



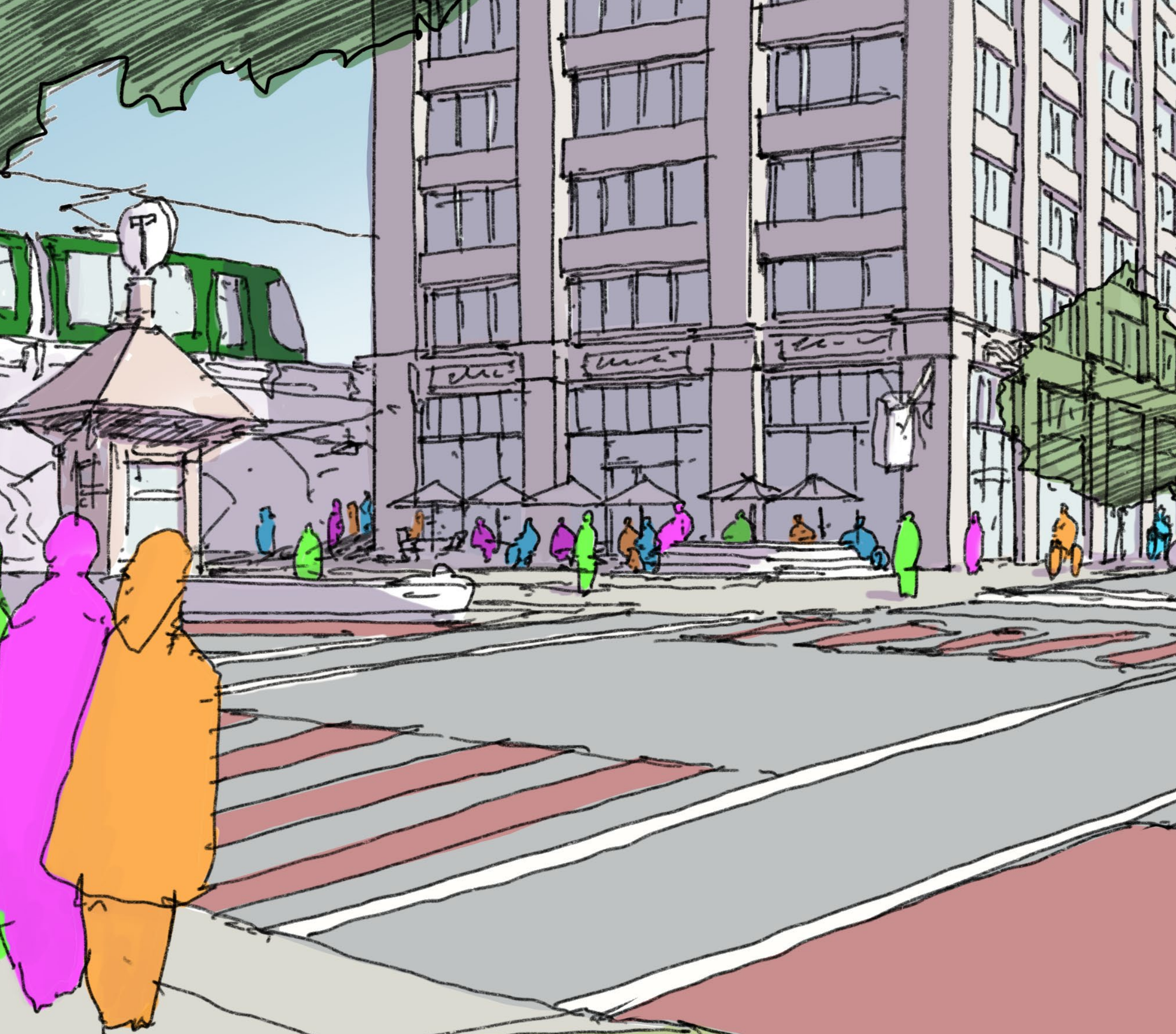
# **BRICKBOTTOM SMALL AREA PLAN**

**PUBLIC DRAFT  
JUNE 10, 2022**



**PUBLIC DRAFT**

**JUNE 10, 2022**



Many passionate people are working on improving the Brickbottom neighborhood. This Small Area Plan would not be possible without local community residents and area stakeholders willing to offer their time and talent. We based the writing and design of this document on the principle that people ultimately create great spaces, not reports. This plan is a collaborative effort between community members, experts, and landowners.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## **SPECIAL THANKS TO**

The Brickbottom Artists Building Trustees and Residents

The Joy Street Studios Artists and Community

Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

Ward Councilor JT Scott

All the area workers, landowners, and residents who participated in our process

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# LETTER

***IN PRODUCTION***

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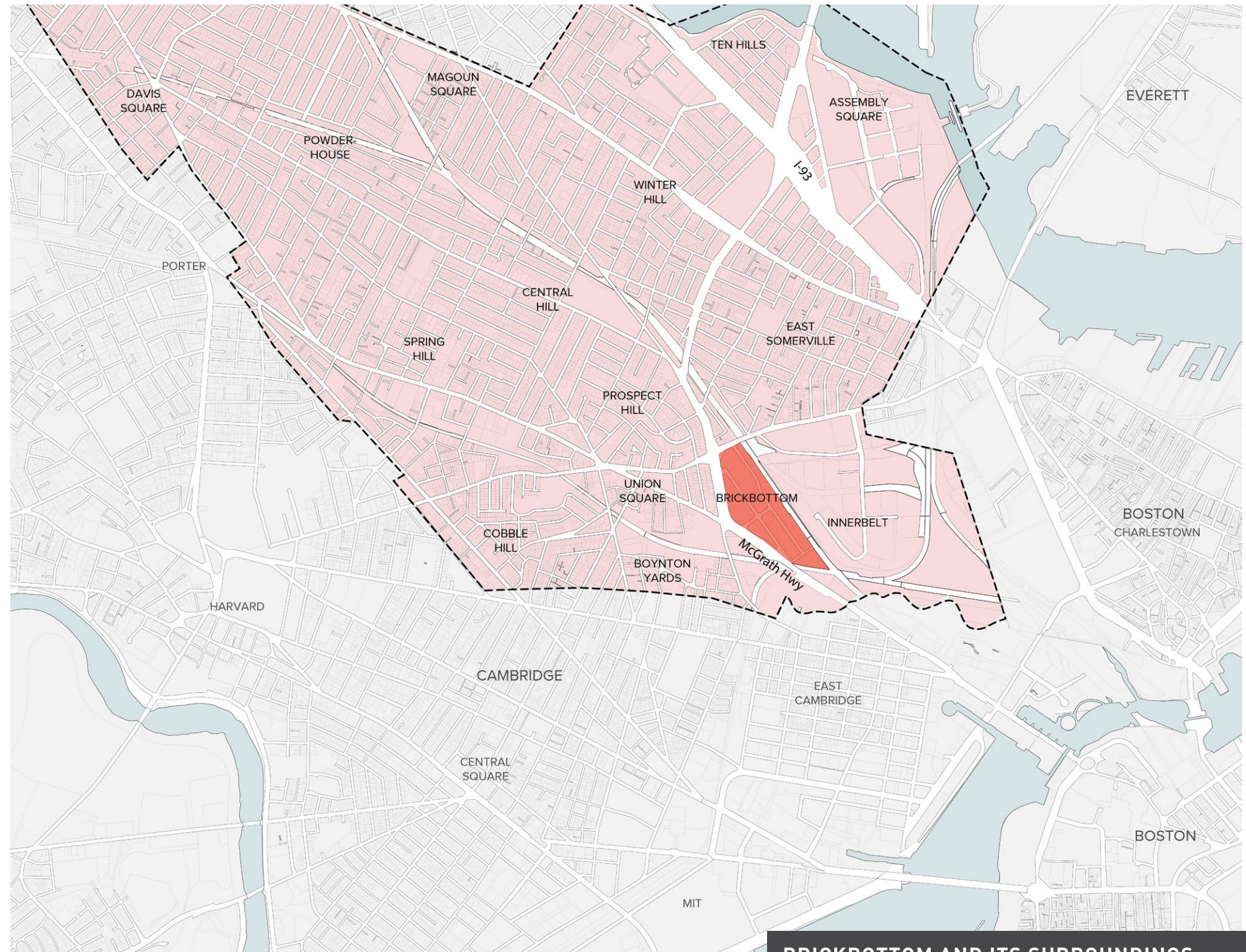


# 1. INTRODUCTION

# 1.1 WHAT IS A SMALL AREA PLAN?

We created the Brickbottom Small Area Plan based on a two-year community engagement focused process. Our experts also researched relevant city-wide plans, similar efforts in other cities, past plans and data regarding the area. Our team included staff from the City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development and our consultants.

A Small Area Plan is a neighborhood-level visioning document that focuses on general land use, directions for economic development, community support, big picture concepts for urban design, and public policy proposals to achieve those goals. The Small Area Plan aims to guide future development, assist the decision-making process for public investment in the area, and bring together city-wide policies and goals with neighborhood-specific objectives. This plan is not an implementation document. We expect each major redevelopment and public initiative in the area to have its own separate internal and external process to address the finer details and considerations.



**BRICKBOTTOM AND ITS SURROUNDINGS**

# 1.2 AREA OF SCOPE

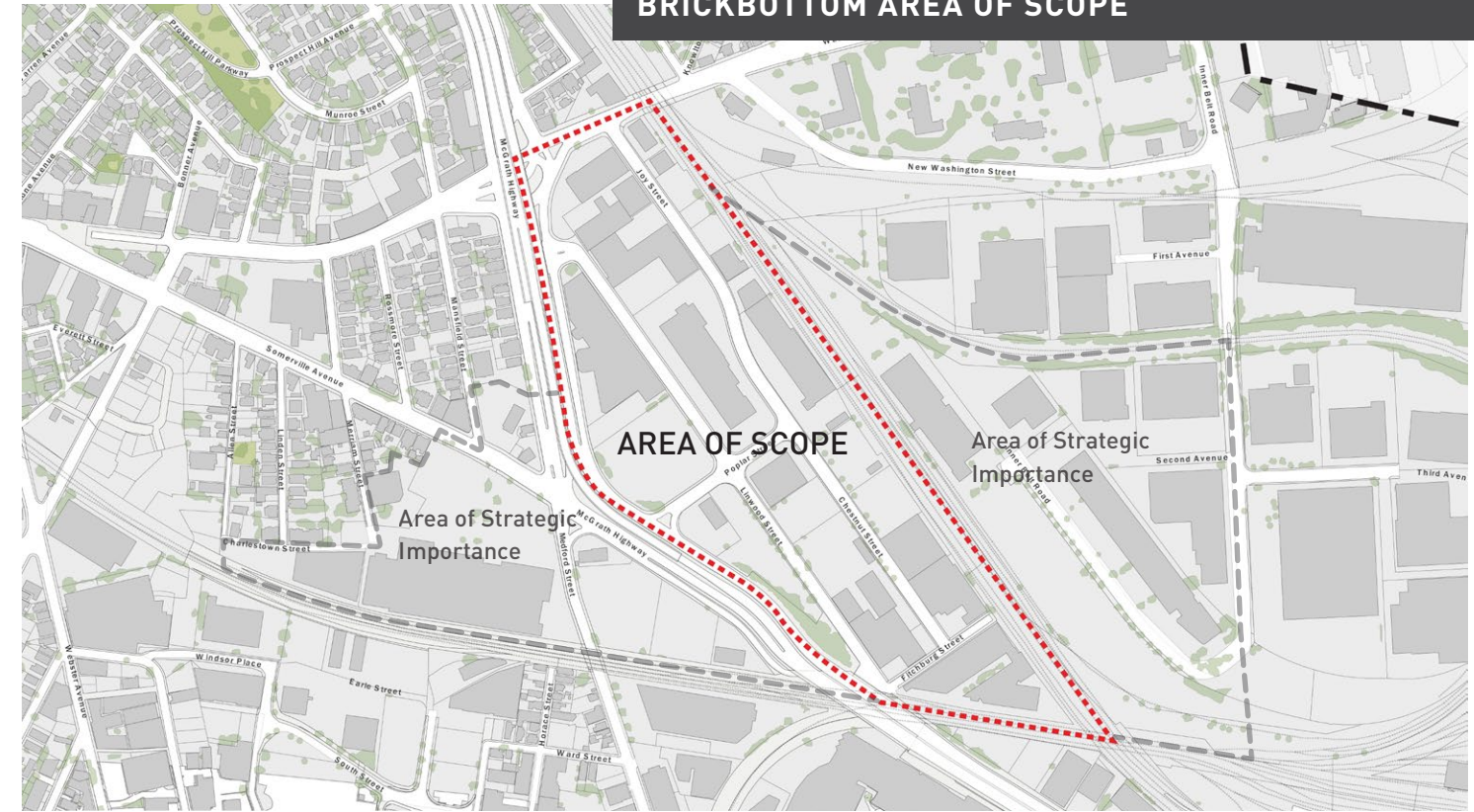
The area of this Plan includes the land located:

