

LOWER ROXBURY

Unlocking Investment for this
Choice Neighborhood

MAY 2012

The American City Coalition

2012

Prepared by:

The American City Coalition

With:

Utile

Lower Roxbury: A Choice Neighborhood

Redevelopment Priorities

“Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty isolate their residents from the resources and networks they need to reach their potential and deprive the larger community of the neighborhood’s human capital ... many neighborhood-level indicators are linked to important outcomes for people residing in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, including crime and delinquency, education, psychological distress, and various health problems.”

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Introduction

This document outlines an argument for prioritizing investment in the Lower Roxbury area of Boston and the potential benefit of a geographically focused private-public effort in Lower Roxbury. The paper demonstrates potential project sites, recommended density levels, and a proposed balance of subsidized versus market-rate housing in the community. It is meant as an enthusiastic endorsement of the community as a place for investment and a place that will dramatically benefit from thoughtful, focused efforts to combine and coordinate resources.

The recommendations outlined here are aligned with the Obama Administration’s Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, a set of cross-agency programs and collaborations designed to bring the concerted efforts of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Education (ED), and the Department of Justice (DOJ) into the fight against concentrated urban poverty.

This is not a narrow appeal to promote housing or social programming, but to highlight an opportunity where concentrated public and private investment will create conditions that support shared interests of the community, the city and private investors. A concentrated effort in this area will strengthen families, improve safety, and create financial and social value.

1

No one will lose their home

- > One-for-one unit replacement
- > No loss of affordable housing
 - > Equitable relocation, and
 - > Ability to return to original development

2

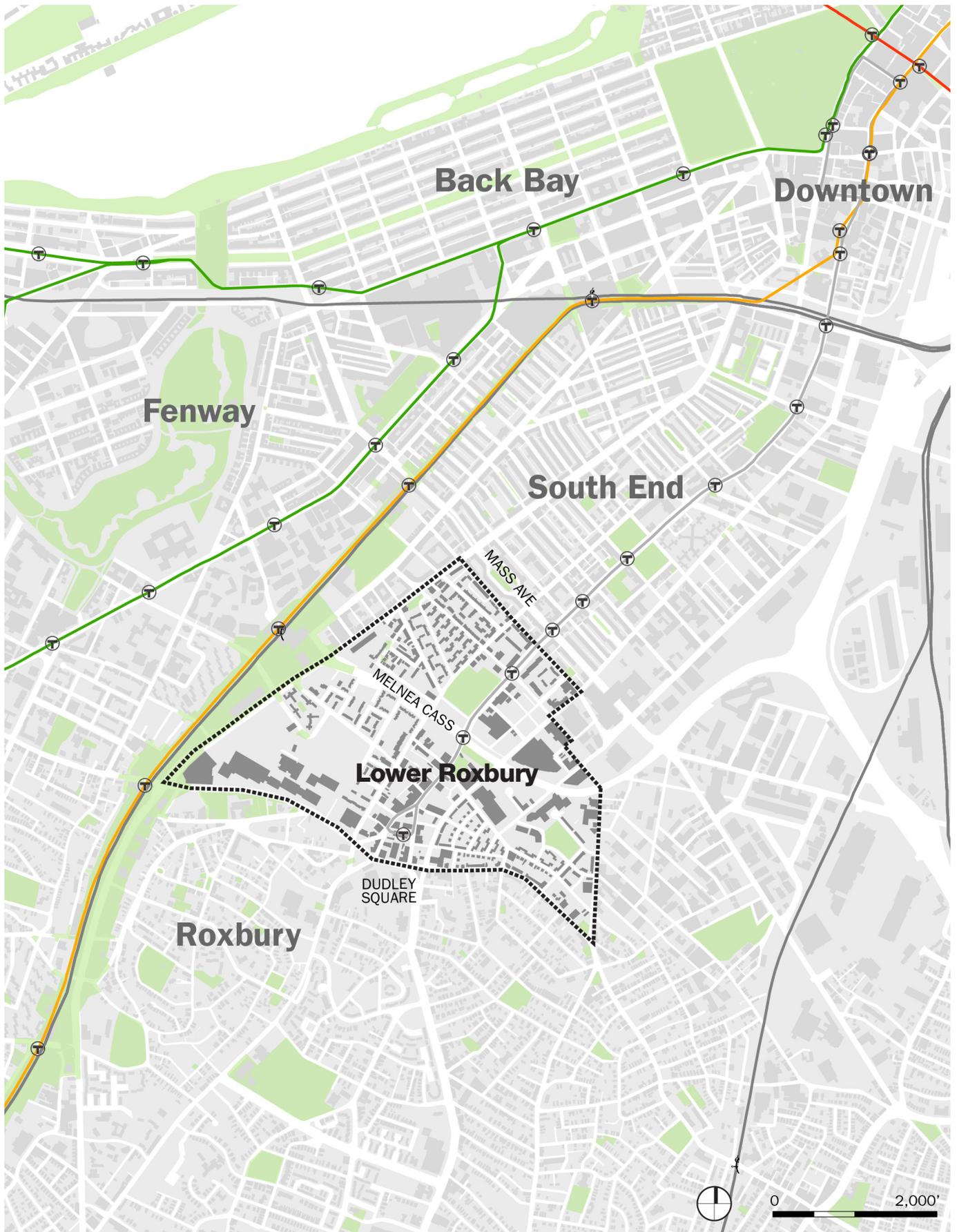
Increase economic diversity and density

- > More households with more disposable income will increase viability for the commercial, civic, cultural, and social activities of Dudley Square

3

Connect communities

- > Physical improvements that relate to context, break up superblocks, integrate with South End, Longwood Medical and Mission Hill



Why Lower Roxbury?

