



# Abandoned Building Trends

Annual Report 2005

DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT • POLICY DEVELOPMENT & RESEARCH DIVISION • CITY OF BOSTON • THOMAS M. MENINO, MAYOR



## Survey Highlights

The 2005 survey documents a continuing decrease in building abandonment, especially for residential property.

Since the survey began in 1997, the total number of abandoned buildings has decreased by 67%, from 1,044 to 350 buildings. The number of residential abandoned buildings has decreased by 76%, from 796 to 188 buildings. Commercial/Mixed-Use building abandonment has decreased by 35%, from 248 buildings in 1997 to 162 buildings in 2005.

Since last year, the total number of abandoned buildings has decreased 13% from 404 buildings in 2004. The biggest decrease was in residential abandonment (17%), while commercial/mixed-use abandonment has decreased 9% since 2004.

61 of the 350 abandoned buildings in 2005 were newly added to the inventory, while 101 properties that appeared abandoned last year were renovated, demolished or are no longer abandoned.

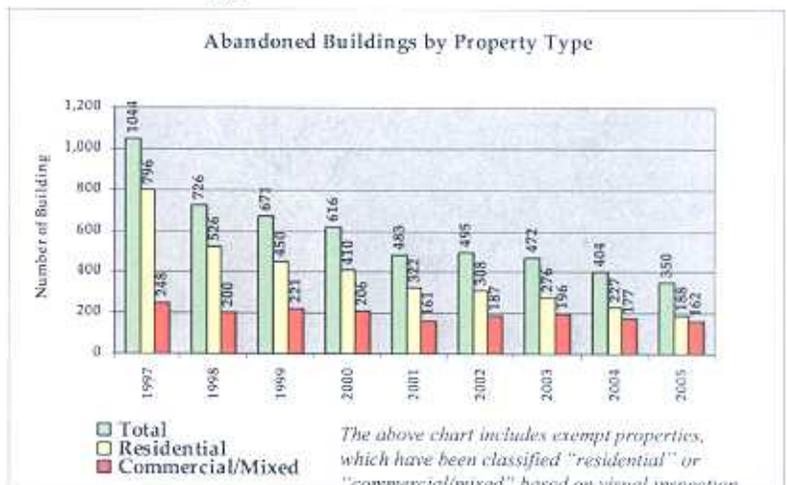
Since the initiation of *Leading the Way*\* in 2000:

- The total number of abandoned buildings has decreased 43%.
- The number of residential abandoned buildings has decreased 54%.
- The number of abandoned mixed-use buildings has decreased by 48%, and abandoned commercial buildings by 15%.

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\**Leading the Way* was the three year (2000 – 2003) City of Boston initiative to create and preserve affordable housing. See [www.cityofboston.gov/dnd](http://www.cityofboston.gov/dnd).





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## Survey Methodology

The abandoned building\* survey is based on information gathered in previous surveys and data on buildings that are likely to be abandoned. A street by street survey is completed for most of the city, including a resurvey of previously identified buildings. This area includes 99% of the abandoned buildings identified from 1999 to 2004. A photo is taken of each property and a form is completed from a visual inspection of the exterior of the property for overall condition and rehab status. Data from the Assessing and Fire Departments are then used to enhance the street-by-street survey.

\* An abandoned building is any residential, commercial, industrial or mixed-use building (excludes sheds and garages on residential property) which is not occupied and has visible signs of physical distress (boarded, burned, open to the elements, otherwise deteriorated, etc.). Property used for storage may be surveyed as abandoned if it is boarded or appears otherwise unoccupied.

## Changes in the Inventory of Abandoned Buildings

Map 2 shows the 101 buildings from the 2004 survey that were found to be no longer abandoned in the 2005 survey.

- 63% (64) were residential buildings.
- These 101 buildings were on the abandoned building list for an average of 3.6 years.

Map 3 shows the 61 buildings that were added to the abandoned building inventory.

- 59% (36) of the newly identified buildings were residential. This was fewer than were removed from the inventory, suggesting continued strength in the housing market.
- 36% (22) were commercial, and only 5% (3) were mixed-use.