- Southwest of the GLX Medford/Tufts branch alignment
- North of the Fitchburg Railroad alignment
- East and northeast of McGrath Highway
- Southeast of Washington Street

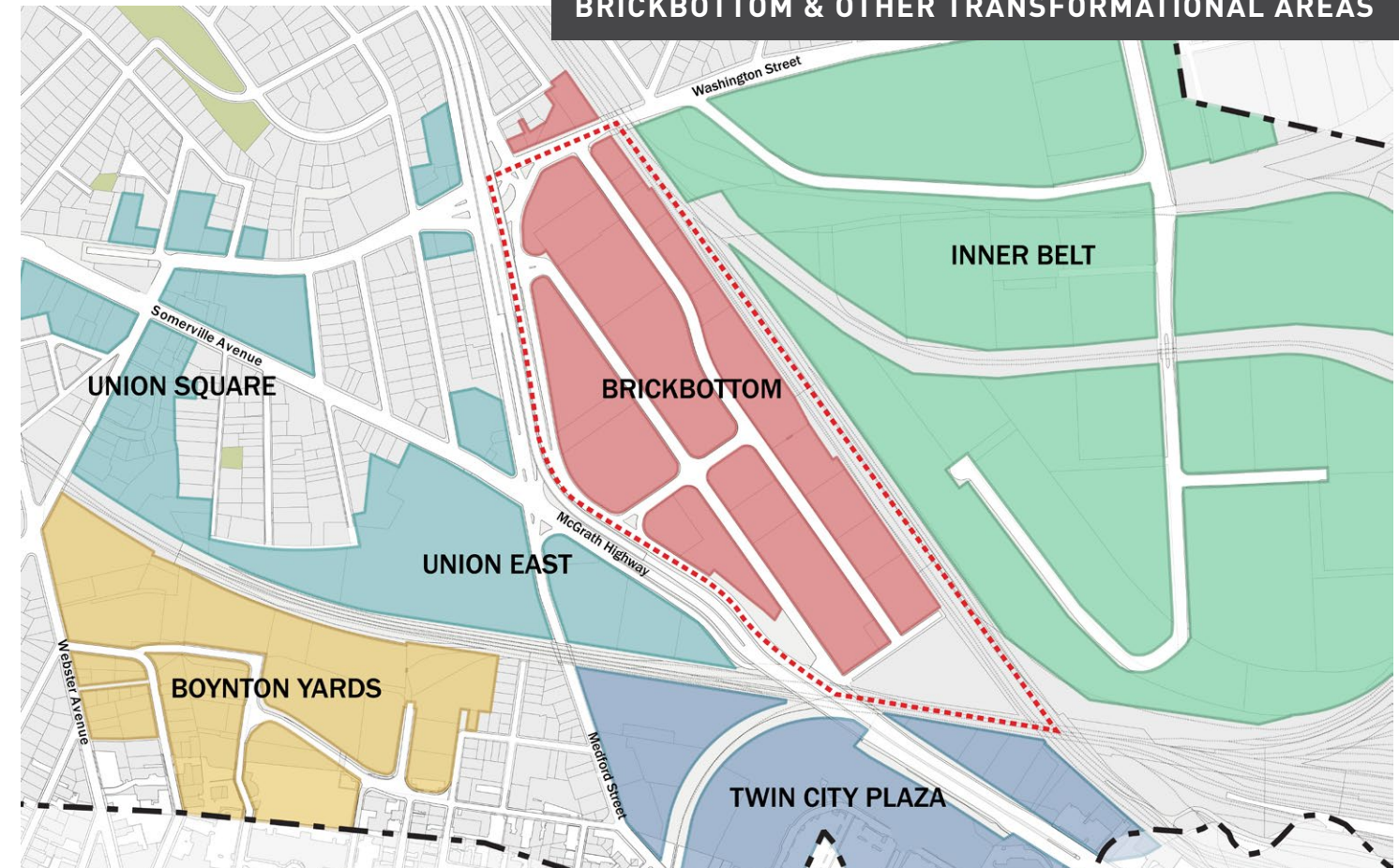
(These are the parcels shown on the City of Somerville Assessors Map 94, Blocks A, B, and C; Map 112, Blocks A, B, and C; Map 115, Block C).

We also studied two additional areas to the extent necessary to determine where connections to Brickbottom were possible. The land directly east of the GLX right-of-way within Innerbelt and the parcels on the westside of McGrath Highway from the recently approved Milk Square Urban Design Framework. These are areas of strategic importance given their connections with the main goals and ideas presented in this document, particularly regarding establishing better connections to surrounding neighborhoods.

**BRICKBOTTOM AREA OF SCOPE**



**BRICKBOTTOM & OTHER TRANSFORMATIONAL AREAS**





# 1.3 WHY PLAN NOW?

We must define a shared vision for the neighborhood before development accelerates throughout Brickbottom on undeveloped and under-developed sites.

Brickbottom has seen a significant wave of recent changes that add development pressure to the area:

- MBTA Green Line Extension (expected to be fully operational in late summer 2022)
- Extension of the Somerville Community Path
- Construction of the Poplar Street Pump Station and the opening of ArtFarm

We must define a shared vision for the neighborhood before development accelerates throughout Brickbottom on undeveloped and under-developed sites. Establishing this vision includes determining the type of neighborhood we want to create, the sense of place we wish to evoke, and the physical and social infrastructure required to support it. There are opportunities for City guidance and community feedback in each development process, but we cannot achieve the best outcomes without a big picture vision that considers the entire ecosystem of private sites and public infrastructure throughout the neighborhood.





## **2. PLAN FOUNDATIONS**

# 2.1 SOMERVISION - THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The new SomerVision2040 Comprehensive Plan provides valuable guidance by recommitting us to long-held community values of diversity, inclusion, growth, accessibility, sustainability, and innovation. It also places greater emphasis on equity and inclusion than its predecessor.

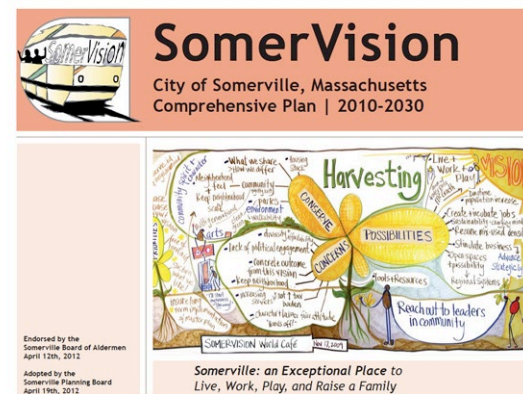
In 2019 the community engaged in a renewed comprehensive planning process building on the success of SomerVision2030. The goal was to update the comprehensive plan by assessing the City's progress, adding new ideas, reconsidering priorities, and extending the scope to 2040. The SomerVision Committee, composed of a diverse group of sixty community members, led the process alongside a broader community engagement effort that included the participation of over two thousand residents.

Brickbottom is defined as a transformation area in SomerVision2040, making it one of the key areas in the city for achieving SomerVision goals. Transformational areas are mostly former industrial or manufacturing sites located on the eastern and southern edges of Somerville. They include Assembly Square, Inner Belt, Brickbottom, Boynton Yards, and the southeastern portion of Union Square. Assembly Square is further along with its redevelopment, while the other areas have many underutilized or vacant lots, offering incredible opportunities to create new open spaces, homes, and commercial sites. Our comprehensive plan calls for these transformational areas to become regional employment centers that offer a wide range of high-quality jobs. They can also help us achieve critical housing goals by increasing our high-density housing stock near mass transit, which allows us to address our housing shortage without worsening car traffic.

By creating thoughtfully designed, pedestrian-focused development, we can turn these former industrial sites into dynamic, mixed-use, and transit-oriented districts that serve as economic engines to complement existing residential neighborhoods.



Covers of SomerVision 2040 and SomerVision 2030



## Somerville's Shared Values

- 1 Protect and foster the **DIVERSITY** of our people, culture, housing and economy.
- 2 Celebrate the unique character of our neighborhoods and the strength of our **COMMUNITY** as expressed in our history, cultures and vibrant civic engagement.
- 3 Invest in the **GROWTH** of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency.
- 4 Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is **ACCESSIBLE**, inviting and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders.
- 5 Build a **SUSTAINABLE** future through climate leadership, balanced transportation, engaging civic spaces, exceptional educational opportunities, improved health, varied and affordable housing options, and the responsible use of our natural resources.
- 6 Affirm our responsibility to current and future generations through continued **INNOVATION** in business, technology, education, arts and government.

SomerVision2040 Community Values

You can learn more about SomerVision2040 at [www.somervision2040.com](http://www.somervision2040.com).

# 2.2 SOMERVILLE CLIMATE FORWARD PLAN

Somerville Climate Forward is our climate change plan mitigation and prevention plan. It provides a set of implementable actions that will reduce Somerville’s contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and prepare us for the unavoidable impacts of climate change. This plan identifies opportunities for near-term action across different sectors, including buildings, mobility, natural environment, community, and leadership.

Some of the Somerville Climate Forward Plan’s overarching goals are particularly relevant for the Brickbottom Small Area Plan vision:

- **Increase the number of buildings with local net-zero or net-zero carbon emissions:** One of the key tools in implementing the Climate Forward Plan is the updated Zoning Ordinance, adopted in 2019. It requires all projects over 25,000 square feet to be LEED Gold certifiable and all projects over 50,000 square feet to be LEED Platinum certifiable. It also provides various incentives for meeting even higher sustainability standards. Brickbottom offers the opportunity to create multiple large mixed-use and commercial buildings that would meet the threshold for those requirements.
- **Increase the number of climate change resilience features in buildings and the streetscape:** The new Green Score in the Zoning ordinance has also increased the requirements for resiliency, trees, and vegetation in new development and will apply to all redevelopment in Brickbottom.
- **Expand the urban tree canopy:** Brickbottom has a particularly low tree count per square foot compared to the rest of city but also presents an opportunity to significantly increase the size of the city’s overall tree canopy.
- **Expand access to bicycle and mass transit infrastructure to lower emissions from vehicles:** Our proposals to improve walkability and bike safety in Brickbottom while increasing housing and job density near the Washington Street train station will allow us to accommodate new residents and workers while lowering our per capita emissions.

