



Downtown Planning

Downtown Boston Residents Association

May 9, 2023

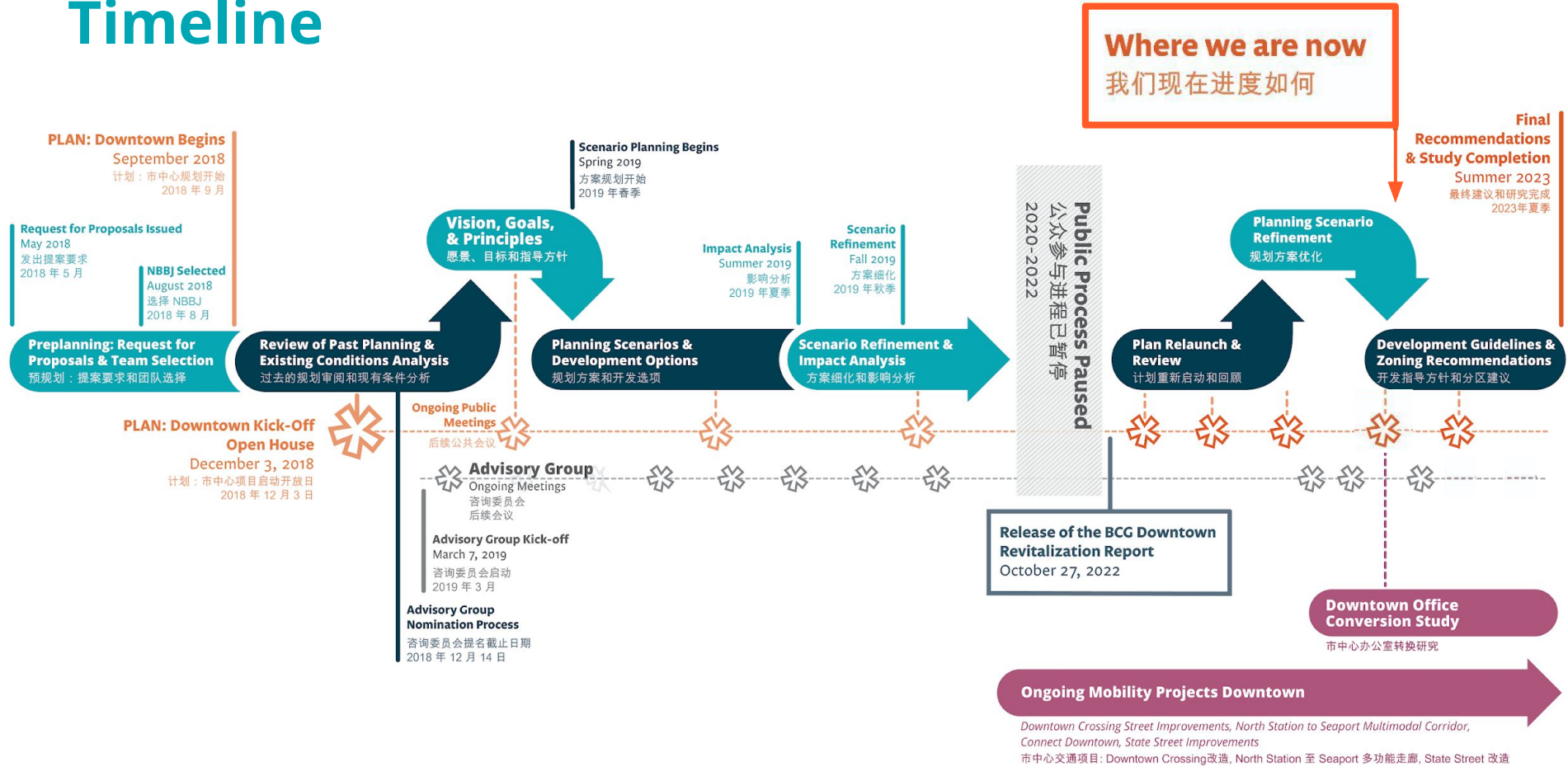


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Agenda

- *Downtown Planning Overview*
- *PLAN: Downtown*
- *Downtown Office Conversion Study*
- *Next Steps*
- *Discussion*

Timeline



Where we are now
我们现在进度如何

Release of the BCG Downtown Revitalization Report
October 27, 2022

Downtown Office Conversion Study
市中心办公室转换研究

Ongoing Mobility Projects Downtown
Downtown Crossing Street Improvements, North Station to Seaport Multimodal Corridor, Connect Downtown, State Street Improvements
市中心交通项目：Downtown Crossing改造, North Station 至 Seaport 多功能走廊, State Street 改造

PLAN: Downtown



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Public Feedback to Date

- What are other ways we can protect the historic character of the area besides height?
- What is the right balance between new development and preservation?
- How do we encourage more residential growth?
- What are the appropriate maximum heights if it means affordable residential? How do we ensure affordability on-site?
- How are public benefits distributed, managed, and updated across Downtown and Chinatown?



