

Section 7.2.3:

CENTRAL BOSTON

For an explanation of the organization, content and maps in this section, please see the Introduction to Section 7.2: Community Open Space and Recreation (page 160).

Background

Included within the BRA-designated Central Boston planning district discussed here are the Financial District, Downtown Crossing, the Waterfront, Government Center, and the Bulfinch Triangle, collectively known as Downtown; and the discrete residential areas of the North End, West End, and Chinatown.

Downtown

Originally known as the Shawmut Peninsula, the city's civic, commercial and financial core has been located at the site of modern-day downtown Boston since the city's founding. The Old State House, at the junction of State and Washington Streets, had served as the center of public life since the 17th century. The original Faneuil Hall was built in 1742. Today it is a major tourist draw along with Quincy Market. Christopher Columbus Park, located between the market and the waterfront, provides passive and active recreation for tourists and North End residents alike.

Financial District and Downtown Crossing

Throughout the 18th century, increasing development resulted in dense street patterns encircling Fort Hill and eventually reaching Boston Common. Fort Hill was leveled in 1872, the same year a fire destroyed much of downtown Boston. Now most of the financial district's office towers are located in the area. Norman B. Leventhal Park (formerly known as Post Office Square Park) provides critical open space, a green oasis in the built-up and paved-over downtown area. The park itself is the product of a public/private partnership and exemplifies the advantages of corporate abutters participating in the management of public spaces in the downtown core.

The Waterfront

A major influence in the growth of downtown Boston has been the development of its harbor. At the beginning of the 18th century, Boston's position as a prominent maritime community was secured with the addition of Long Wharf and the building of nearly 40 wharves, more than a dozen shipyards, and six ropewalks. With the decline of the shipping industry in the early 1900s, Boston's wharves began to be abandoned. Some buildings remained vacant or underutilized until the current Central Artery was constructed in the 1950s. From the 1960s onwards, wharf renovation and urban renewal created one of Boston's liveliest mixed use districts. The Harborwalk, a continuous pedestrian path created along the water's edge, has linked all the publicly accessible open spaces along the downtown waterfront.

Government Center

During the urban renewal era of the 1950s and 1960s, the dilapidated Scollay Square area was leveled to make space for Government Center, a new building complex to accommodate

expanding city, state, and federal offices. An 11-acre brick-paved plaza in front of the new City Hall was built as the center of this complex. The plaza is regularly used for concerts, political rallies, civic celebrations, and a farmer's market.

Bulfinch Triangle

Bulfinch Triangle is the area between Government Center and the North Station complex. So-called because of Charles Bulfinch's street plan for the marshy North Cove, a triangular area created by a 19th century filling-in, it consists of warehouse structures now mostly converted for office and residential uses.

Many recent developments have transformed the character of downtown Boston: the completion of wharf restoration, the linkage of the Harborwalk system, the depression of the Central Artery, and above it at the surface a linear park (almost 12 acres worth) known as the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway. More transformations will ensue as redevelopments with increasing densities occur to take advantage of this area's central location.

North End

The North End, one of Boston's oldest neighborhoods, was "wharfed-out" early and inhabited by wealthy merchants and humble seamen. In the early 1800s came the Irish who built houses abutting the narrow streets and alleys that to this day distinguish the North End. Since the 1890s the area has had a large Italian population. In the 1950s, with the building of the Central Artery, the North End became isolated from the downtown area; that isolation has disappeared since the completion of the Central Artery / Big Dig project.

West End

The West End was once a neighborhood of residential structures, shops, and commercial enterprises, an "urban village" much like the North Slope of Beacon Hill appears today. The urban renewal movement of the 1950s and 1960s razed the West End and replaced it with residential towers and large institutional uses.

Chinatown

Chinatown/South Cove is located on landfill deposited on tidal flats to provide additional housing in the early 1800s for Boston's expanding middle-class population. In the 1840s, this area's original residents began to move out of the city. Newcomers were mainly Chinese, Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Syrian immigrants who converted the homes to multi-unit tenements.

Non-residential uses developed on the edges of Chinatown. South Station, the railroad lines serving it, and the elevated line along Washington Street, were constructed in 1899. Many tenements were razed for expansion of the garment industry. After World War II, Chinese restaurants and specialty shops began to occupy ground floors of residential buildings and a tourist industry began to evolve.

Subsequently, many more housing units were lost due to urban renewal programs. Creation of the Southeast Expressway and the Massachusetts Turnpike, and an increase in traffic along Essex Street, isolated the Chinese residents in the South End from those in South Cove. Old rowhouses were replaced with institutional-scale buildings and high-rise housing towers. Community

isolation increased further following the 1974 creation of the “Combat Zone” adult entertainment district. This zone cut off Chinatown from the Central Business District as well as from Boston Common and the Public Garden.

Today, Chinatown exists on approximately one-half the land mass it once had, with a population that continues to grow. The community struggles to provide housing for new immigrants, growing families, elder residents, and non-Asians attracted by the proximity to downtown Boston.