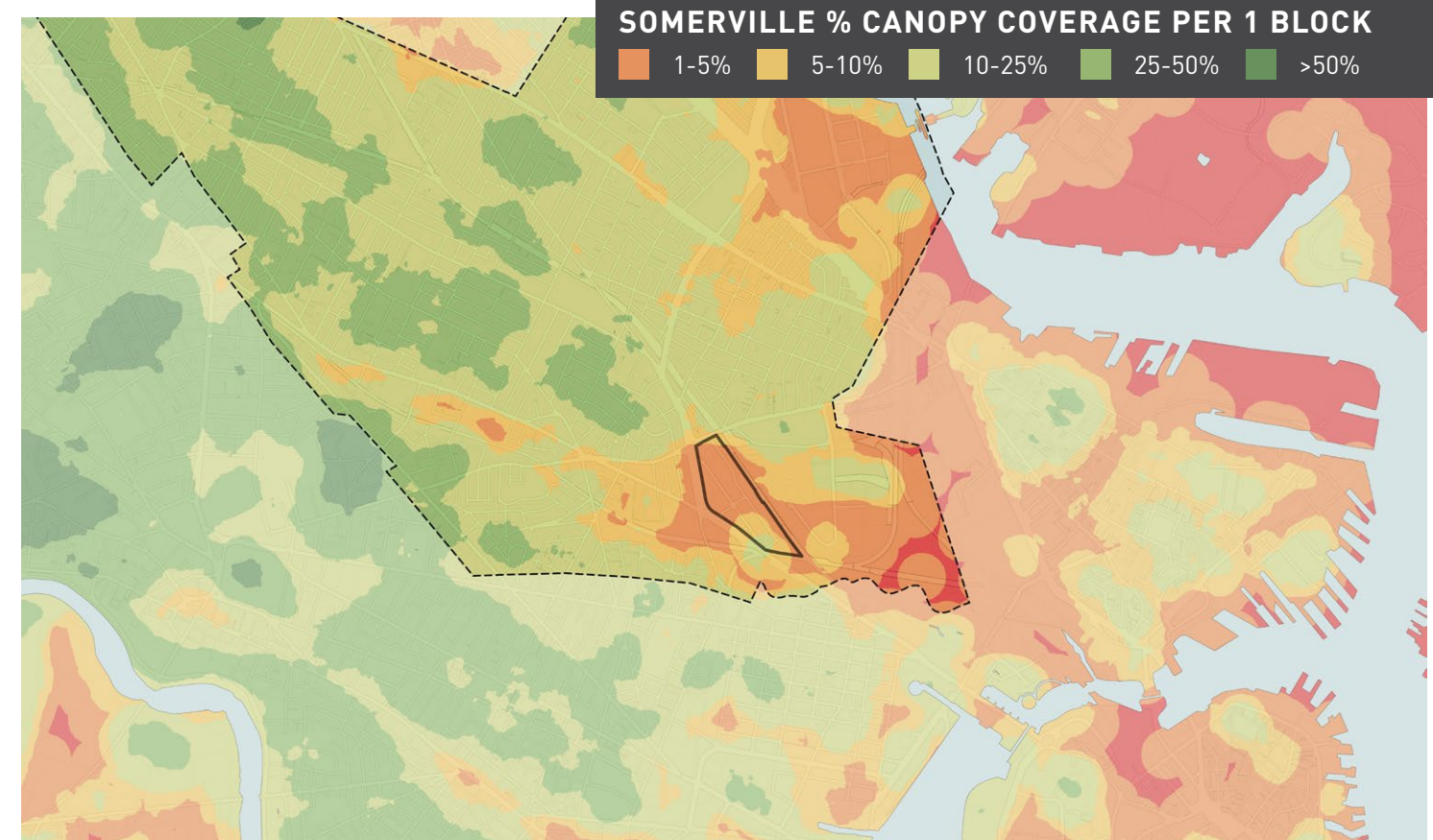
Beyond what we can achieve through regulation, we should pursue every opportunity to negotiate even higher climate mitigation and resilience features throughout the neighborhood as it transforms.

You can learn more about the Climate Forward Plan at [www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/somerville-climate-forward](http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/somerville-climate-forward)

BRICKBOTTOM FLASH FLOODING RISK



SOMERVILLE % CANOPY COVERAGE PER 1 BLOCK



## 2.3 PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

Somerville has long recognized Brickbottom's potential and engaged in multiple planning initiatives to envision its future. Residents shared their time and energy contributing to those initiatives, so we wanted to use them as much as possible in this process. Our team studied them and used them as source material, seeking to build upon and refine their findings and recommendations. Below is an overview of each of those efforts.



### **Inner Belt & Brickbottom Plan 2013, Goody Clancy**

The Inner Belt & Brickbottom planning process (2010-2012) was the City's first attempt at transformational area planning, working with the Good Clancy planning firm. It addressed Brickbottom's longstanding needs: improving connectivity with Innerbelt and across McGrath Highway, block subdivision, connection to the Community Path, and more civic and open spaces. The community process was ongoing at the same time as SomerVision2030, and due to timing, the process did not incorporate many SomerVision goals, policies, and actions and was not adopted. We updated and integrated many tasks and solutions presented in that document into this plan when relevant.



### **Making Brickbottom: 2015 Exploratory Neighborhood Plan, MIT**

In 2014, a team of graduate students from MIT worked with city staff in developing a plan to inform potential development within the Brickbottom area. Prompted by proposals for a de-elevated McGrath Highway and the MBTA Green Line Extension, the goal was to work with the community to envision the area's future after those changes. Through public workshops, academic research, and concept development, the MIT team offered an ambitious vision. While the document proposed significant residential and commercial development for the area, it gave special attention to creating new civic spaces. It recognized the opportunity represented by the gateway at Joy Street and a connection between Poplar Street and the Community Path. We drew from many of those design ideas in this plan.



### **Union Square Neighborhood Plan**

Adopted for the adjacent area of Union Square, it included several aspects relevant to Brickbottom.

#### **Milk Square**

The Union Square Neighborhood Plan called for constructing a public square at the intersection of Somerville Avenue and the to-be-grounded McGrath Highway, dubbed Milk Square, to serve as a pivotal connection between Union Square and Brickbottom. It also called for Poplar Street and Medford Street to be realigned to the envisioned Milk Square design.

#### **Boynton Yards**

The Union Square Neighborhood Plan provided a framework for the redevelopment of the Boynton Yards area; that vision, along with subsequent proposals and initiatives, was considered as part of the larger picture of this plan and neighborhood connectivity.

## 2.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

We wanted to build common ground by sharing our findings while also valuing the lived experience of area residents and workers, and their unique insights about the neighborhood. We also wanted to hear a lot of ideas beyond our own, no matter how ambitious, to not limit ourselves by what we perceived as feasible.

We began the Small Area Plan process by sharing our analysis of current conditions in the neighborhood, including our study of surface transportation and underground infrastructure, and existing and proposed land uses. We then asked open-ended questions of community members to understand what they viewed as the biggest challenges in the neighborhood and what opportunities they would like to see us prioritize.

We met with landowners, elected officials, non-profit groups, local business owners, workers, and residents. We worked with the neighborhood through a series of online workshops to build a vision around common ground between a wide range of views among stakeholders and overall City goals.

As our shared vision began to take shape, we produced illustrative drawings and descriptions to help everyone with visualizing possible outcomes. We shared those drawing with the community and sought their feedback, used to go back to the drawing board, then back to the community. We did as many iterations of this process as we believed beneficial to arrive at a vision most stakeholders could support.

We prioritized community engagement and input as much as possible through this process. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, made that much more challenging than usual, requiring significant adjustments to our standard methods. Vaccines were not yet available at the start of the project, and their potential impact was unknown, while quarantines and travel restrictions were still active in many places across the country and worldwide. Our alternative strategies included:

- Carrying out neighborhood meetings via video conferencing
- Offering multiple detailed surveys online with illustrations and visuals for reference
- Setting up office hours to answer phone calls
- Sending out worksheets for community members to print and draw on themselves and send back to us
- A masked outdoor walk of the neighborhood

Despite the pandemic challenges, we believe our efforts to reach out to a diverse range of area stakeholders were successful, and the community provided clear direction and meaningful feedback.

## Timeline of key engagements

### Existing Conditions and Big Ideas (October-January 2020)

#### Winter Worksheet (December 2020-January 2021)

As the team was limited to remote interaction, the first feedback opportunity was a worksheet to gather big ideas and initial reactions from residents, businesses, and property owners about the future potential of Brickbottom.

### Visioning and Ideation (March-November 2021)

#### Visioning Workshop (April 7, 2021)

After feedback from the winter worksheet was gathered and reviewed, we held a virtual public workshop to share the team's findings and engage the community further. The focus was on the big ideas expressed by the community, its values and priorities for the future, what activities and uses they envisioned for their neighborhood, and where those activities could happen.

#### Design Ideas Workshop (October 27, 2021)

We held a second virtual public workshop to engage the community with different design ideas our team illustrated based on the previous community feedback. Proposals included options for open spaces, zoning and development patterns, arts and culture, mobility and transportation, and short-term tactical interventions.

#### Office Hours and Exit Survey (November 2021)

As a follow-up, the team held office hours and shared an exit survey for the community to share additional thoughts regarding the different ideas shared during the Design Workshop.

### Plan Drafting (November 2021-May 2022)

#### Plan Draft Publication and Community Comments Period (January 2022)

We shared an initial draft of the Small Area Plan with the public and provided a month-long public comment period and encouraged everyone to provide us with feedback.

#### Final Plan Open House (June 11, 2022)





## HR+A Market Study

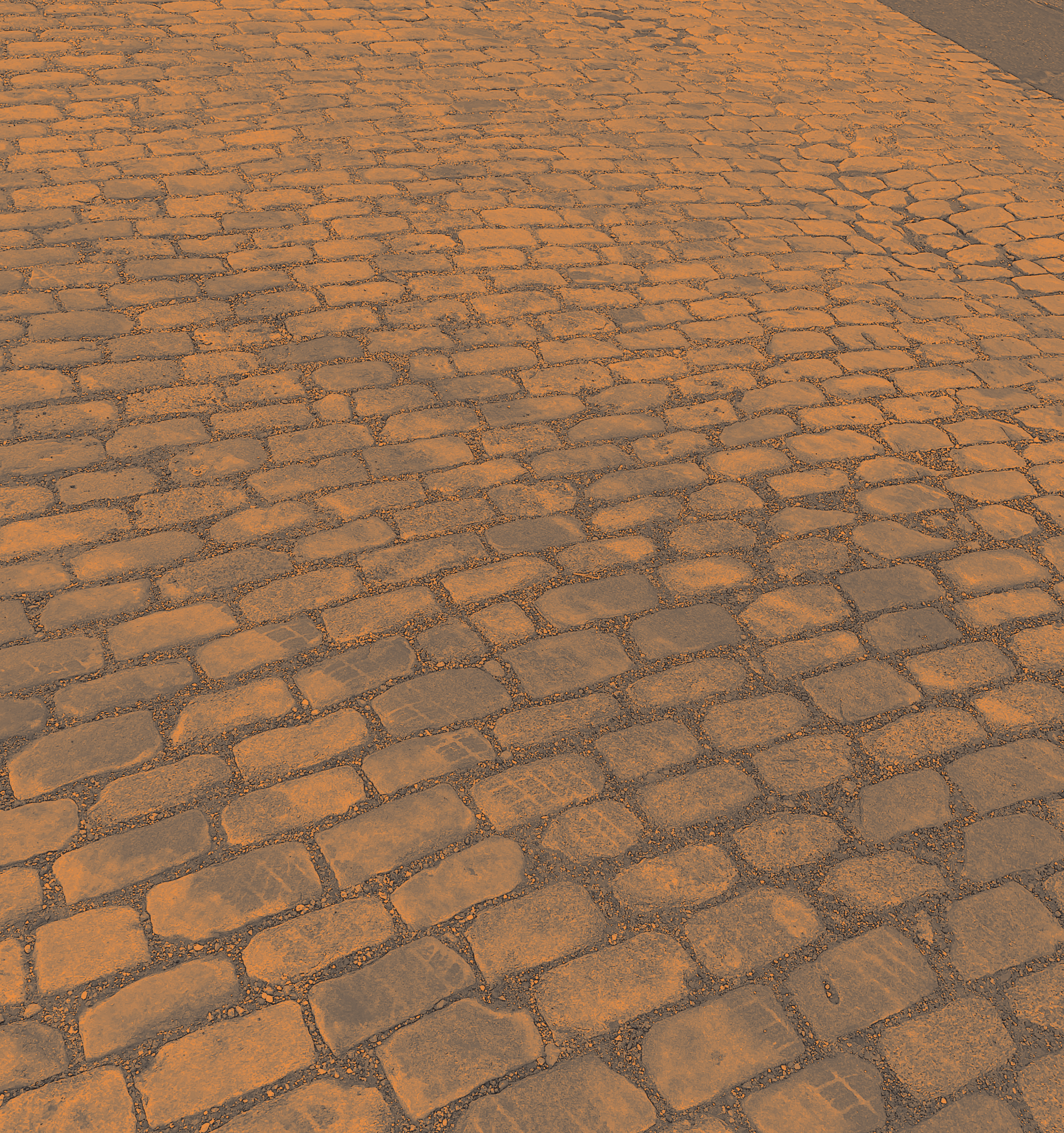
In 2020, the City commissioned HR&A advisors for a Market Analysis to better understand the future development potential and market environment in Brickbottom and its surrounding areas. The first significant finding in the HR&A report is a strong, recent residential growth expected to continue driving demand. Somerville has a large population between 18 and 34 years of age, a demographic expected to seek home-ownership opportunities in the near term. In addition, a large and growing population between 65 and 74 years of age may seek out different housing types that provide elderly support. Despite significant development, housing demand has grown faster than the supply, driving vacancy rates to only 4% in 2019. HR&A expects market demand in Brickbottom would support building about 400 to 625 housing units. The area's desirability for more residential development will be significantly higher when McGrath Boulevard is grounded and the City makes other local improvements. Compared to other Massachusetts communities or the country overall, a larger proportion of Somerville's population is in a professional field, including technical services, life sciences, or the scientific and education fields, which also impacts the type of housing demand.