Ladder blocks walkthrough, April 4th 2023



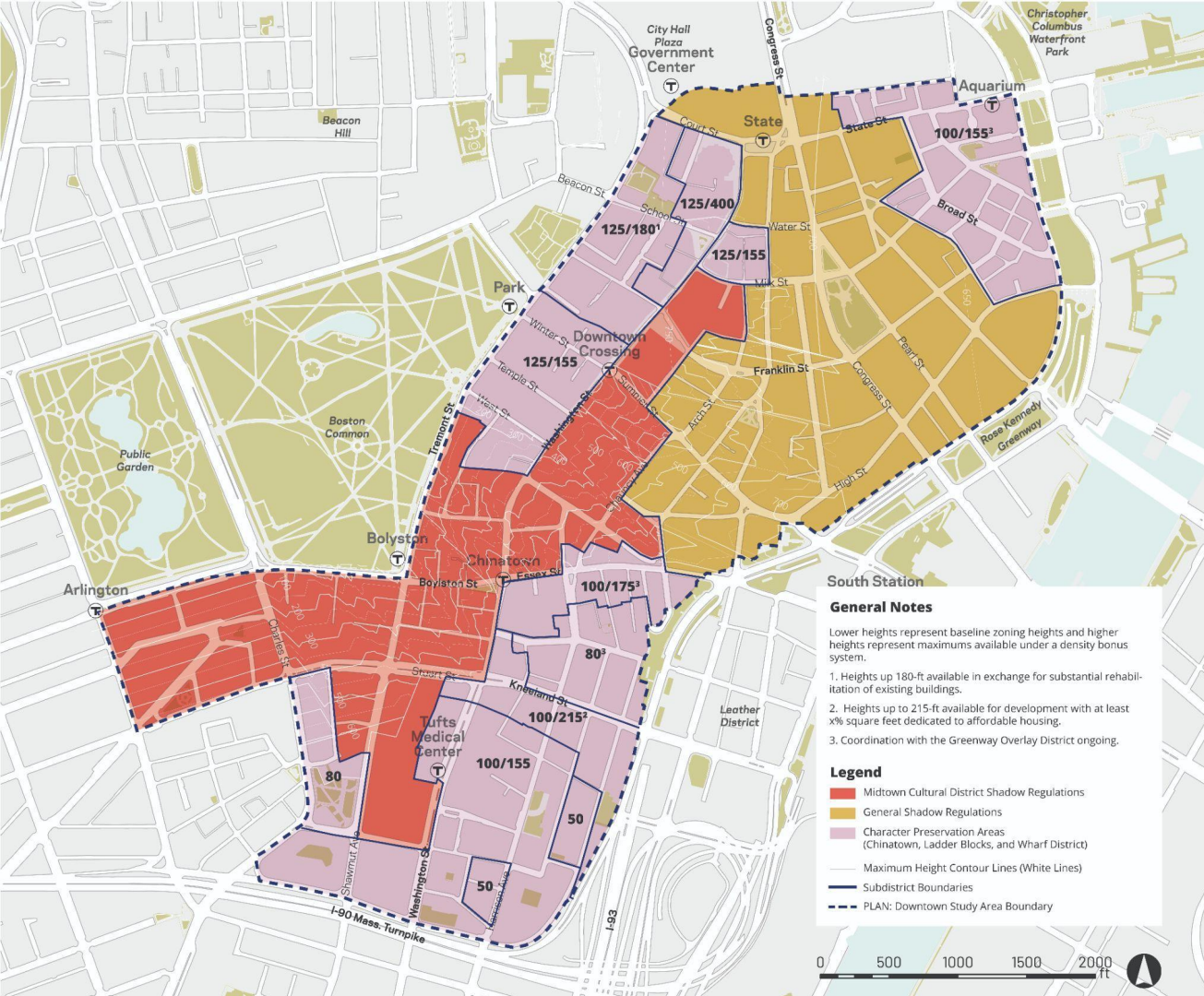
Chinatown walkthrough, February 2nd 2023

Draft Scenario

January 17, 2023

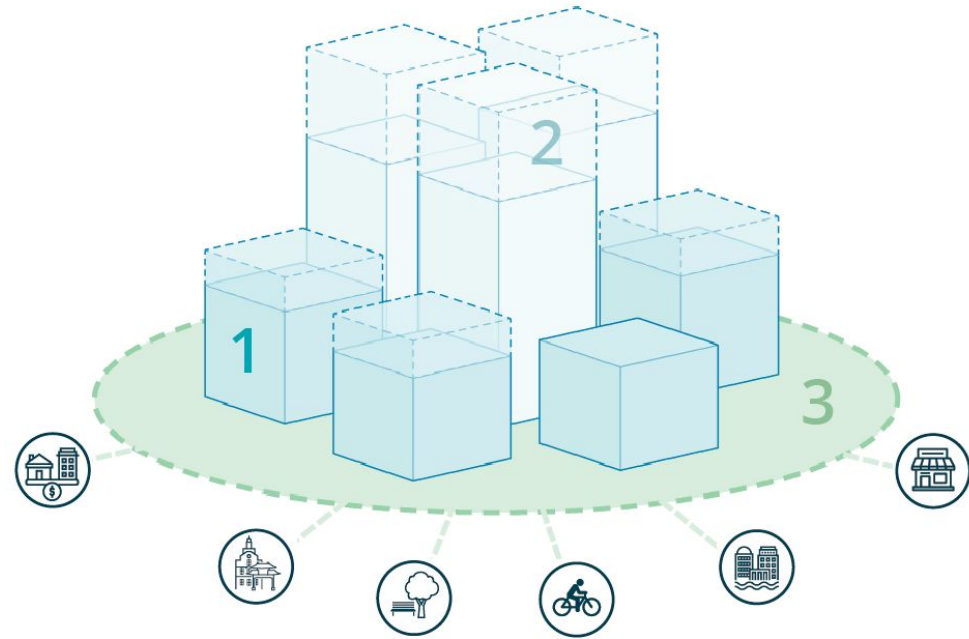
Baseline zoning heights and maximum heights are based on Character Areas.

A developer can add density up to a maximum building height by contributing to a public benefit fund.



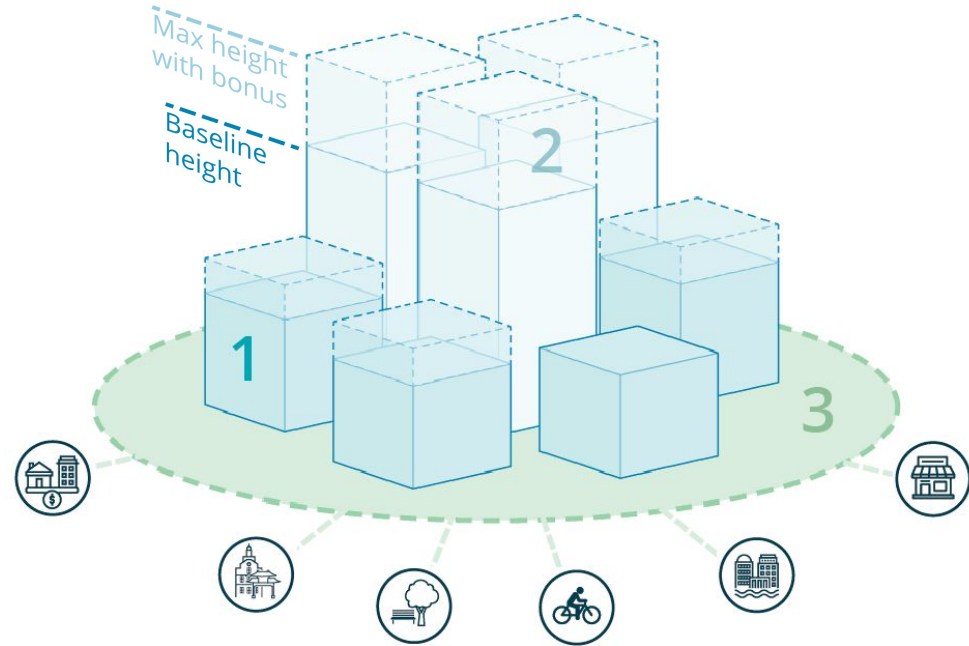
What is the goal of the proposed development process?