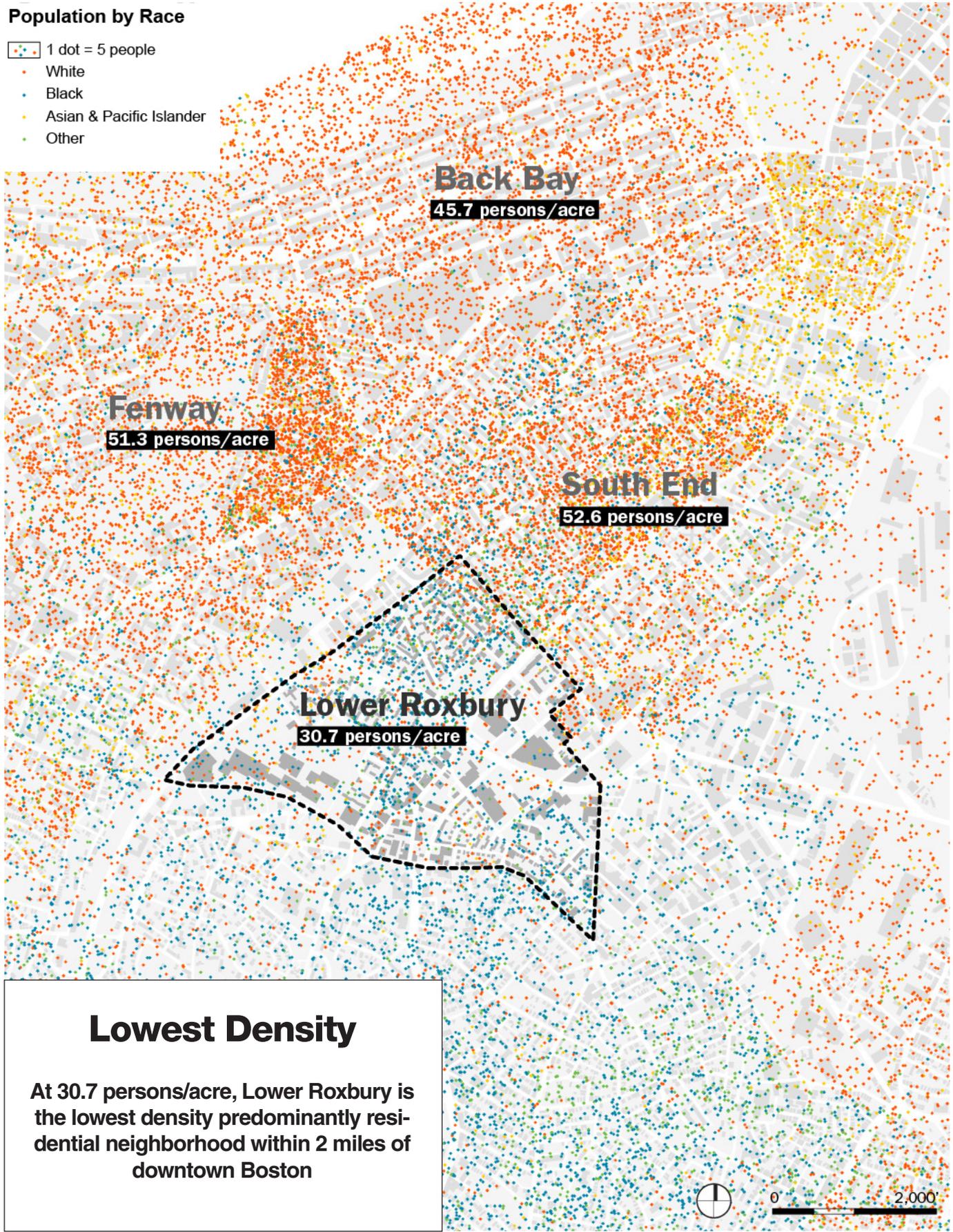
The Lower Roxbury section of Boston, Massachusetts is endowed with many advantages that undergird diverse viable neighborhoods in Boston and across the region. It has iconic architecture, historic sites, proximity to downtown, and a politically aware and active community. Dudley Square, Roxbury's retail center lies at the center of African-American culture, and at the heart of the Mayor-led commitment to neighborhood development. Despite these assets, the community is plagued by chronic ills that stand in the path of this neighborhood fulfilling its potential as an economically vibrant district woven into the fabric of the city.

Urban renewal and public housing policies of the mid-20th century resulted in disproportionately high densities of public and subsidized housing in Lower Roxbury, resulting in extreme concentrations of poverty, crime, and economic stratification. Lower Roxbury has one of the highest concentrations of Extremely Low Income (ELI) Families and the highest concentrations of subsidized housing of any urban community in the northeast. It also has a disproportionately high incidence of violence with greater than five times the incidence of assault relative to the whole city¹. Each of these challenges can be overcome through focused, place-based investment, policy development and social programming.

¹ Boston Police Department and FBI 2010 Uniform Crime Data

Population by Race

- 1 dot = 5 people
- White
- Black
- Asian & Pacific Islander
- Other



Lowest Density

At 30.7 persons/acre, Lower Roxbury is the lowest density predominantly residential neighborhood within 2 miles of downtown Boston

Socioeconomic Conditions

Past efforts to build needed affordable housing have, through site selection and conscious planning, concentrated poor people into a small community, effectively ghettoizing Boston’s lowest-income families. In addition to an abundance of privately managed subsidized housing, there are two public housing projects within the recommended neighborhood footprint (Whittier Street and Lenox/Camden) and a third just outside of the footprint (Alice Taylor), all of which must necessarily be considered in a successful neighborhood revitalization plan.

Census data and on-the-ground research suggests that the area is an economic “desert”—an under-populated, extremely low-income district with the lowest levels of home ownership and the highest levels of single-parent families in the city. Although Dudley Square, the primary retail hub serving this population, has been improved through public infrastructure and private investment in recent years, the neighborhood lacks fundamental market-driven services, such as a sit-down restaurant and a hardware store. This is a priority for the community as expressed in public meetings.

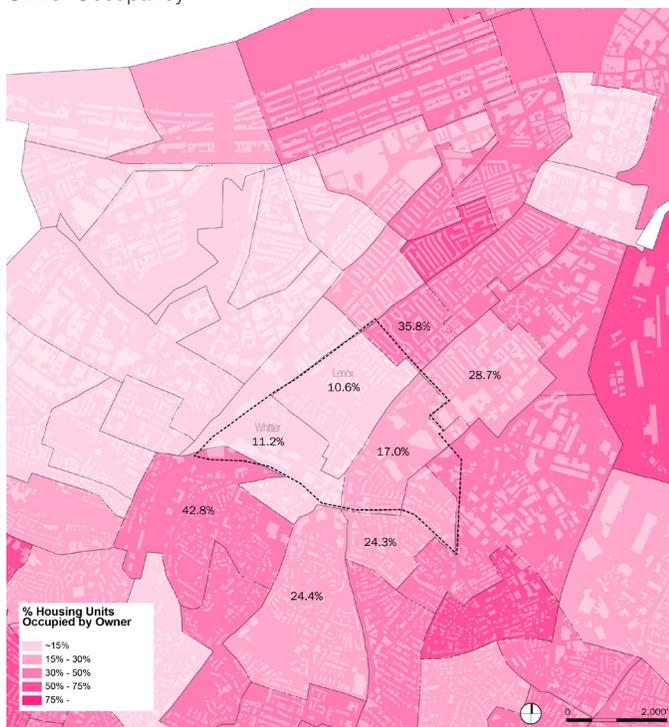
Whittier & Lenox Census Tracts Facts

<\$17,000
Median per annum household income

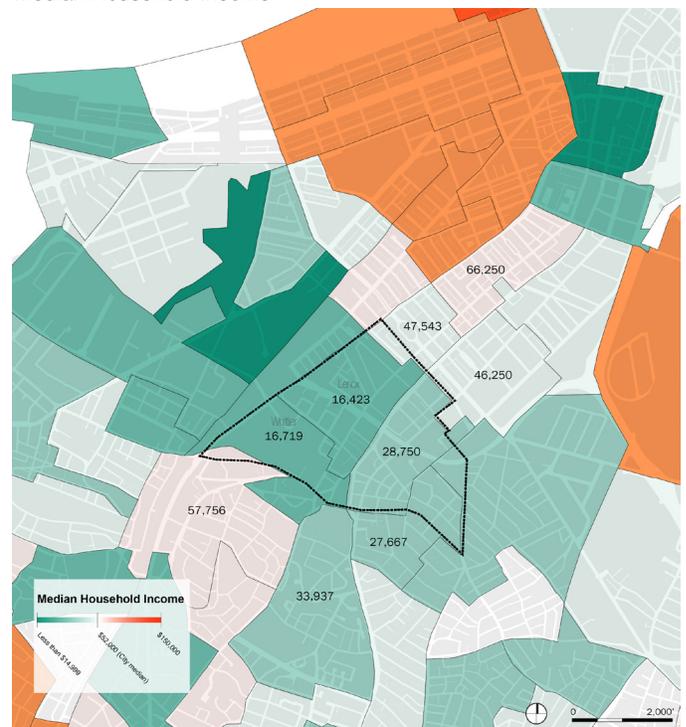
46%
Percentage of Extremely Low-Income families