# Residential Abandonment Trends

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Chart 2

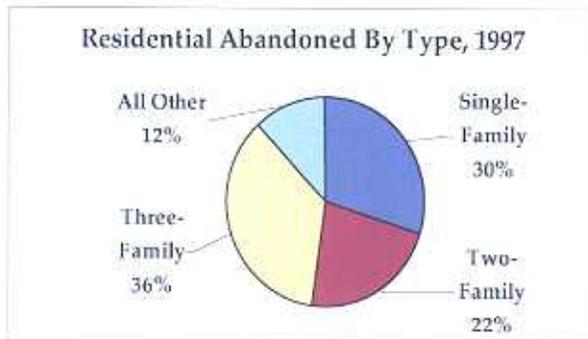
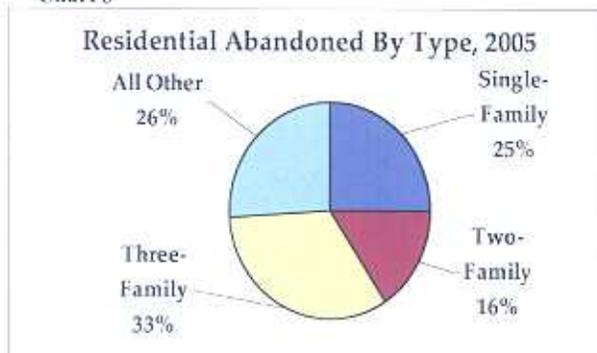


Chart 3



## Tax Status of Abandoned Residential Buildings

Charts 4 and 5 relate to the tax status of residential abandoned buildings.

From 1997 to 2005, the proportion of buildings that were publicly owned has fallen from 15% to 7%. In other words, the number of publicly owned abandoned buildings has been reduced at a faster rate than the other abandoned buildings.

The proportion of privately owned buildings that owe taxes had increased from 16% of residential abandoned buildings to 22%.

## Residential Abandonment By Unit Type

Charts 2 and 3 show the proportion of residential abandoned buildings in each unit size category (single-family, two-family, etc.).

The proportion of abandoned buildings in the "All Other" category, including tax exempt and multi-family properties, increased 23% from 2004 and 117% from what they were in 1997. The proportion of single- and two-family homes has decreased since 1997, reflecting more rehab activity of such properties.

Chart 4

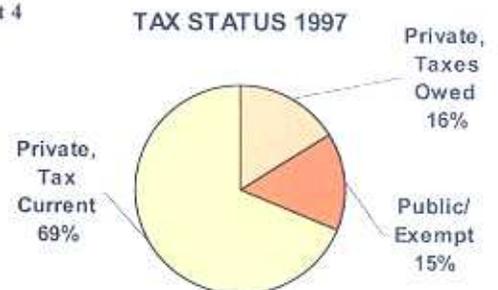
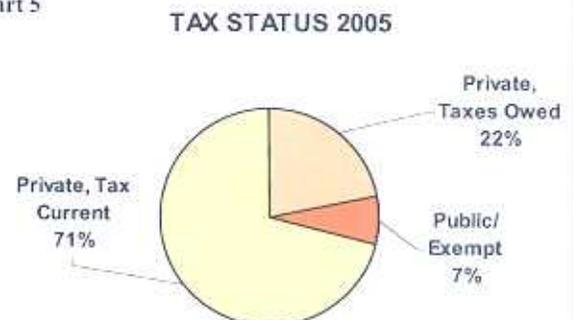