1. **Preserve** significant character areas in Downtown and Chinatown
2. Guide needed **growth** to the most appropriate locations for added density in a predictable development framework
3. Create a **public benefit system** that will address long-standing needs in Chinatown and Downtown that no one project can solve



How does the proposed development process work?

1. Creates a **new baseline height** that matches the character area.
2. Developers can add **density up to an established maximum building height**, defined by character area and shadow regulations.
3. In exchange for the additional density, developers will contribute to an established **public benefit fund**.
4. The public benefit fund will directly support priority **public projects that benefit Downtown and Chinatown**.



What projects will the public benefit fund support?



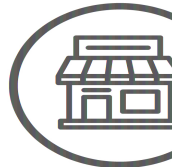
**Affordable
Housing
Opportunities**



**Climate &
Resilience
Infrastructure**



**Local Transit &
Mobility
Infrastructure**



**Small Business
Support + Retail
Activation**



**Historic
Preservation
Investment**



**Open Space &
Public Realm
Improvements**



What projects will the public benefit fund support?

Potential projects and programs

Local Transit and Mobility Infrastructure

- Priority projects that improve connections, through, within, and to Downtown

Historic Preservation Investment

- Preservation projects and grant funding

Small Business Support and Activation

- Programs, grants and subsidies that support small/legacy and ground floor businesses and cultural uses

Open Space and Public Realm

- Revitalization of existing and creation of new parks and plazas based on PLAN recommendations
- Pilot public realm projects

Climate and Resilience Infrastructure

- District wide interventions addressing energy efficiency and resilience



Downtown Office Conversion Study



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The purpose of this study is to identify ways to repopulate and reactivate underutilized office space in Downtown Boston to create a more vibrant neighborhood.



Respond to the **changing streetscape and work environment**, exacerbated by the pandemic



Encourage diverse uses to drive foot traffic throughout the day and **create a more vibrant urban core**



Leverage opportunities to **reuse buildings and achieve sustainability goals**



Unique typologies and potential conversions specific to Boston's Downtown



Responsive to the City's policy objectives



The study so far:



Building types that are best suited for different types of conversion



Opportunities and challenges of retrofitting buildings to different uses



Costs and financial feasibility for different conversion scenarios



Policy strategies for immediate and long-term conversions

Downtown Office Conversion Study

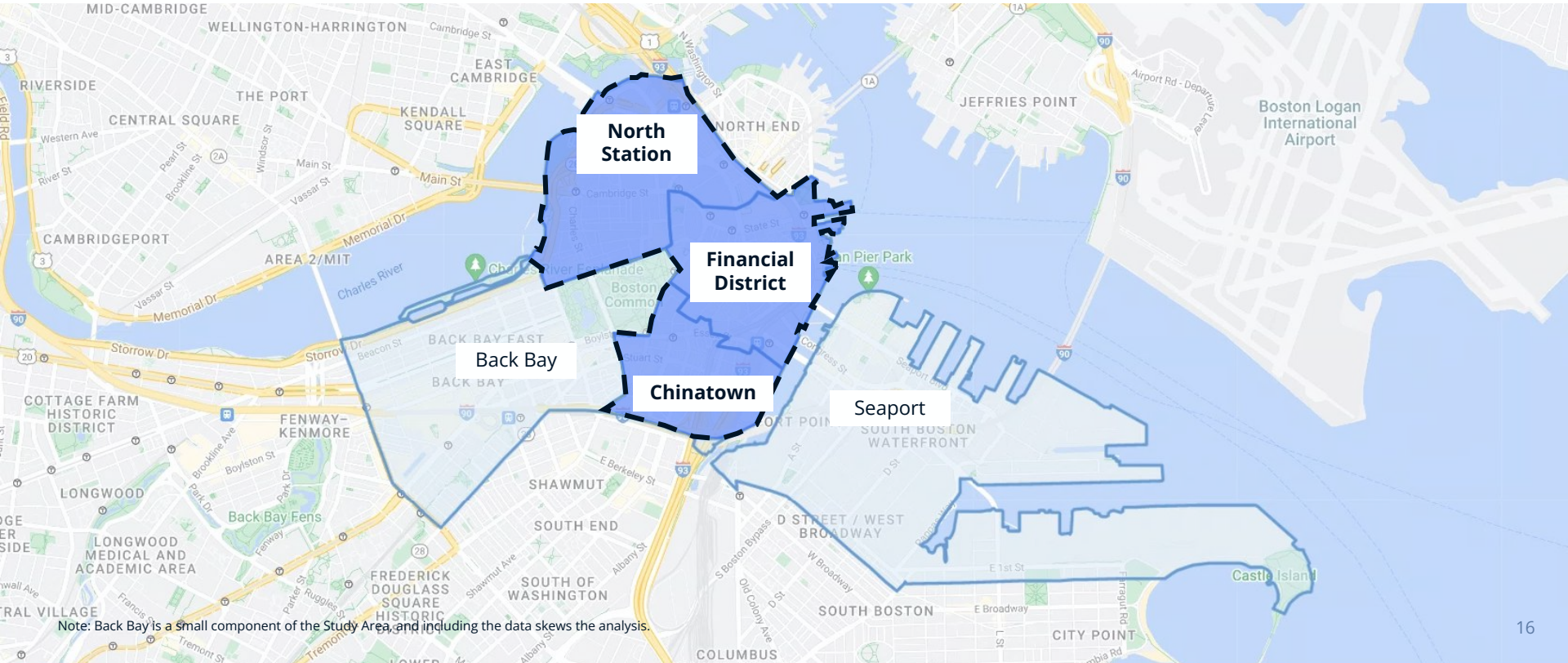
Market Analysis



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Key Findings | Study Area

The market analysis used North Station, the Financial District, and Chinatown to represent the “Study Area”. The Study Area will be compared to the Back Bay and Seaport.