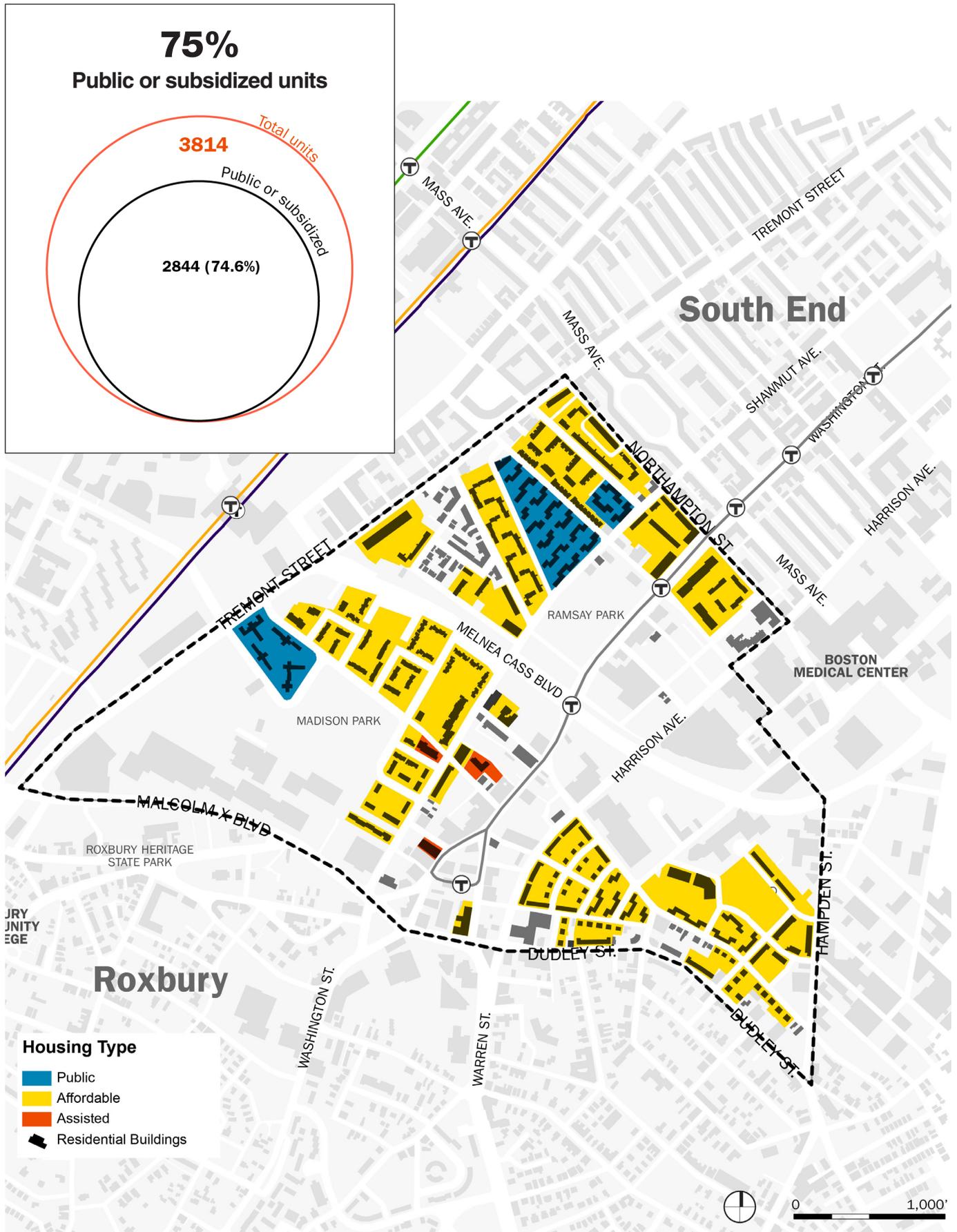
11%
Percentage of home ownership occupancy

Owner Occupancy



Median Household Income





Physical Conditions

Though the area is economically stratified, this is not a remote section of the city. The neighborhood is located within two miles of downtown and is serviced by multiple subway, bus routes, and arterial roadways that link the area to the downtown and the larger region. The neighborhood’s central location and excellent connectivity is its primary point of differentiation. The community offers short bus and train commutes to downtown and universal accessibility to the entire city and multiple job centers via biking.

Despite this centrality there remains an overwhelming sense of isolation, which acts as a barrier to sustainable community development and economic diversification. The land takings for the never-built interstate highway created gaps in the urban fabric that remain, severing once vibrant commercial and residential districts from each other. The elimination of local streets removed convenient connections to Dudley Square and created super-blocks, some of which were transformed into public and affordable housing developments cut off from the surrounding community. Projects such as Lenox/Camden and Whittier Street offer neither a coherent connection to the adjacent communities nor secure edges to provide a safe environment.

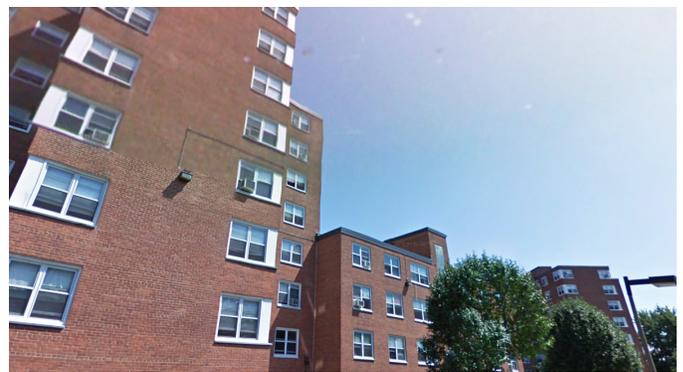
This community is also characterized by an abundance of underutilized land. Many of these parcels are under the control of public agencies. These include Parcels 3, 9, and 10, which have been released to private RFPs and which are scheduled to advance in the coming years.

Recent investments in rehabilitation efforts, such as those at Camfield Gardens, have improved the physical plan of these developments, but have not addressed the larger physical connectivity and socioeconomic issues plaguing the neighborhood.