The local employment information also fits the broader trend around a growing demand for lab space. Significant lab development is currently underway in many areas around Boston, with low vacancy rates and rising rents, but a sizable market seems likely to remain medium-term. The study found that demand in Brickbottom is for between 525,000-700,000 square feet of life-sciences and light industrial

development, corresponding to about 2,100-2,800 jobs. HR&A saw strong spending potential within the local walkshed in and around Brickbottom, especially given the potential for future development. The study found strong spending potential within the local walkshed in and around Brickbottom, especially given the potential for future high-density housing development. While there is limited regional retail demand, residents and employees will provide demand for retail goods and services, restaurants, and amenities.

This Plan stipulates that creating an art district offering many ways to enjoy music, art, and performances would make Brickbottom a regional destination, generating pedestrian activity that would also drive up the local demand for retail and dining. We have also found that the current trend of light industrial uses moving out of Boston's core metro area has left a shortage of available spaces in that category. Brickbottom offers an opportunity to provide compact space for uses like art and music studios, test kitchens, fabrication spaces, and artisanal manufacturing woven into mixed-use neighborhood urban fabric.





### **3. NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT**

# 3.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRICKBOTTOM

The Brickbottom area was largely rural through the Revolutionary War. Most of it was part of the Barrel estate, with the main house located atop Cobble Hill in the area we now call Inner Belt. In the early 19th-century, the Barrel mansion was converted into a mental asylum while most surrounding lands were sold to the railroads. Consequently, most early developments were industrial and catered to the railroads.

By the second half of the 19th century, the neighborhood began transforming into a more residential area to accommodate workers. The area's numerous slaughterhouses and industrial uses were dumping waste into the nearby Millers River to the point the stench of the waterways was unbearable to nearby residents, leading to the landfill of the river.

The asylum was relocated by the turn of the 20th century, leading to significant additions of commercial and industrial uses. The resident population continued to grow with an influx of mainly Irish, Italian, and Greek immigrants, drawn by cheap housing and proximity to jobs. The community built two new schools in the neighborhood for the growing populace. Brickbottom, in the early 20th century, was a mixed-use neighborhood with local industry and residences, shops, schools, and community gathering places. In 1923, A&P Food Distributors built their warehouses, which remain as the Brickbottom Artists' Lofts.

Brickbottom's neighborhood fabric changed in the 1930s when the McGrath Highway displaced a significant portion of the residences, marking a transition to a more predominantly commercial and industrial area. By the mid-20th century, neither of the schools remained in Brickbottom, and among the now vacant lots and exclusively commercial uses was a municipal incinerator. Industrial, auto-oriented uses, garages, and other commercial activities remained the primary users of the area through the turn of the 21st century. However, the conversion of the Brickbottom Artists Building to condominiums may have heralded the development of a new chapter for the neighborhood by adding residential uses back to the area and forming a vibrant art community.



*Old neighborhood character in Brickbottom. Triple-deckers with commercial ground floors. Poplar Street and Somerville Avenue circa 1925*

# 3.2 BRICKBOTTOM TODAY

Brickbottom is primarily an auto-oriented industrial environment, which is at odds with current residents' needs and SomerVision goals. Given its location and current conditions, this neighborhood is brimming with potential and could become an incredible place to walk, bike, live, work and visit. We can guide the area's development and transform it into a mixed-use and arts-oriented neighborhood with meaningful civic spaces, while still retaining industrial uses and character.

Brickbottom currently lacks several urban components needed to have a healthy, vibrant, and active neighborhood. There is no place to purchase food, no medical or community services, no public spaces, and a very limited housing supply. Current and future residents, and the employees of all businesses in the area, would greatly benefit from the addition of critical services such as banks, health providers, food and grocery, and retail.

We also want to take what the neighborhood presently has in art education, creative communities, fabricators, and trade workers as a foundation to build a vibrant local economy centered around the arts, creative uses, and light manufacturing. A focus on this pattern of economic development would differentiate the neighborhood and contribute to Somerville having a diverse business and job environment.

## Demographic snapshot

(For census tract 3515, Middlesex County, MA within which the Brickbottom neighborhood falls)

**Median age: 37.1 years**

**74% Rent**

**Median annual income: \$46,506**

### Mobility

Median travel time to work: 27 min.

17% no-vehicle homes

50% one-vehicle homes

### Race and Ethnicity

72% White

12% Black

9% Asian

10% Hispanic of any race

55% Female

35% speak language other than English at home

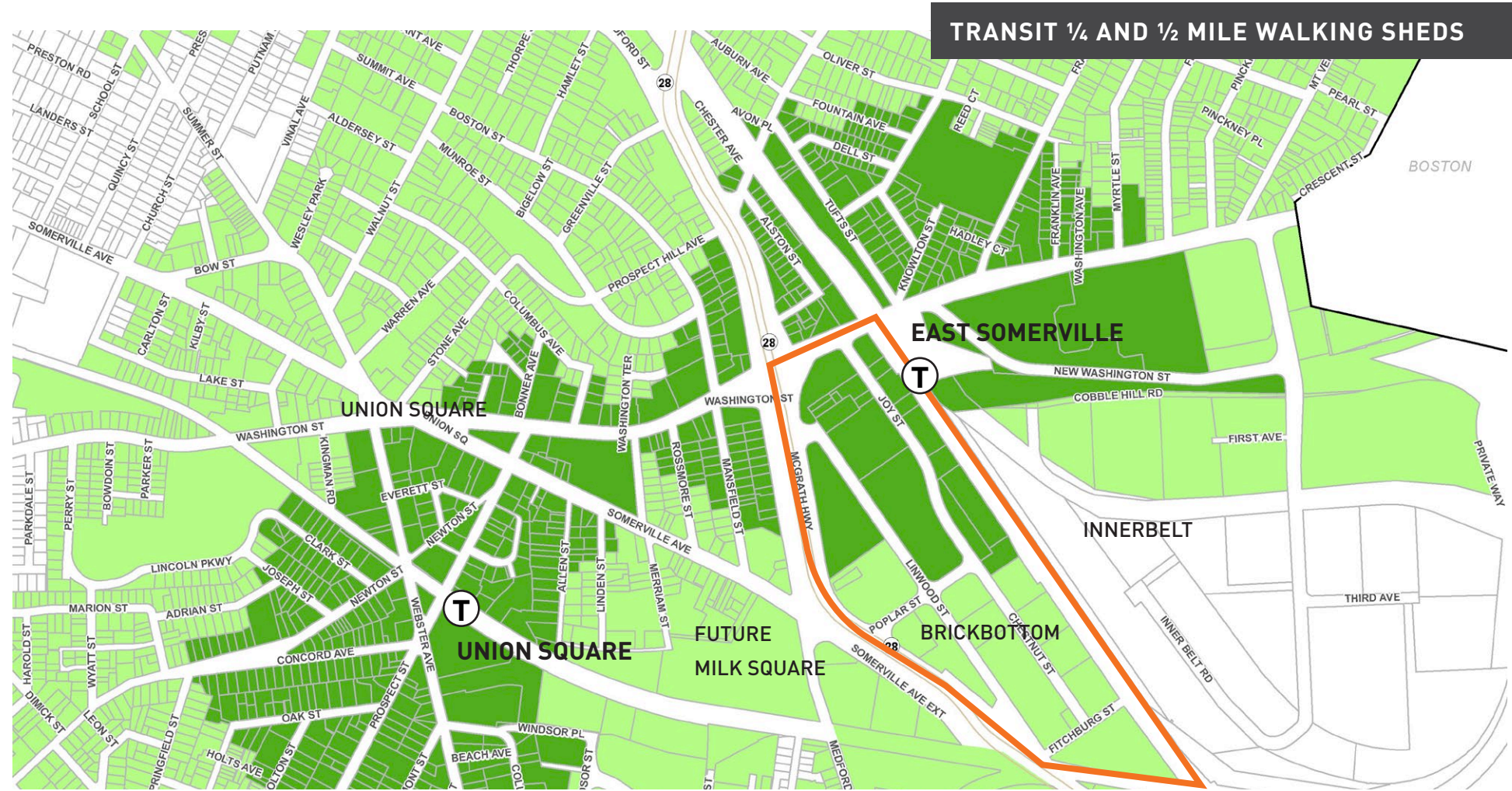
*Neon Williams, local neon art work, located at the end of Poplar Street and the intersection with Joy/Chestnut streets.*



# 3.3 THE FUTURE OF BRICKBOTTOM

Brickbottom's connection to the larger Boston metropolitan area will improve significantly through mass transit and cycling infrastructure with the planned opening of the new MBTA Green Line station in 2022 and the extension of the Somerville Community Path. These new connections and amenities will unlock significant development potential in Brickbottom and the surrounding area.

The entirety of Brickbottom and much of the surrounding areas will be within 1/2 mile of MBTA's Green Line service at Washington Street, enabling new residential development in the neighborhood to link housing and jobs without increasing motor vehicle trips. The neighborhood section north of Poplar Street will be within 1/4 mile or less of the new Green Line station, making it ideal for high-density mixed-use as users are more likely to use transit within a 1/2 mile walk from their home or within a 1/4 mile walk to their workplace. The Washington Street station connection across the tracks to Innerbelt will also provide workers there with mass transit access. This Plan calls for creating multiple routes to the station so that transit riders have the most accessible path to the station from as many parts of Brickbottom and Innerbelt as possible.



View of the new East Somerville Green Line station and the Community Path extension under construction in 2021.

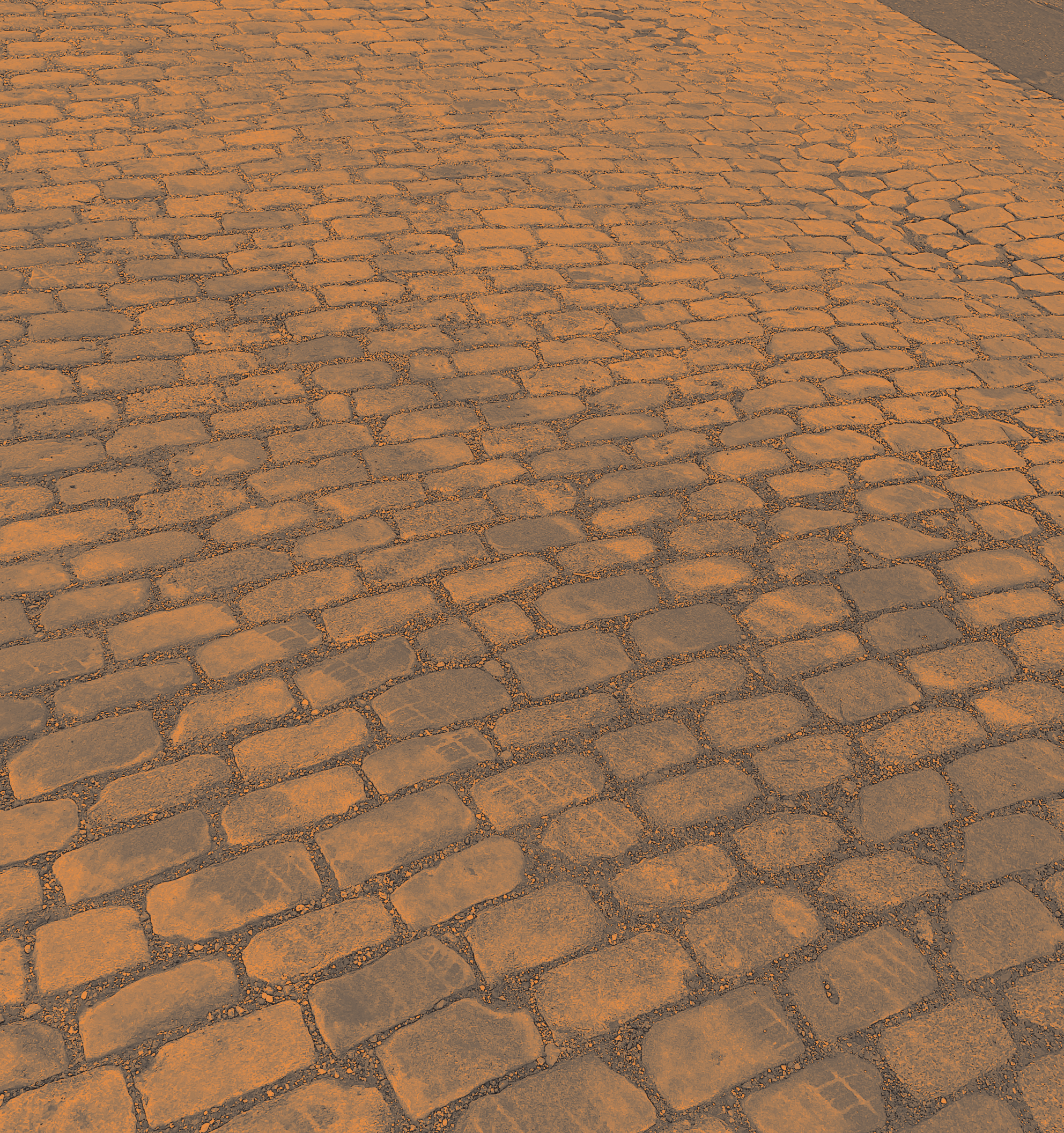




*Rendering of the 100 Chestnut Street, Brickbottom's recently approved life science and Research & Development building already under construction.*

The demand for life science and biotech space is already applying significant development pressure to Somerville, especially the southern section of the city, due to its proximity to lab hubs in Cambridge.

