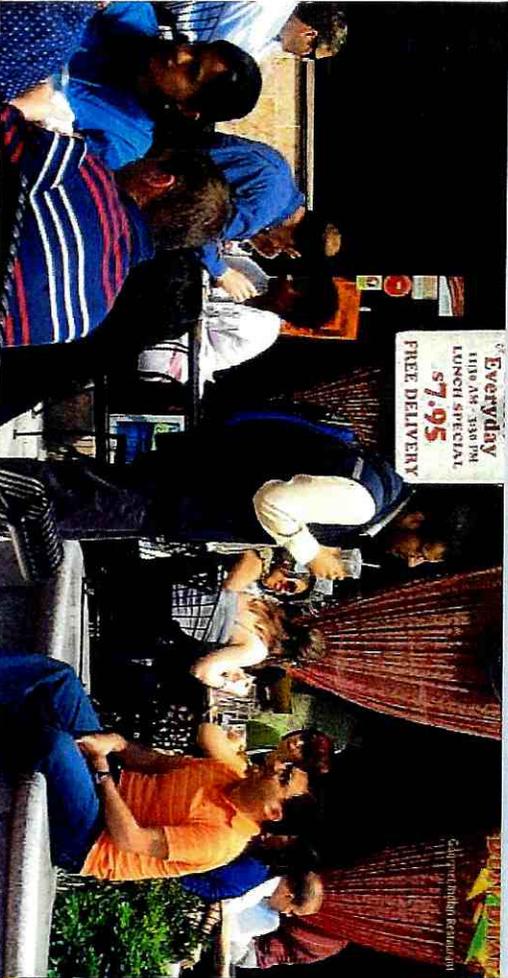
A PLACE FOR LIVING



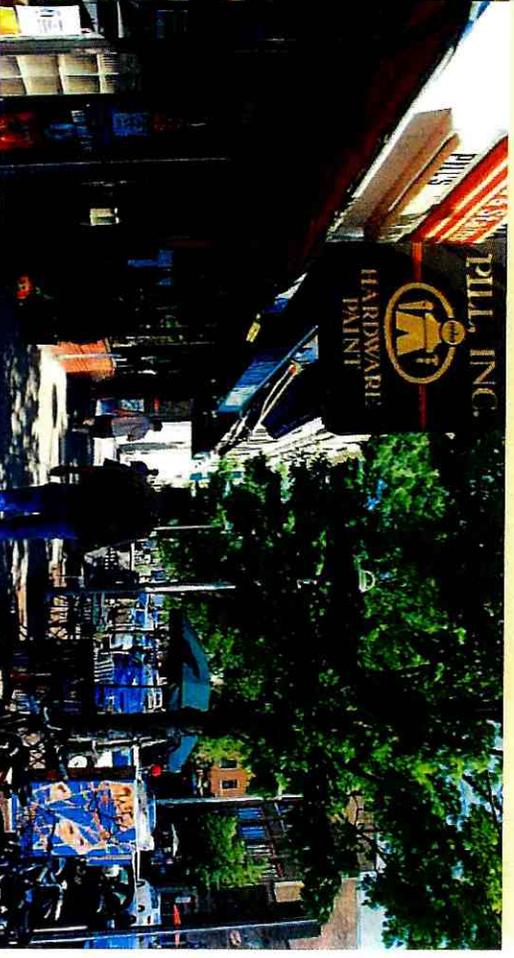
CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE SQUARE



PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY



RETAIL/CULTURAL/NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY



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