Note: Back Bay is a small component of the Study Area, and including the data skews the analysis.

The study area does not have the desired mix of uses nor quality of office to compete with neighboring submarkets. Conversion of existing stock could make it as desirable.

- Offices are faring better in the Seaport and Back Bay, demonstrating **a flight to quality both in terms of building class and neighborhood quality and amenities.**
- **Within the Study Area, office performance has been weak since 2019** with rising vacancy and low rents.



Key Findings | Market Analysis: Office specific

The office market has seen a **flight to quality** not just in terms of building class but also neighborhood quality and amenities.

- **Vacancy is lowest and rents are highest in the submarkets that have a strong mix of uses and newer buildings**, especially with respect to office.
- Within the study area, only North Station has experienced any new development since 2011. The Seaport is showing signs of market resilience because **almost all new office deliveries have been in the Seaport**.
- Although Back Bay has a similar mix of office building class as the other submarkets, it has a more diverse mix of uses which makes it an attractive location (and is reflected in a lower vacancy rate than in the Study Area).
- While the study area appears to have a competitive share of residential, **the Financial District, which is struggling the most in terms of office rents and vacancy, has very little residential**.
- The desire for both new office product and a healthy mix of uses is demonstrated in North Station, which is the strongest office market in the study area and includes a healthy mix of residential and new office.



Downtown Office Conversion Study

Existing Office Building Inventory



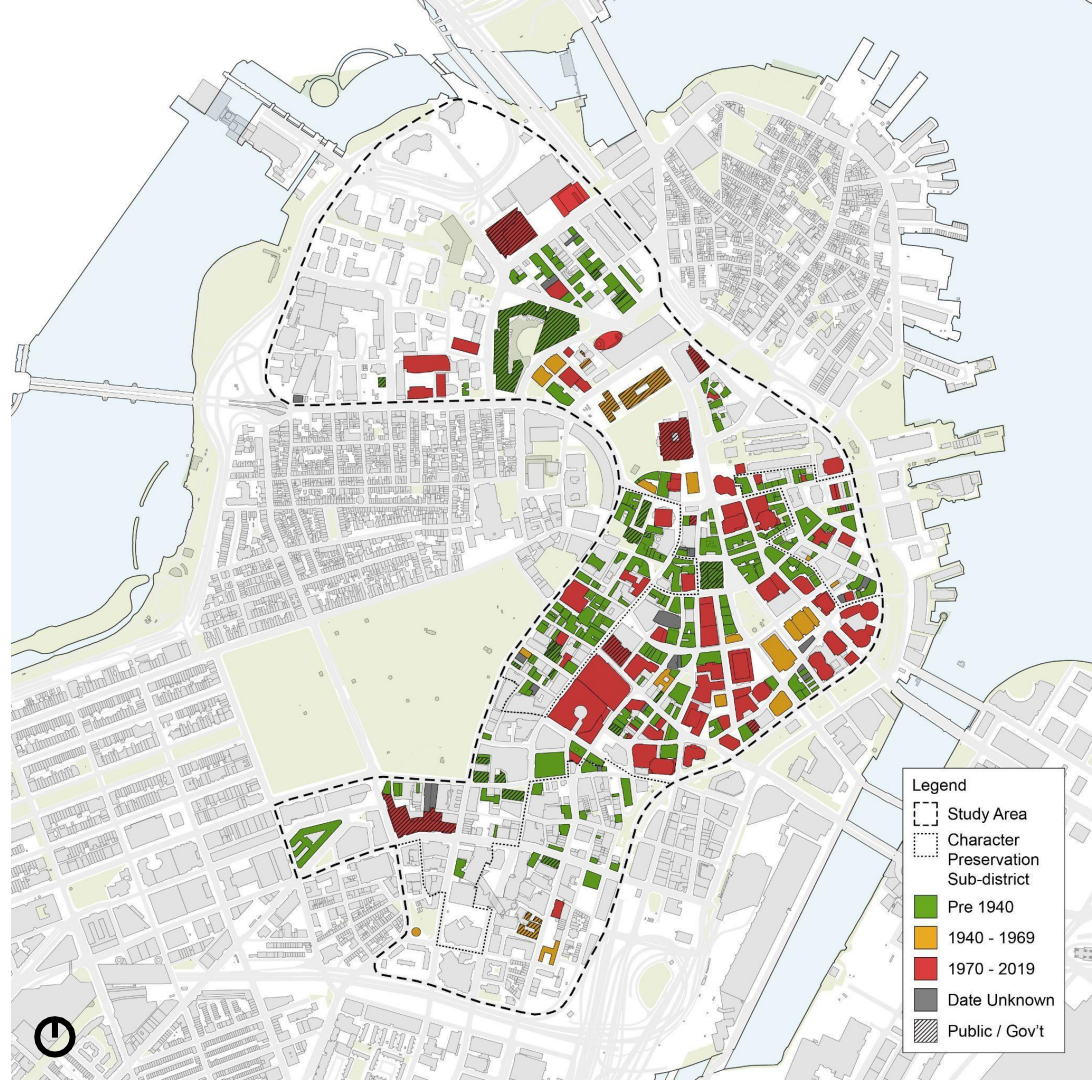
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Office Buildings Downtown