Chart 5





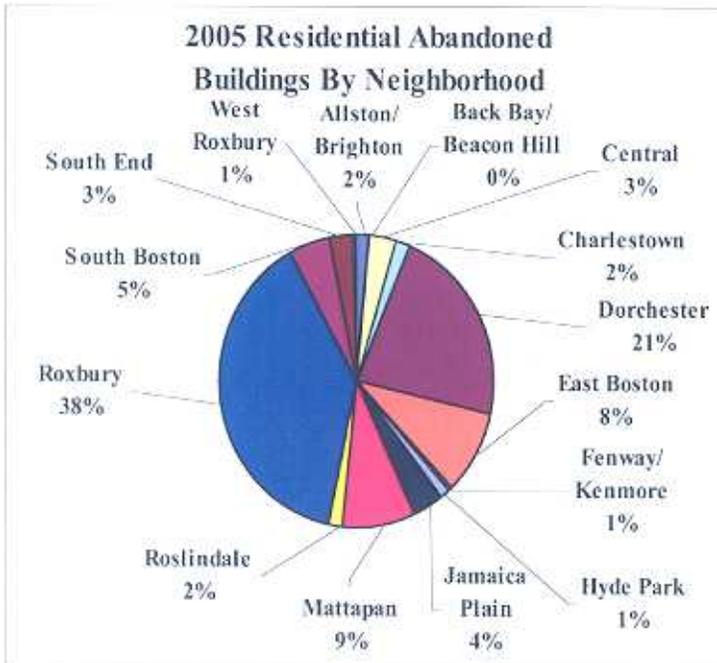
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## Residential Abandoned Buildings By Neighborhood

Chart 6



From 1997 to 2005, there has been a 76% decrease in the number of abandoned residential buildings. Roxbury, Dorchester, East Boston and Mattapan have the highest concentrations of such properties.

Roxbury continues to have the largest number of residential abandoned buildings (73), but the number is down dramatically since the beginning of the survey in 1997 (-72%). The number continues to drop, with a 16% decrease in abandonment from 2003 to 2004.

While Dorchester has seen a large decrease in abandoned residential buildings since 1997 (-75%) the rate of decrease from 2004 to 2005 (-16%) was close to the citywide figure of -19% for that period.

Of those neighborhoods with a significant number of abandoned residential buildings in 1997, Hyde Park has had the largest reduction (-95%) in such buildings. Since last year, Back Bay/Beacon Hill and Fenway/Kenmore had the highest percentage decreases (-100% and -67% respectively), but both neighborhoods had very few abandoned buildings. The greatest drop in the *number* of such buildings was in Roxbury (-14) and Mattapan (-9).

South Boston is the only neighborhood that had an increase in residential abandonment (29%), but an examination of each instance reveals that these buildings are likely to be returned to use in the near future.

Table 1: Residential Abandoned Buildings by Neighborhood

Neighborhood	Counts			Change	
	1997	2004	2005	Pct97-05	Pct04-05
Allston/Brighton	3	4	3	0%	-25%
Back Bay/Beacon Hill	2	1	0	-100%	-100%
Central	14	8	6	-57%	-25%
Charlestown	1	3	3	200%	0%
Dorchester	166	46	42	-75%	-9%
East Boston	52	21	17	-67%	-19%
Fenway/Kenmore	1	3	1	0%	-67%
Hyde Park	44	3	2	-95%	-33%
Jamaica Plain	37	8	7	-81%	-13%
Mattapan	101	25	16	-84%	-36%
Roslindale	11	3	3	-73%	0%
Roxbury	307	87	73	-76%	-16%
South Boston	7	7	9	29%	29%
South End	47	7	5	-89%	-29%
West Roxbury	3	1	1	-67%	0%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>796</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>-76%</b>	<b>-17%</b>



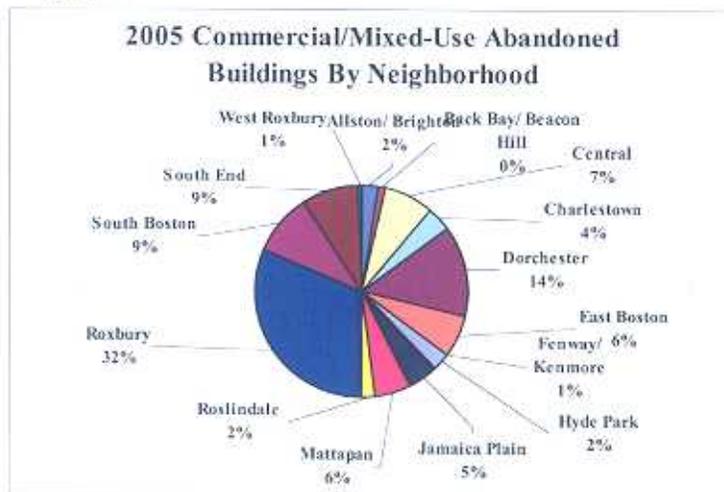
# Commercial Abandonment Trends

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## Commercial & Mixed-Use Abandoned Buildings By Neighborhood

Chart 7



Commercial and mixed-use building abandonment has decreased more slowly than for residential property. From 1997 to 2005, there has been only a 35% decrease in the number of abandoned commercial/mixed-use buildings, and only a 8% decrease since last year.