The development of 100 Chestnut Street under the current zoning has already begun, bringing many good future jobs to Brickbottom. While new investment is welcome, ensuring all projects are well integrated into the neighborhood is essential. The development of 100 Chestnut is the beginning of positive changes in the public realm to produce greener, safer, and walkable streets. 100 Chestnut also brought many challenges like establishing loading and delivery locations for higher-density buildings that we will have to address in future development. The modern style of the 100 Chestnut lab building also highlighted the urgency of considering the architectural character and the types of businesses the community wants to see in the area. Throughout this plan, we considered both the positive aspects of this project and what aspects of it the community does not want to see replicated in future development in the neighborhood.



## **4. EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS**

# 4.1 MITIGATING WORKER DISPLACEMENT

One of the challenges for transformational commercial districts like Brickbottom is the effects on longstanding stakeholders, including the artists and residents at the Brickbottom Lofts, people working at Joy Street Studios, and the industrial businesses that have been operating in the neighborhood over the last decades.

Our Economic Development Division has worked with businesses across Somerville as they face transition periods. We plan to bring that knowledge to Brickbottom to assist existing businesses and their employees cope with the transformation of the area into a dense, mixed-use neighborhood.

As the neighborhood land uses and building types diversify, there may be fewer opportunities for today's industrial operations. We support that Brickbottom maintain a significant presence of industrial uses and aim to enable it through regulations that make it feasible. We see it as an ideal area to experiment with mixed-use industrial buildings. There is an opportunity for a niche auto-detailing business on the ground floor of an office or biotech building or an electrician operating from a storefront office with their trucks stored in the garage of a residential building. These industrial mixed-use building models should be researched and supported to create opportunities for businesses from Brickbottom to relocate or return after redevelopment. We view this effort as critical in retaining the industrial history of Brickbottom and ensuring good quality trade jobs are still available in the area.

In situations where, for one reason or another, a business decides its future is not within the transformed Brickbottom, we will assist them. In addition to the business transition services provided by MassHire BizWorks, the City currently supports businesses with site searches throughout Somerville, helping them find and connect with property owners who have available spaces or who are developing new buildings.

As an example, Tulip, a startup company that develops software for manufacturers, outgrew their space in Boynton Yards. We introduced them to a property owner in Assembly Square with available space that met their growth needs. The company opened its new headquarters in April of 2022 in the old K-Mart space in Assembly Square—keeping this Somerville-born company in Somerville. A business relocation within the city is a win for everyone. Somerville retains a longstanding



operator, the business transition is more manageable, and the employees and customers are less impacted.

Sometimes industrial operators can't find a suitable location that meets their needs within Somerville at a price required for their operations. In these cases, we shift our focus to the company's local employees, who may not be able to follow their employer to a new location. The Job Creation and Retention Trust (JCRT), funded by linkage fees on new commercial development, is used to support Somerville residents facing those scenarios. The JCRT funds opportunities like the Asian American Civic Association's Building Energy Efficient Maintenance Skills (BEEMS) and Green Automotive Skills (GAMS) job training programs. The drawback is that these programs are currently limited to Somerville residents, while often, residents from neighboring communities are also affected if a Somerville business moves away or closes.

*Aerial view of Brickbottom, with Joy Street Studios in the foreground and the Brickbottom Lofts building in the background.*

## 4.2 SUPPORTING DIVERSE NEW BUSINESSES

Our shared vision for Brickbottom is to see it become a complete neighborhood and an Arts District. For this effort to succeed, we will need to support the art and creative business differently than we do industrial ones.

As the arts district grows and evolves, there will be changes to the studio space offerings that we hope will make Brickbottom a more attractive location for artists to produce, exhibit, and sell their work. Assisting current art and creative businesses with their growth will help preserve the continuity of the district's spirit as Brickbottom evolves. The City's Economic Development Division and the Somerville Arts Council have long collaborated and are currently working closely on repositioning the Armory as an Arts Center. They are also working on the Art Barn project, a future performance and community space that will be located in Brickbottom's Artfarm.

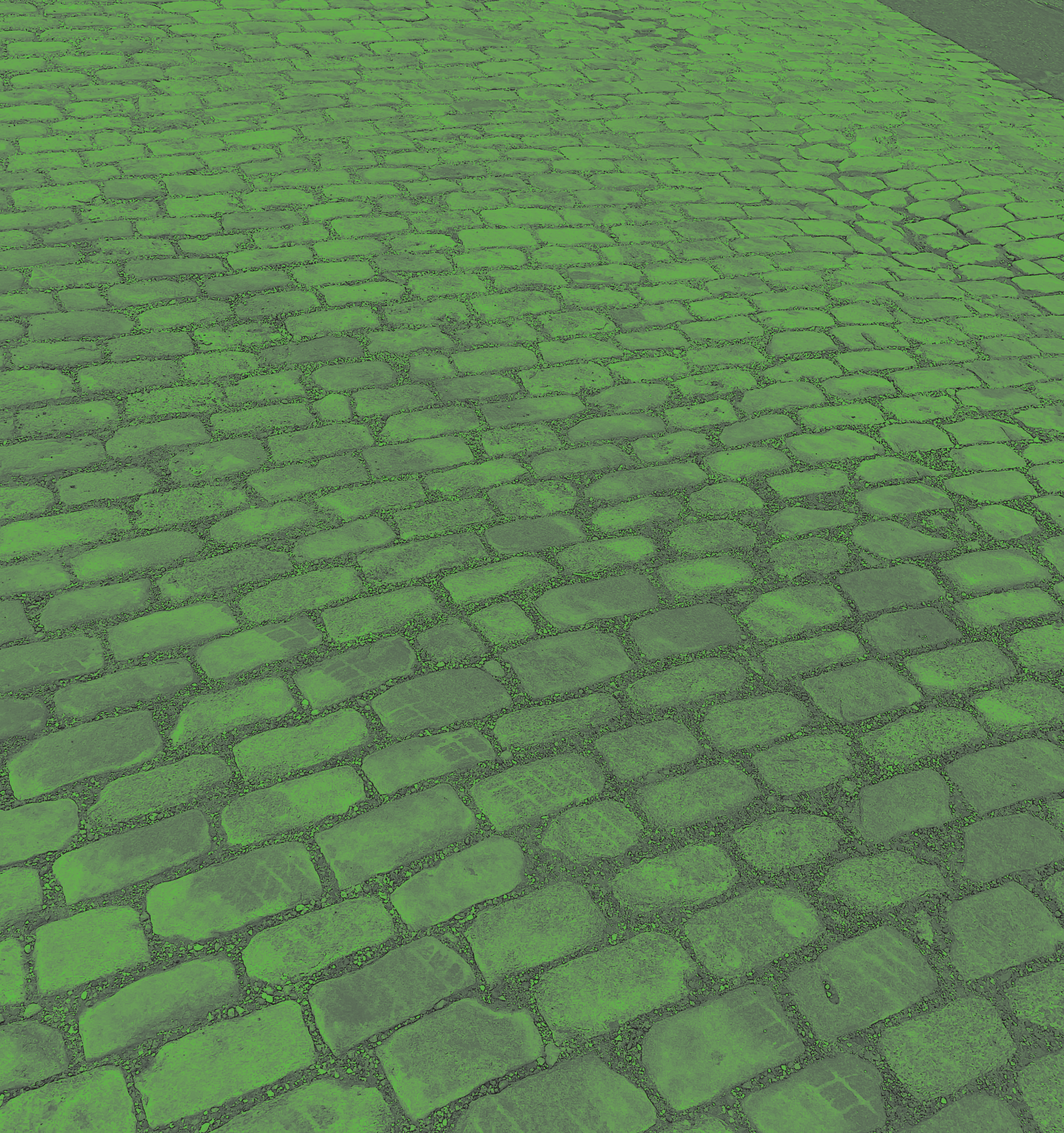
To provide similar support to the Brickbottom Art District as it develops, further collaboration and additional staff, resources, and outside collaborators will be essential. Examples are the two Main Street organizations in Union Square and East Somerville, which provide coordination, marketing, and support to businesses in those areas. Brickbottom will likely need a comparable art district organization. As part of the implementation of this Plan, we will explore other arts district management models to determine the best strategy to ensure the Brickbottom arts district can grow into a regional destination.

## 4.3 INCREASING THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK

The City of Somerville Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance was established in 1990 and has grown over the past three decades, adapting to evolving community and housing needs. The current requirements outlined in the Development Benefits chapter of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance are the highest standard we have adopted to date. The specifics vary depending on building type and district. The general requirement is that any new buildings with four or more residential units include 20% affordable housing units or, in some cases, for developers to contribute the proportionate value to the city's affordable housing fund. Property owners substantially subsidize those units based on area medium income calculation guidelines. Through substantive new high-density housing development in areas that previously offered minimal housing, like Brickbottom, we have an opportunity to generate dozens of subsidized units through inclusionary zoning. These units could help families displaced from other areas in the city due to increasing housing costs and allow them to stay in Somerville.

Inclusionary zoning is not a silver bullet to our regional displacement and housing affordability crisis. It is, however, a powerful tool in leveraging private development value, rather than limited public funds, to produce affordable units. Transformational areas like Brickbottom offer a unique opportunity to produce multiple high-density housing projects near mass transit access and trigger inclusionary zoning requirements on a large scale.





## **5. VISION FOR BRICKBOTTOM**

# 5.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

## Challenges

### Rail Barrier

There are multiple engineering and safety concerns when crossing the train rail. We make some suggestions in this plan but know the matter will take further study and coordination with the MBTA and developments across the tracks in Inner Belt.

### Long Blocks

The current block lengths make it difficult to produce a walkable or mixed-used neighborhood. We will need to modify these blocks with new street connections to realize our vision for the area.

### Lack Of Green Space

The complete absence of green space outside of Artfarm means that providing enough green space to produce the neighborhood outcomes the community is looking for will be a major challenge in terms of land acquisition. We know this effort will require a lot of negotiation and creative thinking during implementation.