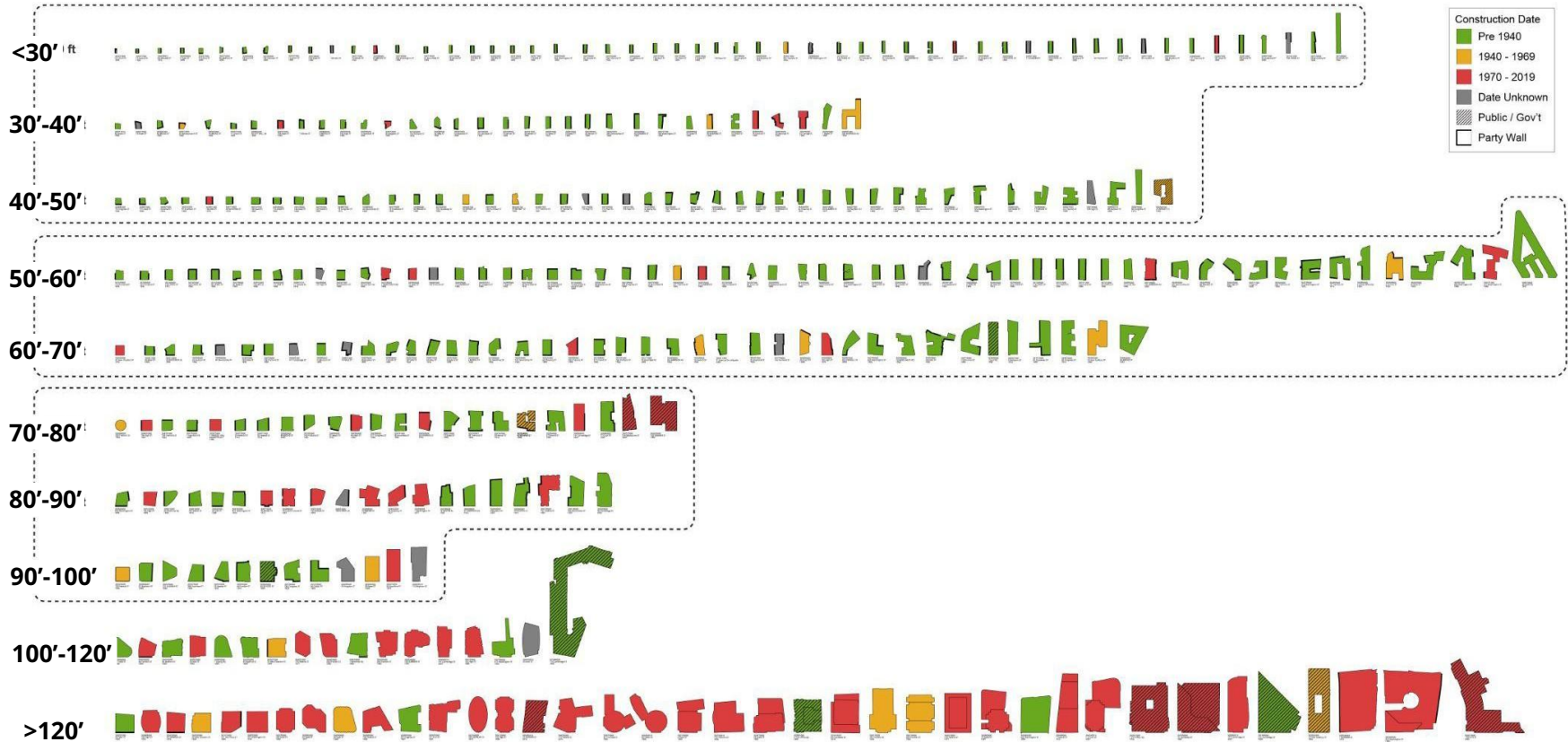
Downtown has a mix of older Class B and C office buildings.

Older pre-1940 buildings often have smaller narrow floorplates, while newer office buildings have larger deeper floorplates.

Floorplate is a way of measuring the width and depth of a building, to create the shape of each floor.



Downtown office buildings sorted by width and age



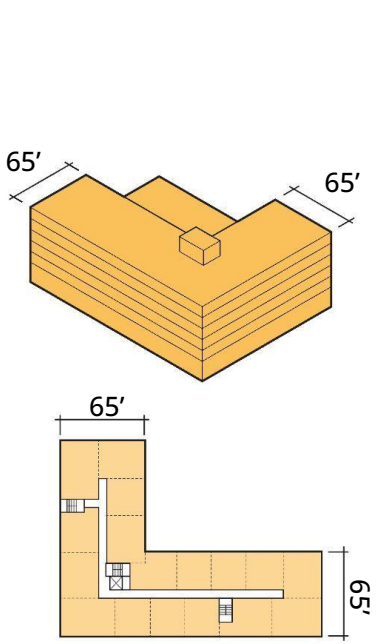
Downtown Office Conversion Study

What office buildings are best suited to other uses?

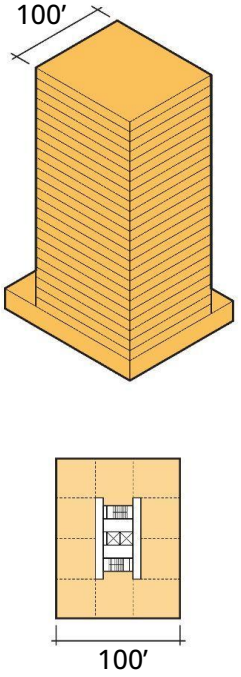


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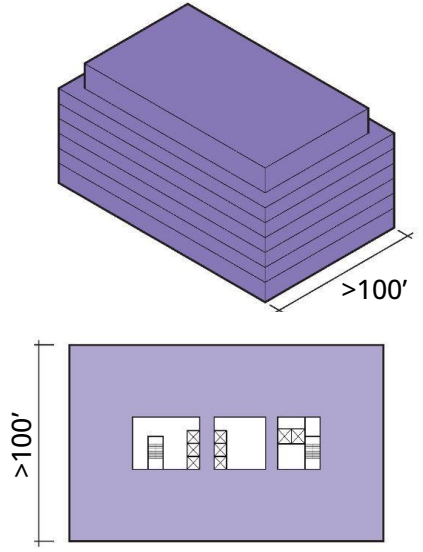
Typical building widths for different uses