Commercial uses are more difficult to survey accurately, however, since buildings that are actively used as warehouses are often boarded up and may appear derelict and abandoned.

This may be especially true in South Boston, where the dramatic (650%) increase in abandonment since 1997 may be due to a more rigorous survey, in an area where old industrial buildings are becoming obsolete, but where new residential development has been on the increase.

Therefore, looking at changes from 2004 may be more informative for judging abandonment trends in commercial properties. There were increases in Charlestown, East Boston and the South End, but decreases in areas with a more substantial number of abandoned commercial buildings (Central, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, Roxbury and South Boston) was promising. There was no change in Dorchester.

Table 2: Commercial/Mixed-Use Abandoned Buildings by Neighborhood

Neighborhood	Counts			Change	
	1997	2004	2005	Pct97-05	Pct04-05
Allston/Brighton	5	6	4	-20%	-33%
Back Bay/Beacon Hill	1	3	2	100%	-33%
Central	30	16	12	-60%	-25%
Charlestown	0	4	6	N/A	50%
Dorchester	30	23	23	-23%	0%
East Boston	30	7	10	-67%	43%
Fenway/Kenmore	4	0	0	-100%	0%
Hyde Park	13	5	4	-69%	-20%
Jamaica Plain	15	11	8	-47%	-27%
Mattapan	13	11	9	-31%	-18%
Roslindale	5	4	3	-40%	-25%
Roxbury	77	56	51	-34%	-9%
South Boston	2	17	15	650%	-12%
South End	22	13	14	-36%	8%
West Roxbury	1	1	1	0%	0%
TOTALS	248	177	162	-35%	-8%



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## Intractable Abandonment

Some abandoned buildings reappear on the survey year after year. Table 3 at the right includes a count of these by neighborhood in 2005, sorted by the average number of years they have been listed as abandoned.

Fenway/Kenmore only has one abandoned building, and it has been on the list every year. Putting this case aside, the most intractable abandonment can be found in Roxbury, the South End, Mattapan, and Hyde Park.

Of 165 properties on this year's survey that have been abandoned four or more years, 87 (53%) are residential, while 78 (47%) are commercial or mixed-use.

Of the residential buildings that have been abandoned four years or more, three-family homes were the largest group at 29% of the properties, followed by single-family homes, with 26% of the properties.

Table 3: Average Number of Years Abandoned

Neighborhood	Count	Avg Years on List
Fenway/Kenmore	1	9.0
Roxbury	124	4.3
South End	19	4.3
Mattapan	25	4.2
Hyde Park	6	4.2
East Boston	27	3.9
Central	18	3.6
Jamaica Plain	15	3.5
Dorchester	65	3.2
Roslindale	6	2.7
Allston/Brighton	7	2.6
South Boston	24	2.3
Charlestown	9	2.1
Back Bay/Beacon Hill	2	2.0
West Roxbury	2	2.0
Citywide	350	3.7

Table 4: Tax Arrearage By Assessing Land Use

Land Use	Sum of Taxes Due	Count
A	\$30,779.52	1
C	\$464,835.28	17
I	\$232,488.39	4
R1	\$256,523.16	12
R2	\$84,794.39	6
R3	\$284,990.85	17
R4	\$21,092.36	3
RC	\$68,204.22	3
Totals	\$1,443,708.17	63

Land Use categories include Apartment (A), Commercial (C), Industrial (I), One-Family to Three-Family Residential (R1-R3), 4-6 Family Residential (R4) and Mixed Use (RC).

## Properties in Tax Title

Table 4 at the left is a breakdown of taxes owed, sorted by Assessing land use categories, which are described in a note below the table.

63 of the 350 properties on this year's survey are held by private owners who are in tax arrears to the tune of over \$1.4 million.

21 commercial and industrial properties account for 48% of this arrearage; three-family (20%) and one-family properties (18%) account for most of the rest.