### McGrath Highway

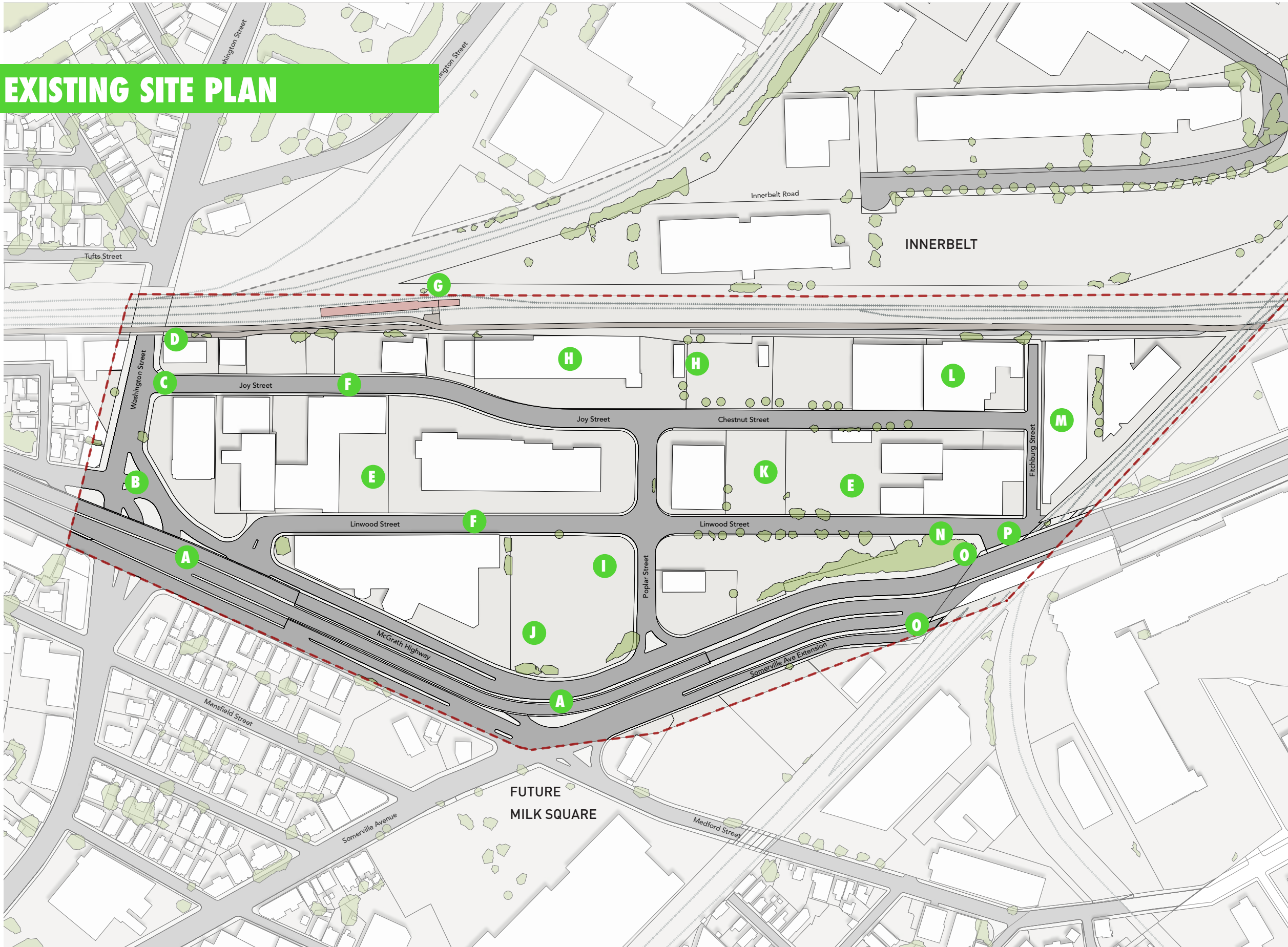
Until the state initiative of converting McGrath Highway into a Boulevard moves forward, it presents a major challenge to improving the safety and walkability of entering and exiting Brickbottom.

### Lack Of Public Amenities

The lack of a school, dog park, community center, and other public services and amenities in the area presents a challenge when expanding the residential population. We can eventually offer some of these services in the neighborhood. Others, like schools, will be offered in nearby areas, but we must ensure those areas are easily accessible from Brickbottom including by bike or walking.

*IN PRODUCTION*

# EXISTING SITE PLAN



## LEGEND

- A. Elevated McGrath Highway is a barrier between Brickbottom and The rest of Somerville.
- B. Very complex intersection at McGrath & Washington Street.
- C. Unfriendly intersection, especially for pedestrians and cyclists, at Joy and Washington Street.
- D. The only access to the Green Line and Community Path is hidden and remote from the actual station.
- E. Brickbottom has overly long blocks.
- F. All streets in Brickbottom have most of their space dedicated to cars, with narrow and deficient sidewalks.
- G. Innerbelt has no connection to Brickbottom or the new GLX station
- H. Thriving Arts Community (Joy Street Artist Studios & Neon Williams)
- I. ArtFarm is the only planned new open green space in Brickbottom.
- J. New Pump Station to be located in the northwest corner of ArtFarm.
- K. Most of the unbuild land in Brickbottom is impervious.
- L. 100 Chestnut St project.
- M. Thriving Arts Community (Brickbottom Artists Lofts)
- N. Only existing green space.
- O. Stairs going up the Squire Bridge sidewalks to cross the MBTA tracks
- P. Somerville Ave Extension ("Scary Way") brings in vehicular traffic.

## Opportunities

### MBTA GLX Service

As we have highlighted throughout the document, the GLX Service is an essential part of our strategy to increase density while minimizing a proportionate increase in traffic.

### McGrath Boulevard

Once McGrath Highway becomes a Boulevard there will be tremendous connectivity potential between Brickbottom and the Milk Square and Boynton Yards areas. It will also unlock the potential for better pedestrian-oriented storefronts along the full length of Brickbottom's west edge.

### Local Arts + Creativity

The current presence of a vibrant artist community in Joy Street Studios and Brickbottom Lofts is an invaluable resource that can serve as the foundation from which we can build an art district in this neighborhood.

### Connections with Inner Belt

Once we can establish connections across the rail, the transformational development in Inner Belt will provide a great opportunity to connect and build synergy between the two areas.

### Community Path

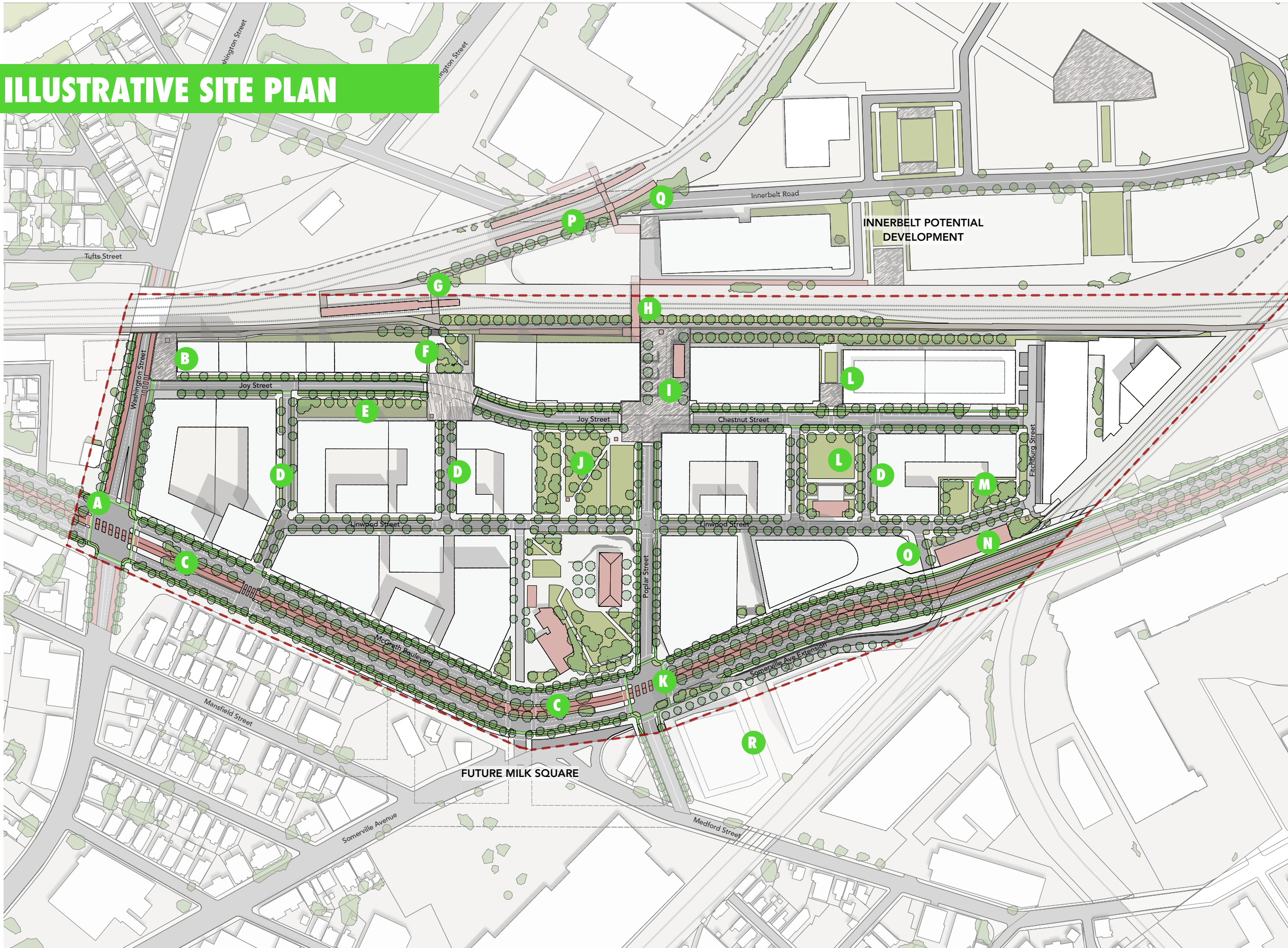
The extended community path offers a unique opportunity for accessing and exiting Brickbottom by walking or biking without concerns for vehicle traffic. This connection will also provide a valued amenity for residents looking to exercise outdoors.

### New Street Connections

New street connections create great opportunities to produce walkable, bikeable, and green street designs from the ground up.

*IN PRODUCTION*

# ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN



## LEGEND

- A. Improved intersection at McGrath and Wasghinton Street, considering potential Rapid Bus service.
- B. Plaza at Joy Street to serve as gateway for the neighborhood, MBTA station and Community Path.
- C. Multi-modal McGrath Boulevard with space for Rapid Bus service, new tree canopy, and bike lanes.
- D. New transversal streets to break down block sizes.
- E. New Neighborhood Park at Joy Street.
- F. Park and access to the MBTA station and Community Path.
- G. Potential at-grade MBTA station access and crossing to Innerbelt.
- H. Potential over the tracks connection to Innerbelt.
- I. Plaza and access to the Community Path and MBTA service road.
- J. New Park next to ArtFarm to provide additional forested and recreational areas, and arts programming.
- K. New Poplar Street intersection to align with the future Milk Square.
- L. New Park with arts programming and Pocket Park at Chestnut Street.
- M. Green space with passive green and playground at Fichburg/Linwood St.
- N. Galleria, Public Stair and Elevator to access the Squires Brigde sidewalk.
- O. Redesigned Somerville Ave Extension and Linwood Street.
- P. Potential Commuter Rail Station.
- Q. Possible street Innerbelt Rd underpass.
- R. Union East Potential Development