Lenox/Camden (BHA-owned) - 376 units



Whittier Street (BHA-owned) - 200 units



Madison Park (Non-Profit-owned) - 263 units

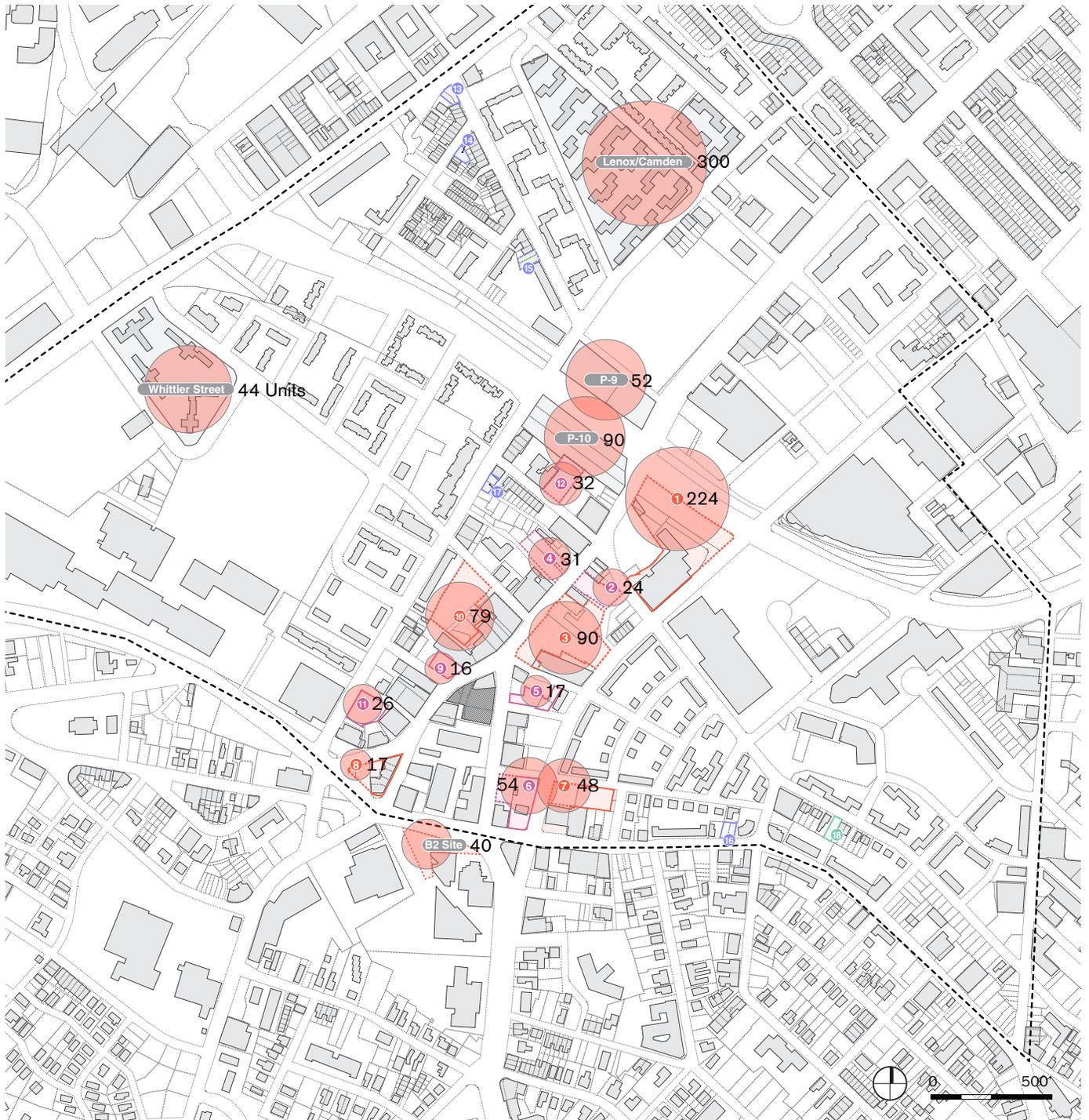


Greenwich Street (Multiple private ownership)



Camfield Gardens (Non-Profit-owned) - 102 units





An inventory of under-utilized parcels reveals that there is the potential for nearly 1200 units of new housing in the neighborhood.

Development Potential

The availability of space and centrality to nodes of economic development and cultural attractions together create a unique opportunity for broad-based neighborhood revitalization and market-rate rental. It is a unique location where neighborhood revitalization priorities and market demand combine to create mutually reinforcing project conditions.

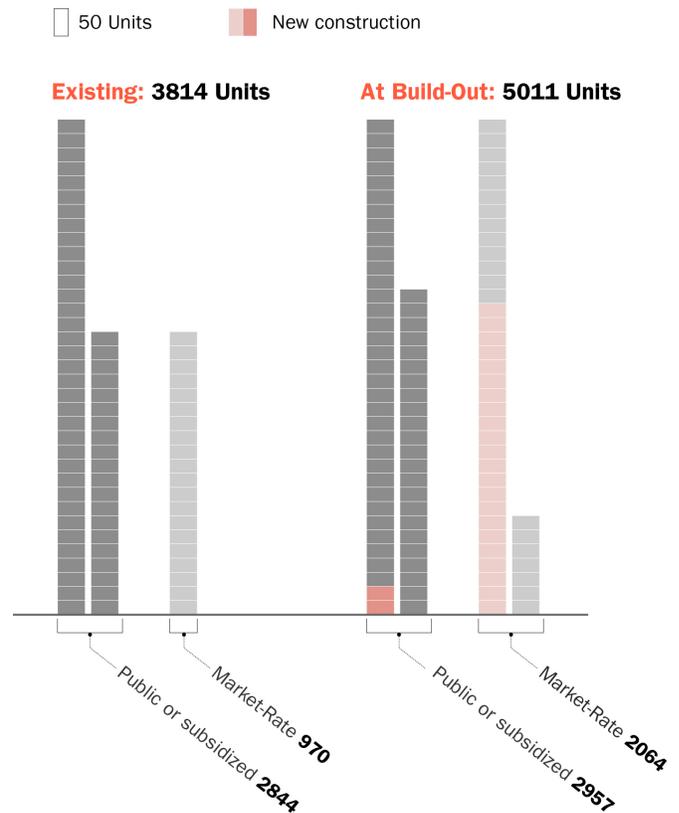
To create sustainable change in Lower Roxbury, a well-designed, place-based initiative will diversify the housing stock, increase density in the community, and incentivize moderate and market-rate home ownership.

A comprehensive place-based approach to the community could:

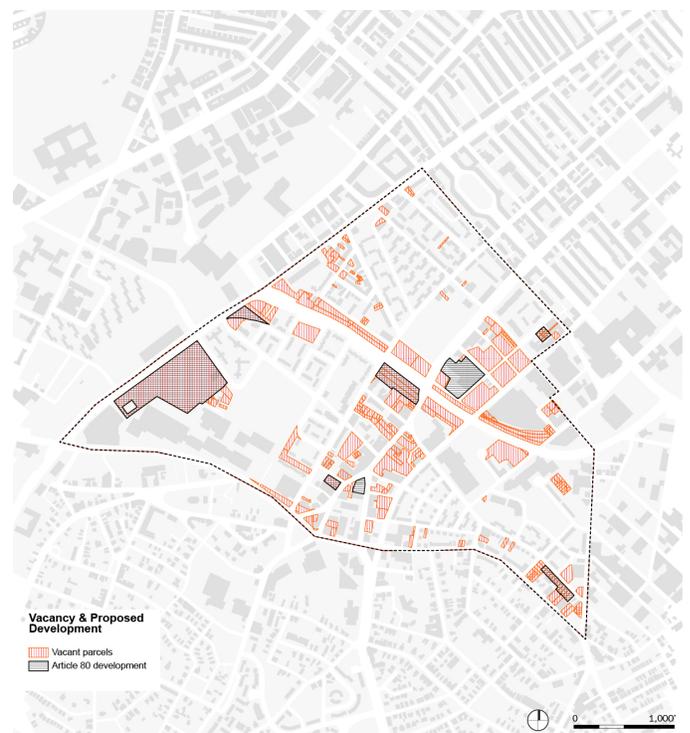
- Preserve affordable housing;
- Increase housing standards;
- Strengthen public safety;
- Increase retail demand;
- Create new economic opportunities;
- Expand economic and ethnic diversity.