Residential or Hotel
Double-loaded bar
Max width ~65ft



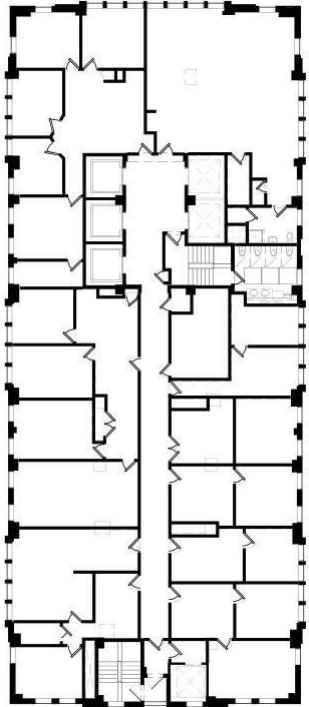
Residential or Hotel
Point-loaded tower
Max width ~100ft



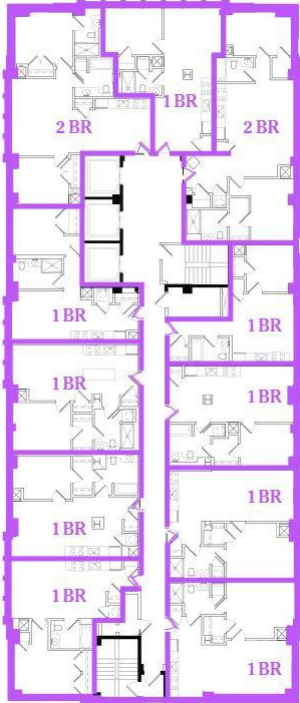
Life science
>100ft

Residential Case Study: Double loaded bar

11616 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, built 1929



Pre-conversion

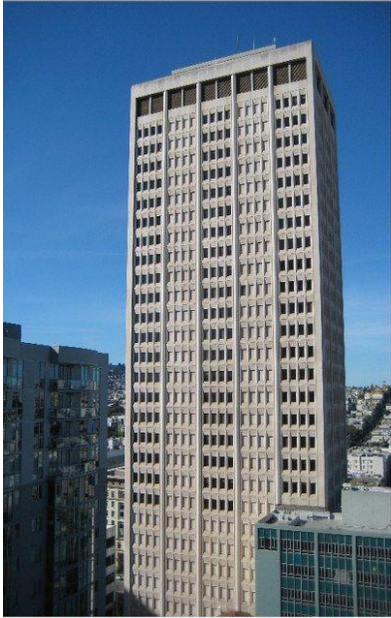


Post-conversion, 2014



Residential Case Study: Point-loaded tower

100 Van Ness, San Francisco, built 1929

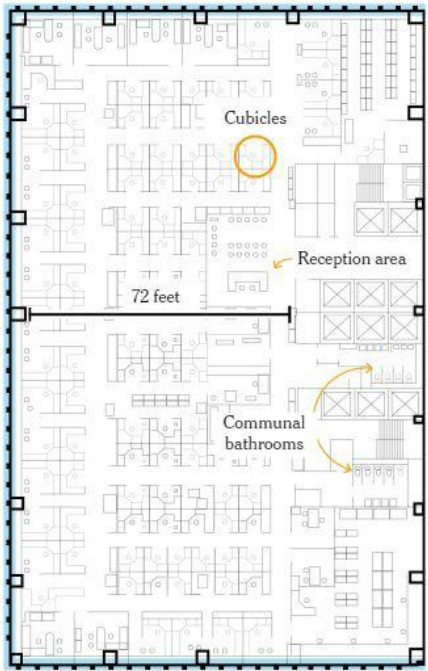


Post-conversion, 2015



Residential Case Study: Point-loaded tower

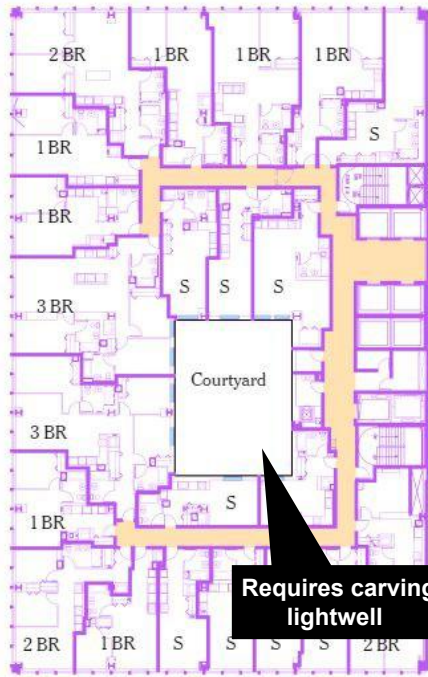
180 Water St, New York City, built 1970



Pre-conversion



~120' width



Post-conversion, 2017



Life-Science Case Study

1000 Washington St, Boston



Downtown Office Conversion Study

Key Drivers of Conversion Feasibility



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Key Drivers of Conversion Feasibility



Market conditions

- Current and projected performance to remain as office vs. the market for a new use



Physical attributes and location

- Floorplate size
- Window walls
- Operable windows



Construction cost to convert the building

- Amenities, service, and building systems upgrades



Regulatory requirements

- Linkage fees
- Affordability requirements
- Green building standards



Ownership and financing structure

- Partial occupancy



Next Steps



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**Building types that
are best suited for
different types of
conversion**



**Opportunities and
challenges of
retrofitting buildings
to different uses**

Next steps...



**Costs and financial
feasibility for
different conversion
scenarios**



**Policy strategies
for immediate
and long-term
conversions**

Next Steps

- **Public Meetings:**

- *Advisory Group Meeting*: PLAN: Downtown - benefits working session late May, 2023*
- *Public Meeting: PLAN: Downtown & Office Conversion Study Policy - Zoning Recommendations early July, 2023*

Public

- **Release PLAN Downtown Draft: July 2023**
- **Release Downtown Office Conversion Study Recommendations: July 2023**
- **Zoning implementation: Fall**

Get Involved with PLAN: Downtown: <http://bit.ly/plandowntownboston>

Questions and Comments: plandowntown@boston.gov

*All Advisory Group meetings are open to the public.