# POTENTIAL MASSING

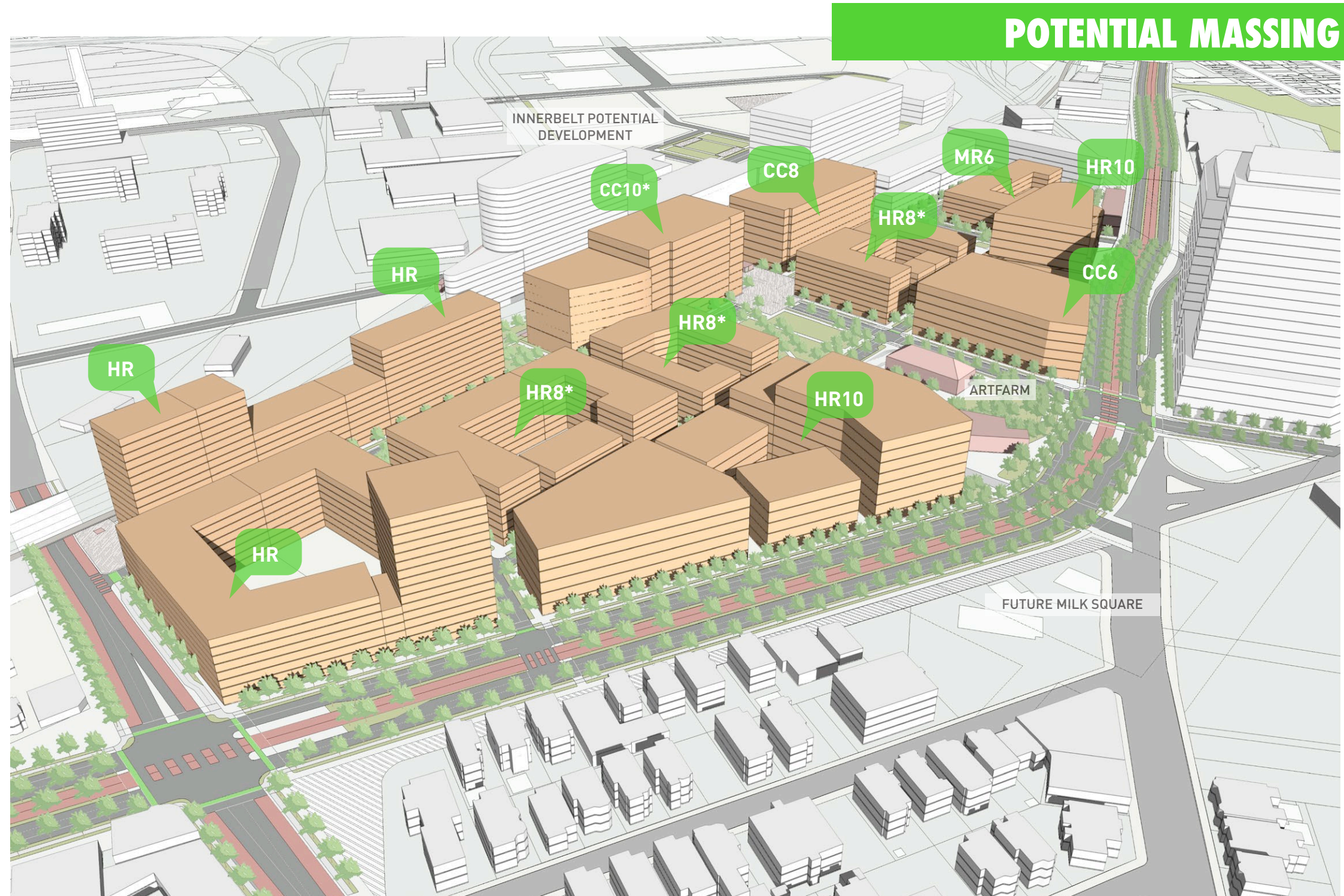


# 5.3 ANTICIPATED ZONING CHANGES

To unlock the redevelopment potential of Brickbottom, we will need a new zoning map for the area during the implementation phase. We anticipate the area to be zoned primarily for mid-rise buildings, with height and density increasing closer to the MBTA GLX Station and Washington Street.

Some of the potential development parcels along the train tracks are well-suited for residential development. The parcels closer to McGrath Highway can provide larger building footprints that commercial uses require. As the primary connection to the train station, we will coordinate the design of Chestnut and Joy Street to prioritize pedestrians, with wide sidewalks and planting areas to provide shade and connect the civic spaces throughout the neighborhood.

There are several paths to change the zoning once this document is adopted, but they all involve separate public processes through the City Council. The Civic Space types should reflect the context of the City's Open Space & Recreation Plan. We may also need to create new building types to accommodate some of the constraints along the train tracks. The most likely solution will be an overlay district, similar to the Disposition Parcels in Union Square, where landowners may opt-in to higher density by agreeing to follow more stringent regulations than the underlying zoning allows or requires.

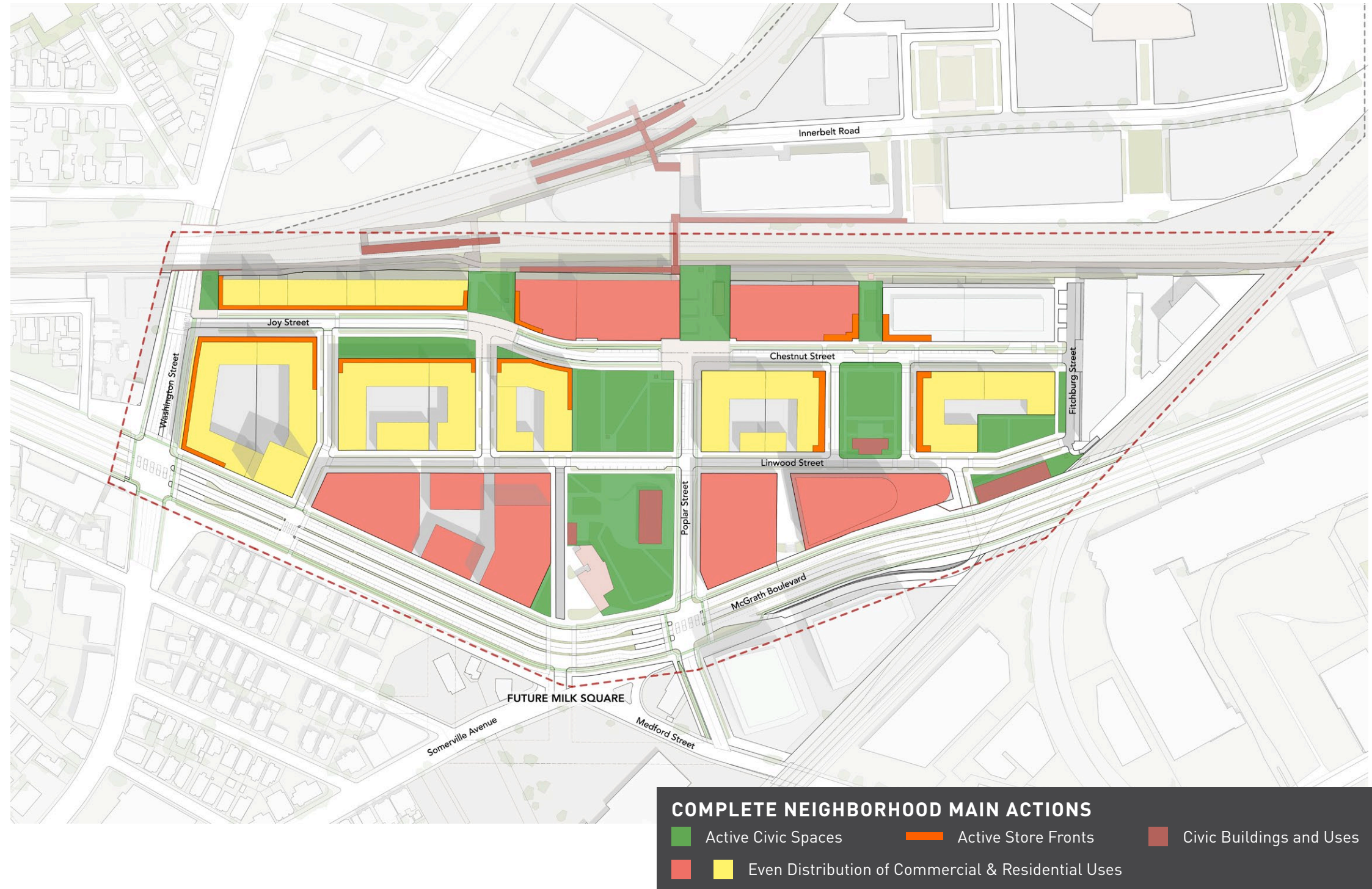


# 5.4 COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Based on community feedback, conversations with stakeholders, the city-wide documents and older planning as previously outlined we established the following broad goals for Brickbottom that inform our vision and recommendations detailed in the following two chapters.

## Create a Complete Neighborhood

This term describes a neighborhood where residents have safe and convenient access to the goods and services needed in everyday life. These services include varied housing options, multiple types of nearby retail particularly essential goods, quality public schools, public open spaces, recreational facilities, health services, affordable and easy-to-use transportation options, and other public services. While not all of these amenities must be within the neighborhood boundary, they must be easily accessible in neighboring areas. Another key element is a walkable, bikeable, and a safe public environment suitable for people of all ages and abilities.