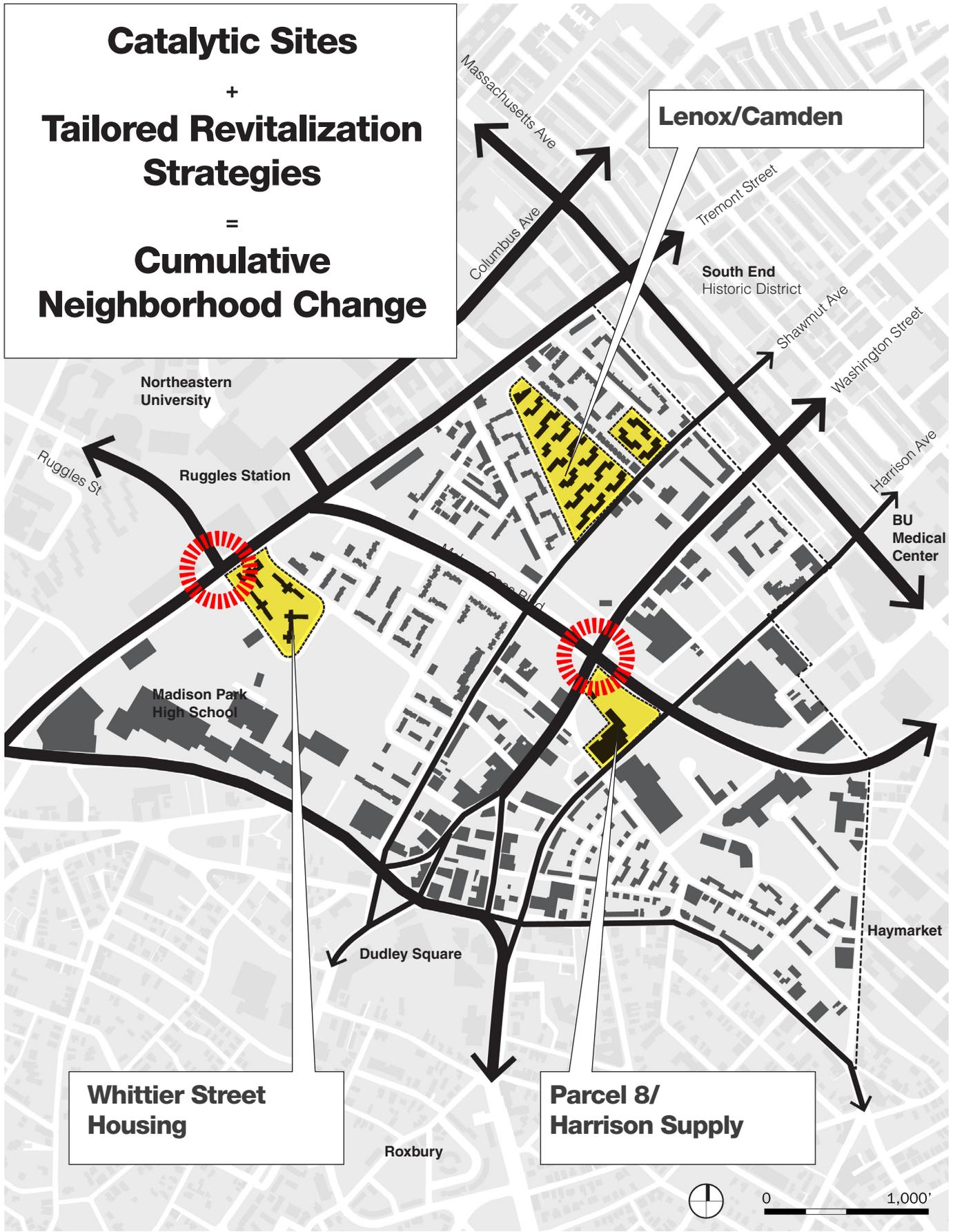
Choice Neighborhoods grants attempt to “transform distressed neighborhoods and public and assisted projects into viable and sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods by linking housing improvements with appropriate services, schools, public assets, transportation, and access to jobs.” Given the abundance of recent government investment, including new schools, two new police stations, two major public transportation lines, the relatively new Silver Line, a large multi-phased Hope VI project, and a forthcoming municipal office building, one potential missing ingredient is economic diversification.

Potential increase in housing inventory



Vacant parcels





Revitalization Strategy

Catalytic Sites

Implementing a Choice Neighborhoods program in Lower Roxbury will attract further investment in the under-developed buildings and land in close proximity to transit access, services, and successful neighboring mixed-income communities. These strategic sites can drive neighborhood transformation through housing. In total, coordinated efforts on these sites will distribute catalytic activity across the neighborhood, and incentivize the private sector to begin investing in the community. A coordinated effort will enable phasing that ensures a one-to-one replacement of affordable units with modest displacement and will provide vital time and input from community stakeholders.

We propose a revitalization strategy that is based on the privatization of Whittier Street and Lenox/Camden and the development of a significant, predominantly market-rate development at the corner of Washington and Melnea Cass. These three strategically located sites are dispersed throughout Lower Roxbury:

- Parcel 8/Harrison Supply, a collection of vacant Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) owned and underutilized private sites;
- Whittier Street, a 331-unit Boston Housing Authority (BHA) Project; and
- Lenox/Camden, a 376-unit BHA Project.

Whittier Street and Parcel 8/Harrison Supply are prominently located along key boulevards and at key intersections. Lenox/Camden on the other hand, is enmeshed in the heart of the neighborhood. Whittier Street and Lenox/Camden stand out as prime opportunity sites for intervention as they both present:

- High concentrations of extreme poverty and low density;
- Aging buildings in need of refurbishment and/or replacement;
- Access to Tremont and Columbus Avenues with the ability to link neighborhood fabrics;
- Strategic locations able to activate immediate vicinity; and,
- Desirable marketable locations for market rate occupants.

Together, these developments will provide density in the neighborhood and dramatically increase the number of market-rate units to help support neighborhood services and amenities.

Phasing

Accomplishing one-for-one affordable unit replacement and ensuring zero long-term displacement requires a well-coordinated phasing strategy. By first creating housing at the Parcel 8/Harrison site, these units can be used to host tenants while Whittier is renovated and units are added. Residents that

wish to return to Whittier would return. Phased reconstruction of Lenox would then be completed using Whittier and Parcel 8/Harrison as host housing. At completion, each of these three sites will be owned and maintained by private operators, and will have high standards of housing and a diverse population of residents.

Supportive Services

Although the concentration of poverty in Lower Roxbury will be greatly helped by new housing, supportive services will ultimately make the life-changing difference. There is an abundance of organizations that provide social services in Boston. However, consistent support will require case management of residents throughout the revitalization process and tailored services to support residents as they return to revitalized housing.

This case and personal plan should be coordinated through the housing provided and funded from a Supportive Services Trust Fund generated from 15% of a Choice Neighborhoods implementation grant. These funds will not necessarily pay for direct services, but will create and maintain a structured collaboration that will develop programming, create ongoing systems for residents' service and link resident community members to an ongoing point of support. Coordinated supportive services for the community would include:

- Lease compliance and housing counseling;
- Early childhood development;
- Coordination with public schools;
- Parent support;
- Workforce development; and,
- Mental health referral.

Choice Neighborhoods grants transforms distressed neighborhoods and public and assisted projects into viable and sustainable mixed-income neighborhoods by linking housing improvements with appropriate services, schools, public assets, transportation, and access to jobs.