Open Space Access& Equity/ Future Development

The Central Boston neighborhood population is dominated by young and middle age adults and has seen a dramatic 24.4% growth between the 2000 and 2010 census. These upward trends are likely to continue into the future as more downtown housing is developed. Where housing exists, population density is high which is appropriate for the downtown setting.

While characterized by mature and well-distributed public spaces, Boston’s historic inner core has only 56 acres of open space, a quarter of which are hardscaped plazas, malls, and squares. The Central Boston neighborhood is extremely constrained in terms of access to active recreation spaces. Protected open space per 1,000 residents in this neighborhood is only 2.17 acres compared to the city average of 7.59 acres. The existing park facilities are well spread out, but they are limited in size and number and do not adequately meet the needs of this growing community.

The pedestrian environment in Central Boston benefits from its context as the civic, historic, and economic core of the city. While existing squares, pedestrian malls, passive seating areas, and plazas are well distributed, they could be better linked in a coherent, intelligible manner with improved wayfinding. The opening of the Rose Kennedy Greenway over the submerged Central Artery introduces a new organizing element into the downtown landscape. Developing strong connections across the Greenway to the waterfront is now paramount (Central Boston Map 4).

The residential neighborhoods in the North End, West End and Chinatown are most affected by the disaggregation of neighborhood open space. Chinatown, for instance, does not have any protected open space with active recreation facilities and its nearest ball fields are located on the Boston Common which is a high demand location.

There are no playgrounds within the downtown / Financial District area of the city and this should be considered as new residential units are introduced along the Rose Kennedy Greenway, within the Leather District, and in Downtown Crossing. Because of the high numbers of tourists who frequent these areas, a play space would be used by both residents and visitors alike (Central Boston Map 7). New development in this neighborhood attracts young adults who might choose to remain in the city if nearby recreational facilities can accommodate family uses.

Downtown open spaces may be necessarily smaller in scale, but they can support a range of uses, provide opportunities for urban greening, and foster engagement in city life. Larger multi-use open spaces that a community can coalesce around are limited to the North End (Langone/Polcari, Christopher Columbus Park, and the North End playgrounds), and Elliot Norton Park in Bay Village/Chinatown (Central Boston Map 8). Established, livable neighborhoods have activated open spaces that become part of the neighborhood fabric. The linear nature of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, its location between two boulevard-like thoroughfares, and its mix of largely passive uses does not currently suggest that this park will serve that purpose. This deficiency should be further explored as the Boston’s downtown continues to add residential units.

Due to the number of small open space areas in this neighborhood, park access is well distributed. The Park Equity map overlays the high need areas on the park service areas. This shows a deficiency of open space in the Downtown Crossing area and in Chinatown (Central Boston Maps 10 & 11). The facilities discussion above has identified the shortcomings of this neighborhood’s open space.

The BRA has initiatives underway to better link the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway with the downtown waterfront and other parts of downtown: the Greenway District Planning Study, the Downtown Waterfront Public Realm Plan, and the Crossroads Initiative. Another effort to better organize the downtown landscape is the BTD-led Connect Historic Boston project. Connect Historic Boston is an initiative between the National Park Service (NPS) and the City of Boston’s Transportation Department to provide multi-modal transportation options for residents and visitors between many of downtown Boston.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

CENTRAL BOSTON

Population	
2010 Census	31,821
2000 Census	25,573
Population Growth/Decline, 2000–2010	24.4%

Population Density		Persons per Acre
2010 Census		38.2
2000 Census		30.7
Density Change, 2000–2010		7.5

Age	Persons	Percent of Population
0 to 9	1,293	4%
10 to 19	3,104	10%
20 to 34	13,067	41%
35 to 54	6,959	22%
55 to 64	3,094	10%
65 and over	4,304	14%

Teens, City to Community Comparison	Total Population	Total Children 12-17	% of Boston's Children 12-17	Children 12-17 as % of Neighborhood Population
Boston	617,594	33,920	100.0%	5.5%
Central Boston	31,821	473	1.4%	1.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census, BRA Research Division Analysis

Race/Ethnicity/ Latino Status	Persons	Percent of Population
White alone	12,635	40%
Hispanic or Latino	3,568	11%
Black or African American alone	4,113	13%
Asian alone	7,320	23%
Other	1,000	3%

Median Household Income

\$63,105

Source: US Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, BRA Research Division Analysis

Percent of Households by Number of Vehicles Available	
No vehicles	52%
1 vehicle	40%
2 vehicles	7%
3 or more vehicles	1%

Source: American Community Survey 2006-2010; BRA Research Division Analysis

Population* with Disability	Persons	Percent of Population
Boston	72,390	11.6%
Central Boston	2,722	9.1%

*Civilian Noninstitutionalized

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, BRA Research Division Analysis

N.B.: "0%" means "less than 1%"

All Tables 2010 U.S. Decennial Census, unless otherwise noted





