Discussion

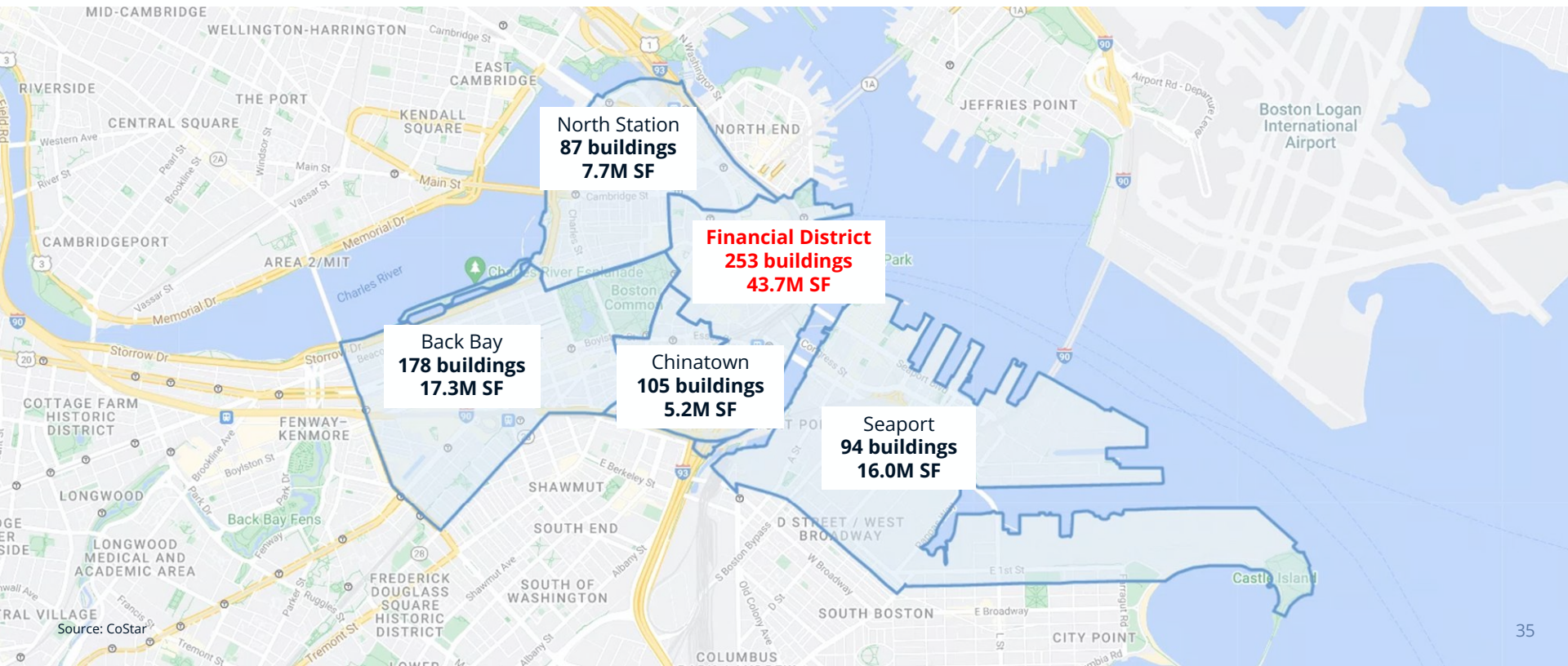


Reference



Office Market | Building Stock

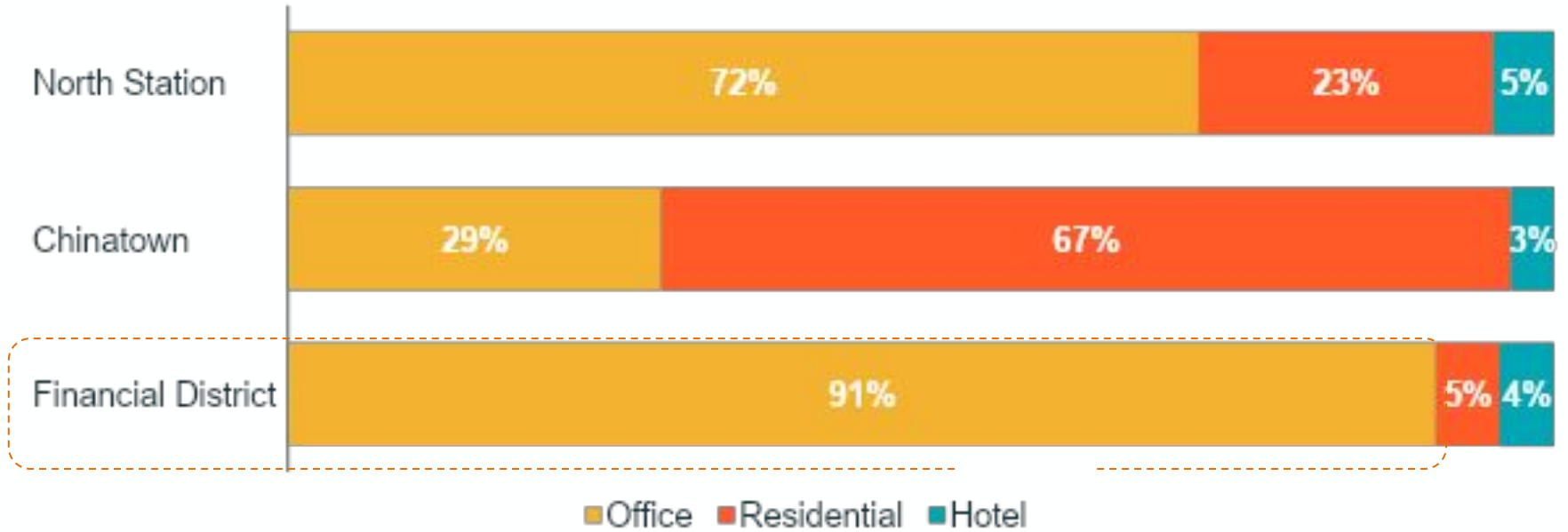
The Financial District is the largest office submarket in Boston by a substantial margin. The Study Area has 445 office buildings compared to 178 in Back Bay and 94 in the Seaport.



Office Market | Mix of Uses

The Financial District currently has a major shortage of residential units compared to surrounding neighborhoods.