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Parcel 8 / Harrison Supply

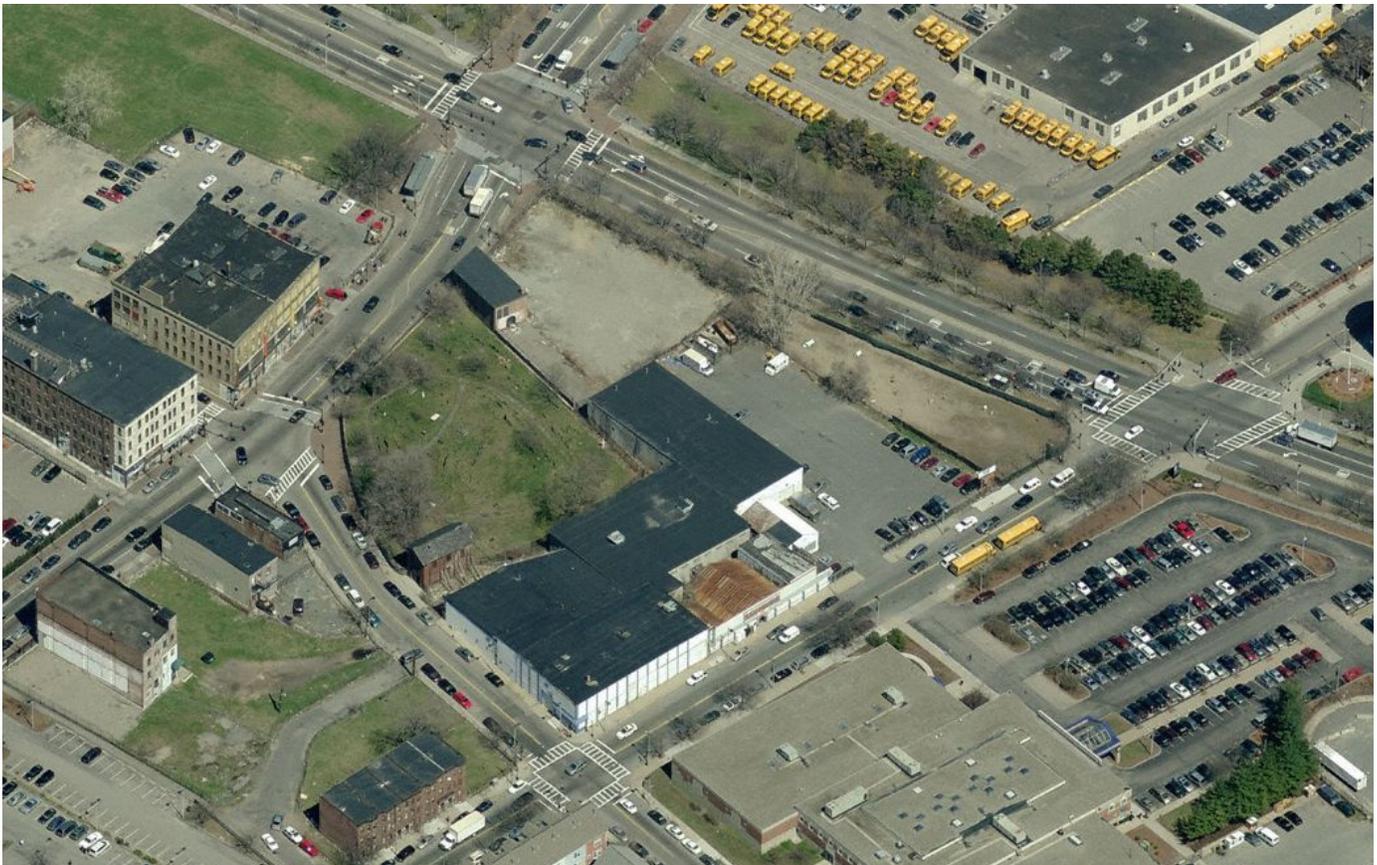
A Strategy of Mixed-Income New Construction

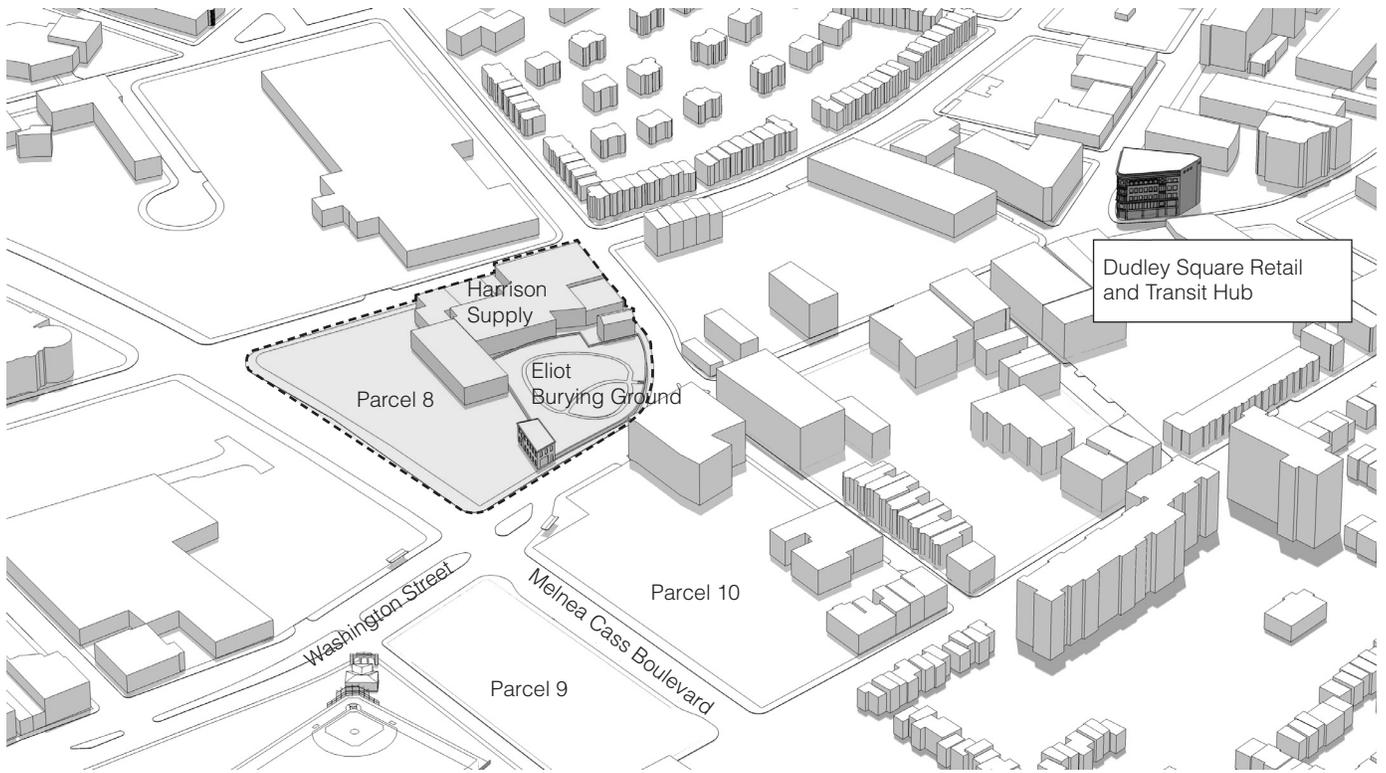
Parcel 8/Harrison Supply will require the demolition of existing under-utilized light-industrial facilities and the construction of a series of new mixed-income residential buildings with community-serving retail and cultural uses. This unique site will complement the institutional and commercial work being completed at the Ferdinand Building and the developments of Parcels 9 and 10. The site has excellent access to the new Boston Public Schools headquarters, Longwood Medical Area, UMass Boston, as well as the MBTA's Silver and Orange Lines. The site could provide roughly 224 new units of mixed-income residential housing; 194 market-rate units and 30 affordable units, fulfilling the Mayor's inclusionary housing program.

224
New mixed-income housing units

9,000 gsf
Retail / community / arts space

Public open space, rehabilitated sidewalks,
cemetery, and public realm





Existing

Potential development concept







Bird's-eye view towards northeast, showing one potential development concept

View from Harrison and Eustis



View from Melnea Cass and Washington



Whittier Street

A Strategy of Renovation and Revitalization

At Whittier Street, one of the City’s most successful public housing projects with a relatively intact physical plant, a strategy of rehabilitation and improvement is proposed. Whittier Street has intrinsic value as a mixed-income property because of its convenient location next to the Ruggles Orange Line MBTA stop. It also has great value because of the potential for using the adjacent property for redevelopment. The proposed initiative would attempt to increase density at this transit node using space on the Whittier Street site and the adjacent Crescent parcel to create an additional 44 units of housing.

These designs for Whittier were created by Phil Viana as part of his Master’s Thesis at Northeastern University, Spring 2012.

0
Net loss of affordable residential units

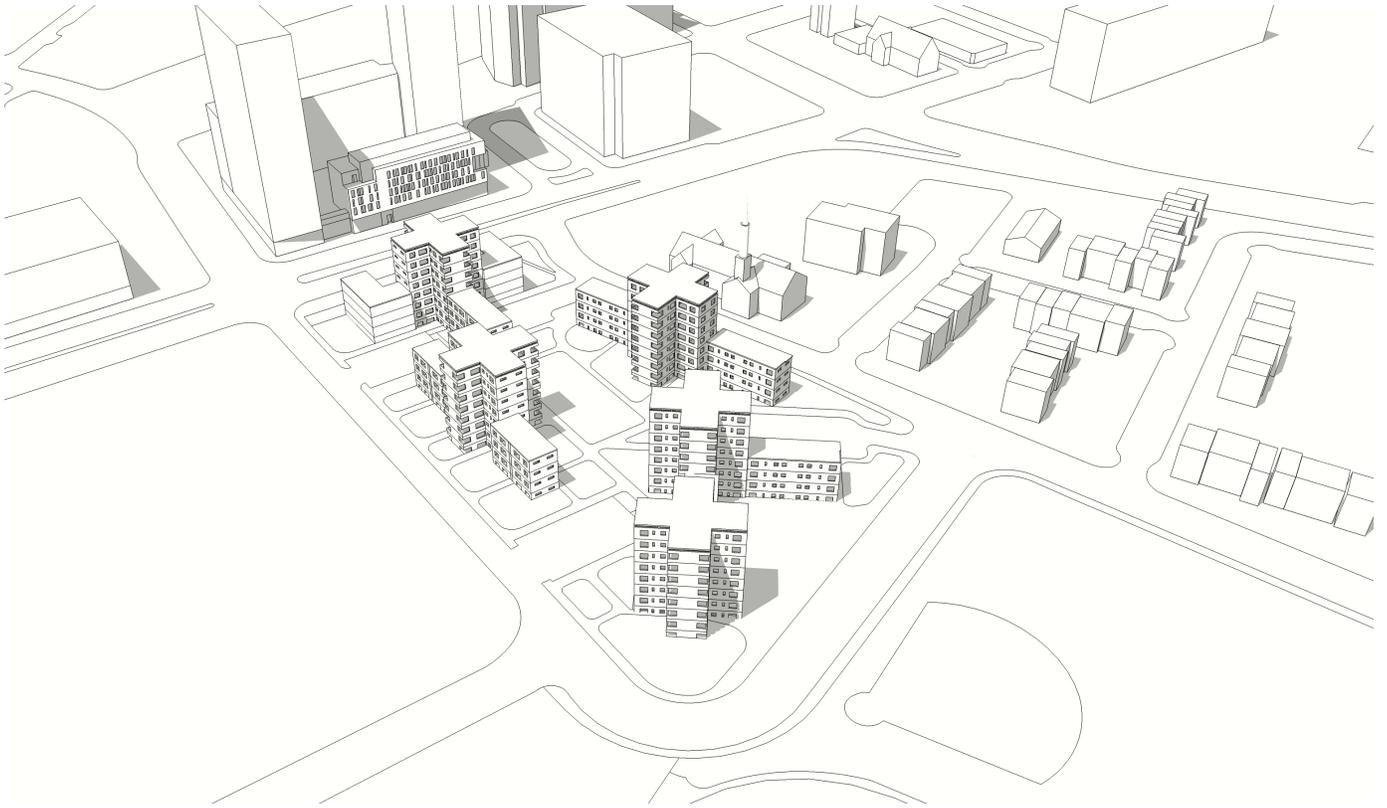
104
Mixed-income replacement units

44
Additional mixed-income units

44,900 gsf
Retail / community / arts space

New streets, rehabilitated sidewalks, and public realm improvements





View of existing super-block

Potential development concept, showing realignment of streets to create connections to surrounding community



Lenox/Camden

A Strategy of Phased Redevelopment with Renovation, Demolition, and New Construction

Lenox/Camden is plagued by a sub-standard physical plant. Here, a combination of renovation, demolition, and new construction of units, with no net loss of affordable units is proposed. The Camden housing cluster, which comprises 70 of Lenox/Camden’s total 376 units, will remain in situ. The remaining Lenox cluster of housing is recommended for sub-division into a network of blocks woven into the surrounding fabric. Razing and reconstruction in partnership with the private sector would be carried out in four phases, independently tendered for reconstruction and future operation of the replacement mixed-income housing. The project could total 676 units, a net increase of 300 units over existing conditions.