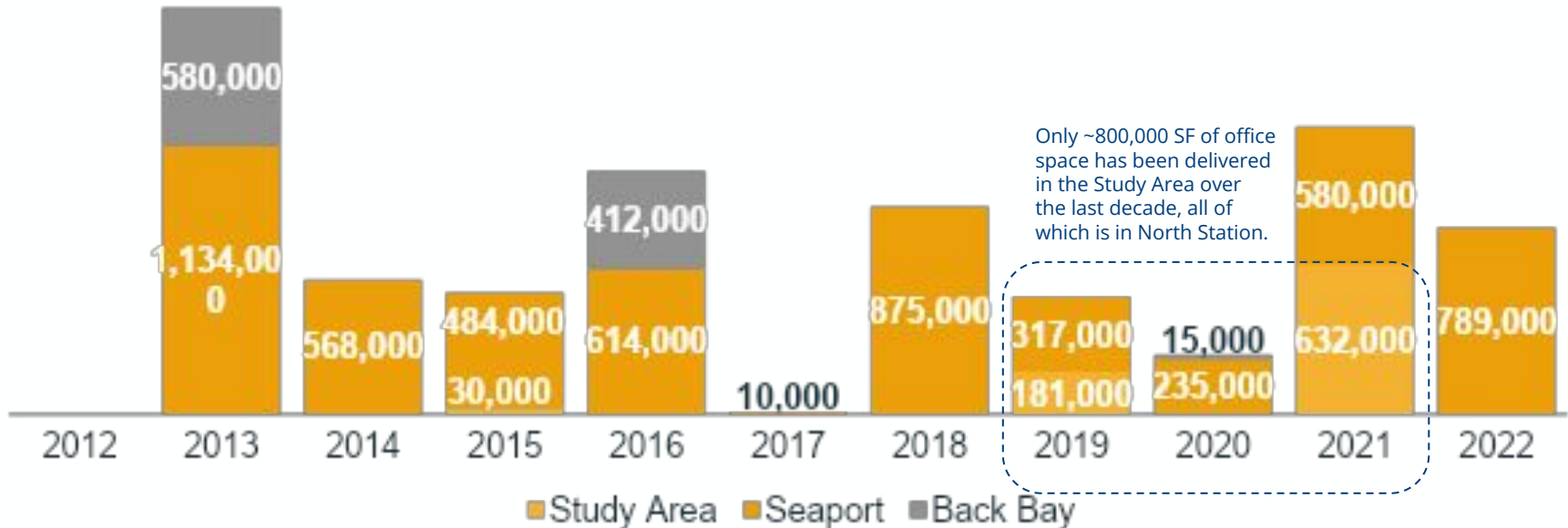
Building Stock by Typology within Study Area (2022)



Office Market | Deliveries

Over the last decade, new office product has been delivered primarily in the Seaport. Over 95% of these were Class A buildings, which explains the flight to quality (to the Seaport).

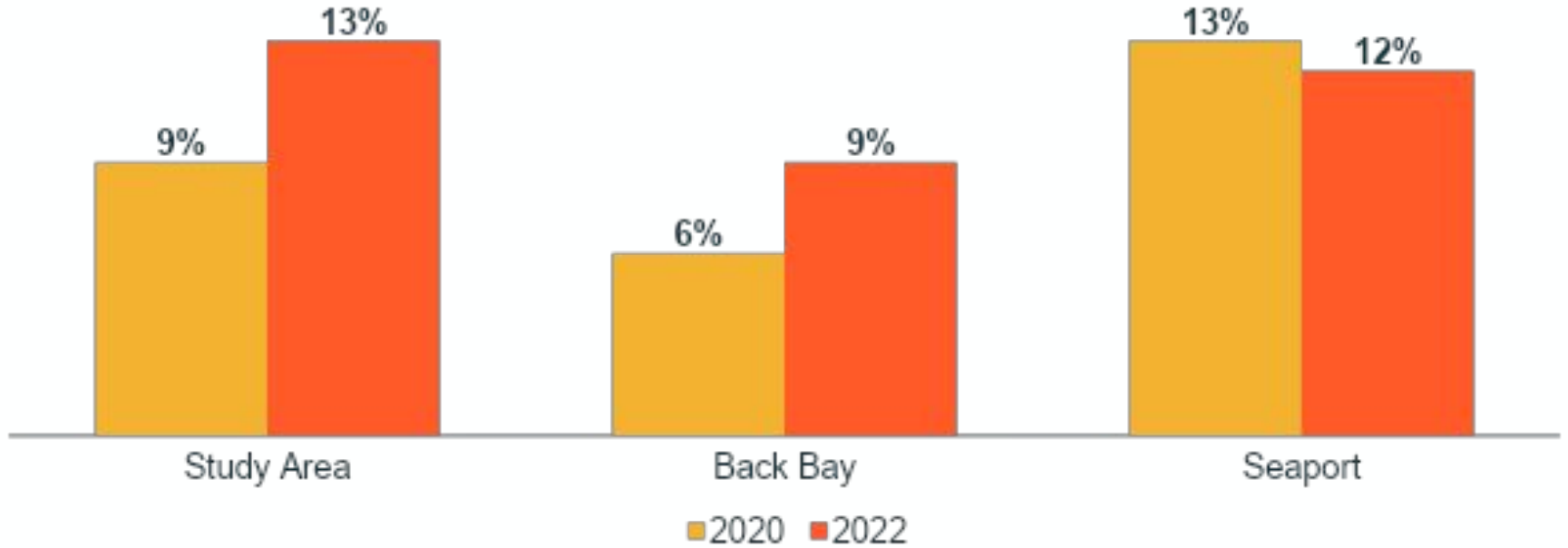
Office Deliveries (SF) (2012 - 2022)



Office Market | Vacancy

In the past two years, office vacancy has risen everywhere except in the Seaport where new deliveries are highest.

Office Vacancy by Submarket (2020 - 2022)



Office Market | Pipeline

Planned office development is spread throughout the city with a higher concentration in the Seaport. The Study Area accounts for roughly a third of planned office square feet.

Boston Office Pipeline

22 Projects (7 in Study Area)

9.5M Square Feet (3.3M SF in Study Area)