0
 Net loss of affordable residential units

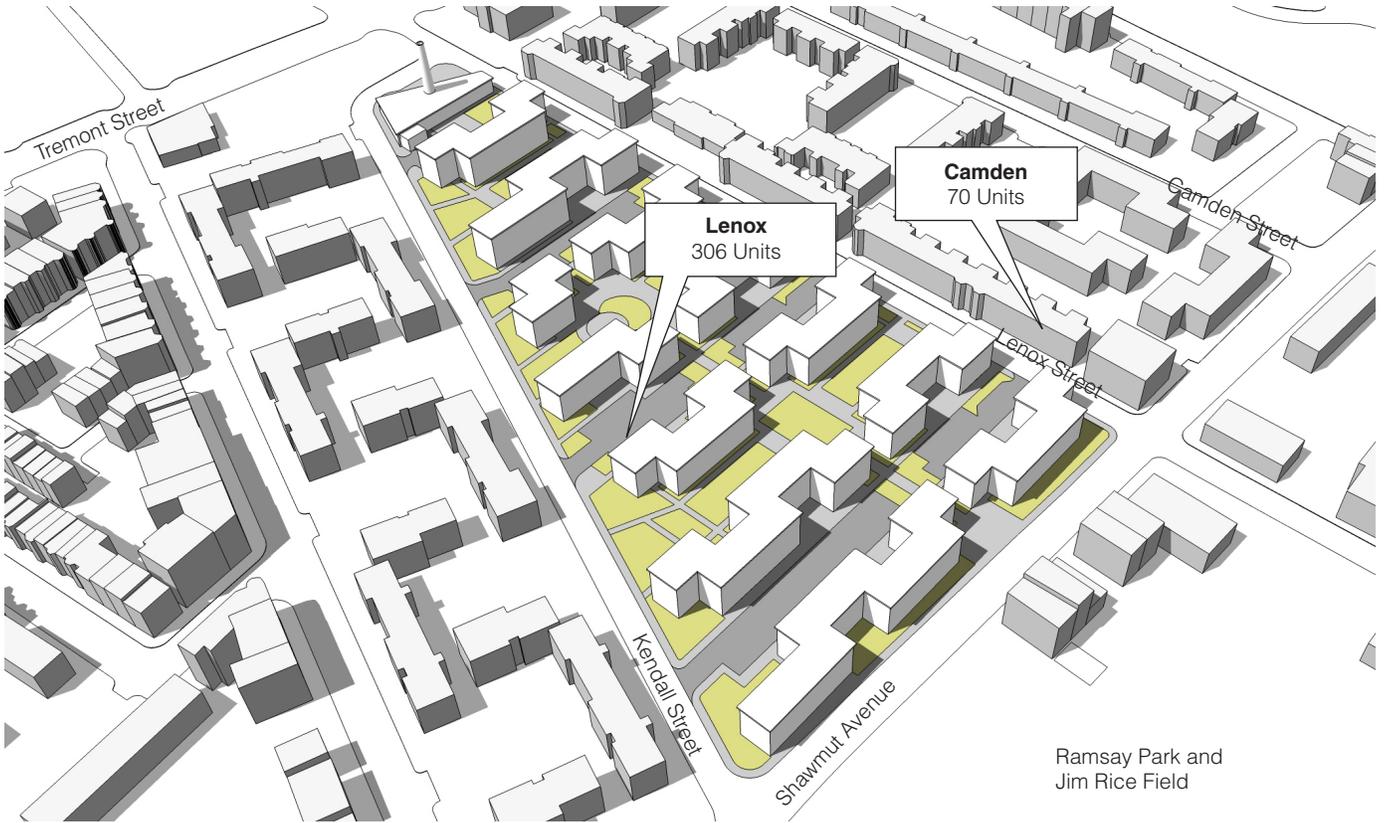
300
 New market-rate residential units

676
 Total units (versus 376 currently)

40,000 gsf
 Retail / community / arts space

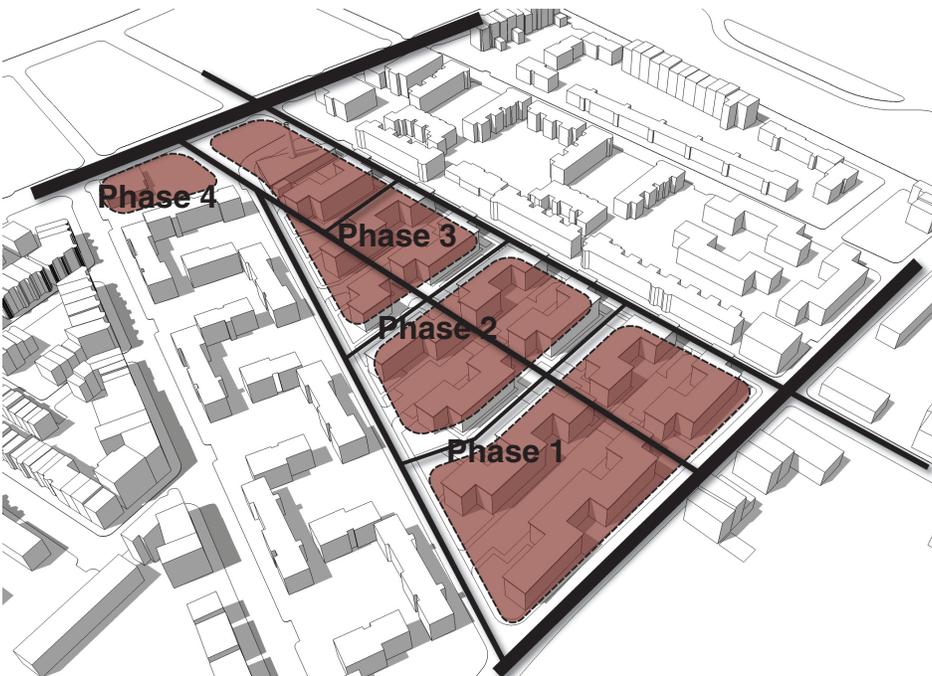
New streets, rehabilitated sidewalks,
 relocated community garden, and public
 realm improvements





Existing super block structure

Potential development concept, showing incremental phasing and a network of neighborhood streets





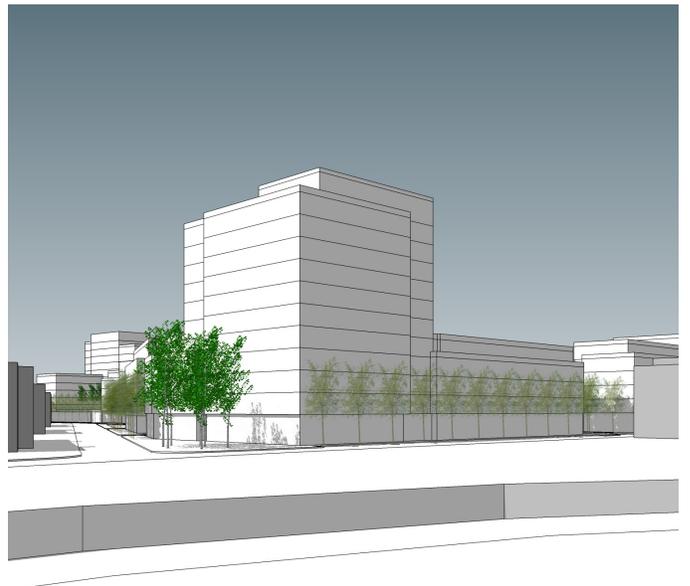


Bird's-eye view towards north east, showing one potential development concept

New pedestrian-scaled neighborhood streets



View of visual anchor from Jim Rice ball field



Getting to the Goal

Lower Roxbury has long suffered the consequences of well-intentioned, but ultimately disruptive, housing policy decisions of the past sixty years. The high concentration of poverty is directly related to the extremely high concentration of affordable and public housing. This community is the exact profile of a neighborhood that was considered when the HUD Choice Neighborhoods program was developed. Lower Roxbury is a neighborhood where housing can serve as a platform for dramatic yet sustainable socioeconomic change.

This is an argument for action led by a spirit of social justice and equity and for action that builds diversity and increases standards for all people. This is an outline for an intervention that de-concentrates poverty in an area with enormous potential. To even begin this project it will require substantial collaboration from disparate organizations in multiple sectors and a commitment to community vision.

Collaboration

A fundamental barrier exists for this type of revitalization strategy. Disparate organizations and large-scale institutions are incentivized to focus on self-directed interests and agendas. There is no entity—political, governmental, non-profit, or institutional—charged with collaboration and cross-sector coordination.

The recommended revitalization plan will have a long-term impact on the community. However, the most impactful and sustainable outcomes will be generated if multiple government agencies and for-profit and non-profit entities can address the common goals while simultaneously achieving their own missions. What is necessary to accomplish this task is a single, independent entity, empowered by the community, the City, the state, non-profit, and private-sector actors to serve as an objective interlocutor focused on advancing a common agenda.

Recommendations and Community Vision

The recommendations outlined here are consistent with the Roxbury Strategic Planning and Oversight Committee as expressed in meetings throughout 2011. The community envisions a Lower Roxbury that is a diverse, safe, welcoming, and vibrant area for residents and visitors.

Results

- > Two public housing developments converted to private management
- > All affordable housing preserved
- > Long-term support of Lower Roxbury Supportive Services for affordable housing residents
- > 568 new market-rate rental housing units
- > Increase in area household income to support local retail
- > Streets activated and safety improved
- > Lower Roxbury integrated into neighboring communities