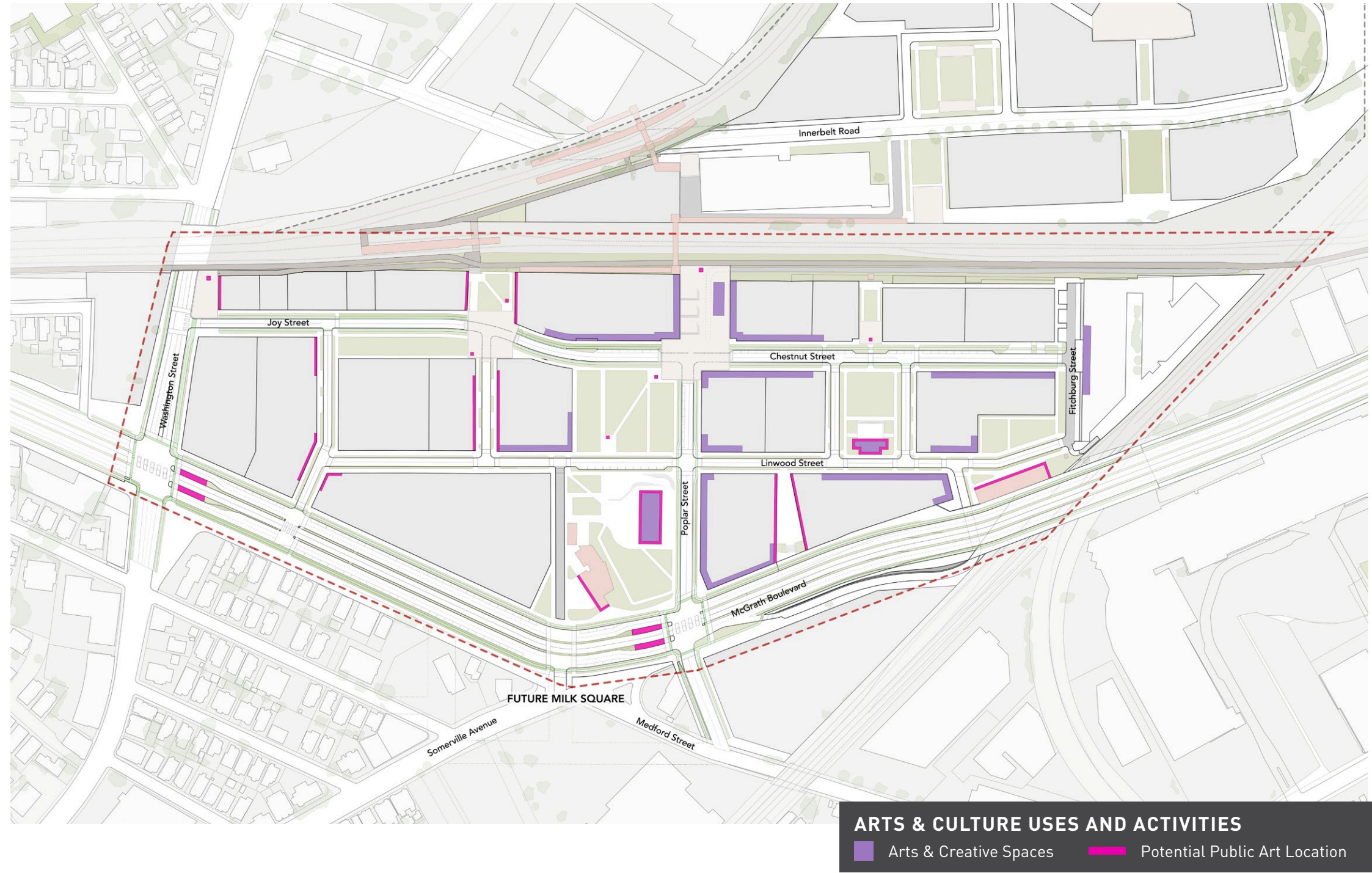




# 5.4 COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

## Support Arts & Creative Uses

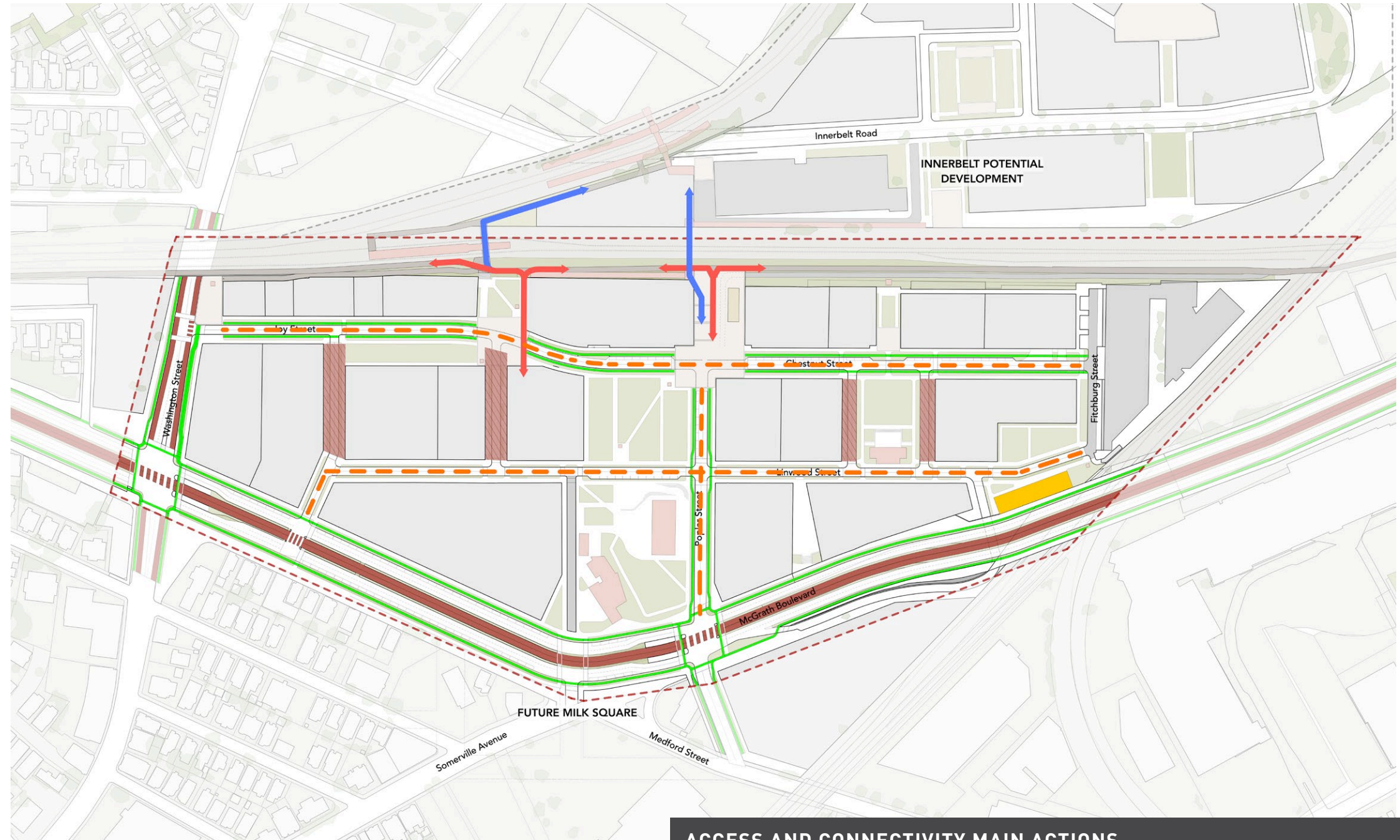
Brickbottom is home to a vibrant community of working artists and makers. Supporting and enhancing this community's potential is central to this plan. Implementing the policies, programs, and infrastructure we recommend in this document will support and grow the art-oriented small business community in the area. With a thoughtful strategy and robust public investment, Brickbottom has the potential to be one of the great art districts in the region, if not the country.



# 5.4 COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

## Improve Access and Connectivity

A robust approach to mobility considers all elements of movement in the public realm: people, bicycles, motor vehicles, public transit, and the delivery of goods. Access is about how those modes will navigate, enter and exit the neighborhood safely and efficiently. Connectivity is the neighborhood's relationship to surrounding areas and how easy it is to transition between them. Each of these categories is complex, but we know Brickbottom needs substantial improvements in all of them.



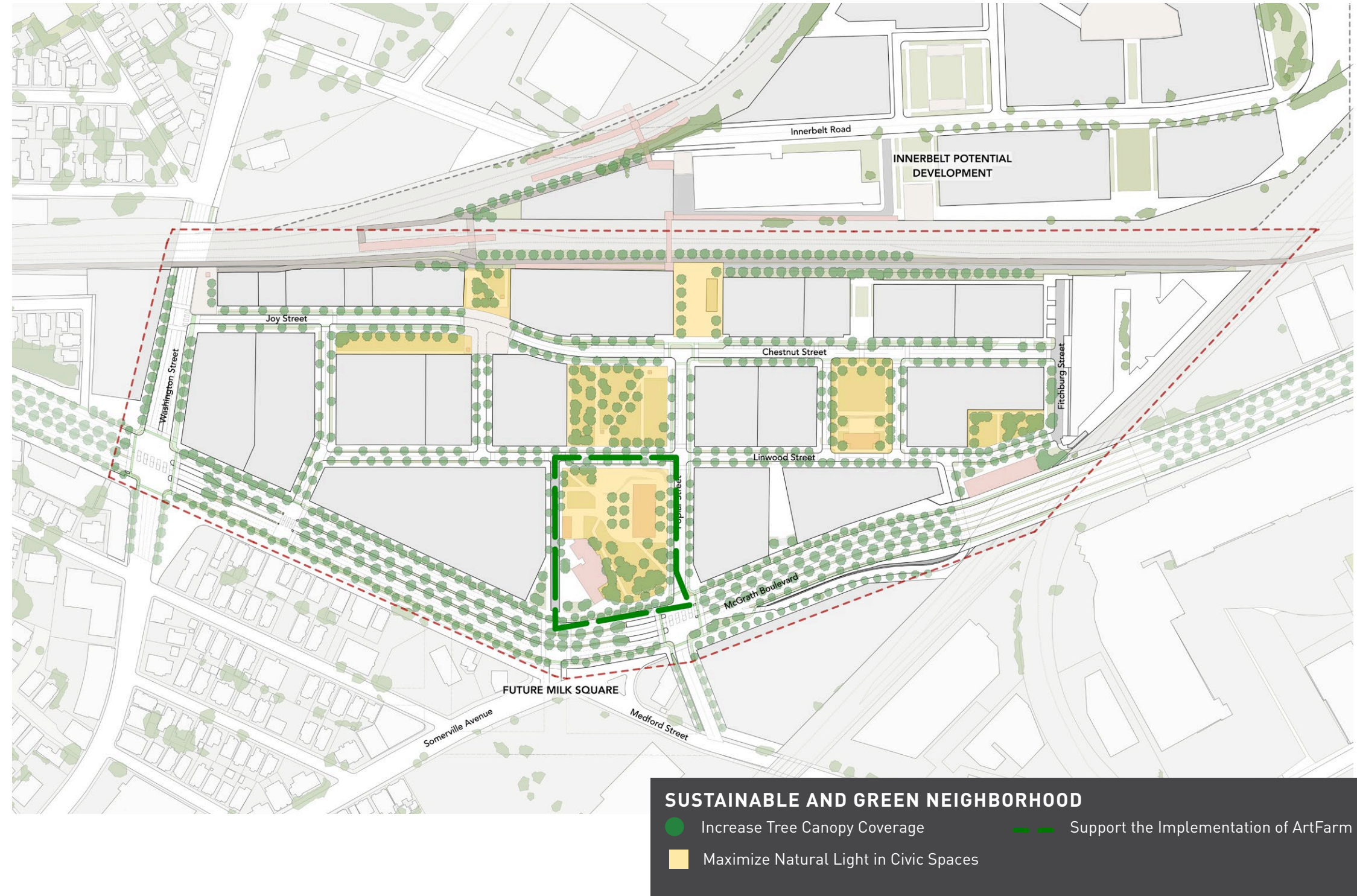
**ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY MAIN ACTIONS**

- Potential Connection to Community Path
- Potential Connection to Innerbelt
- Improved Streetscape
- Bike Lanes
- Potential Bus Rapid Lanes
- New Transversal Streets to Reduce Block Size
- Civic Building with stairs

# 5.4 COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

## Implement Sustainable and Human-Scaled Design

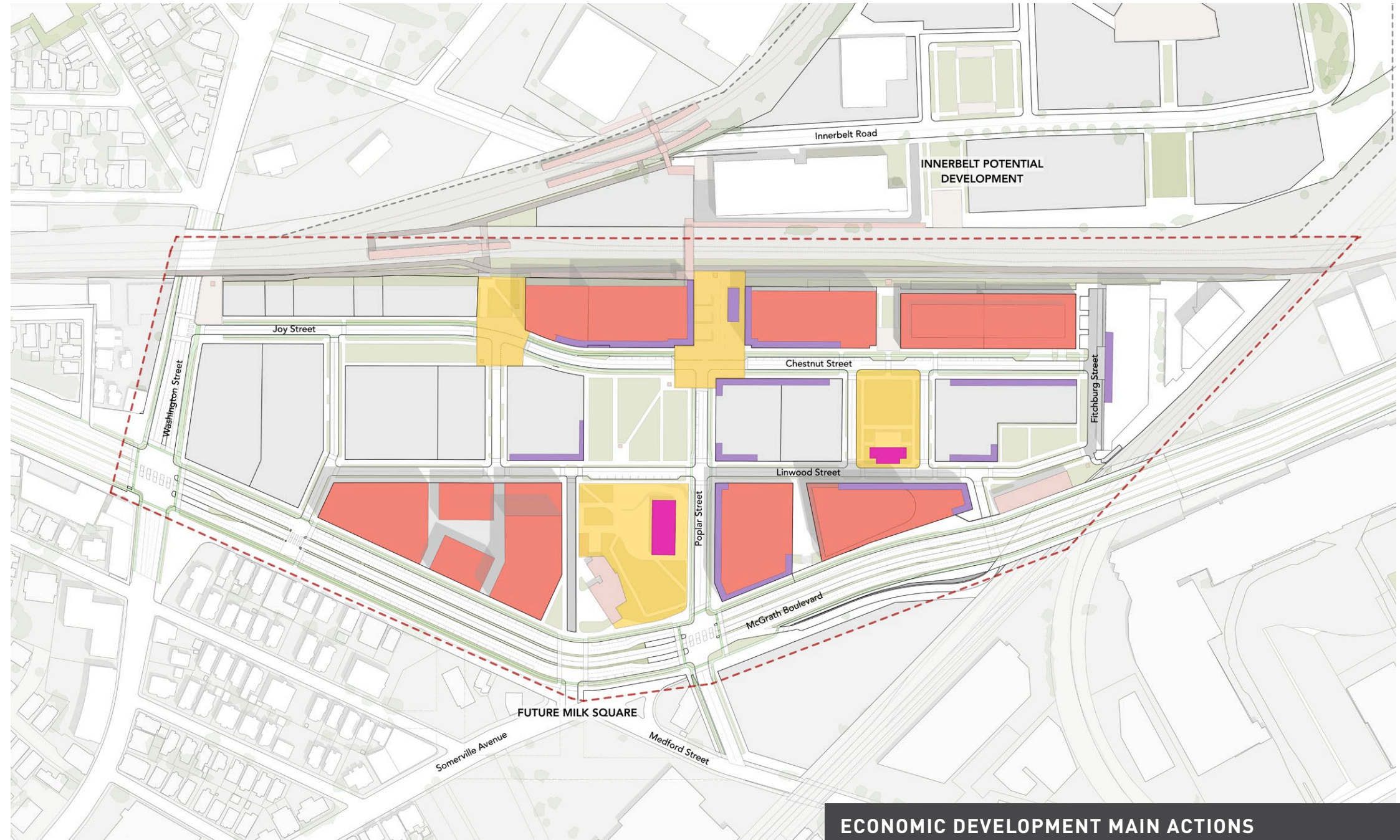
Designing to a human scale means creating something optimized for use by humans. It may sound obvious, but it is not always the first approach in developing cities. Too often, vehicles are prioritized, or buildings are designed only considering their use rather than the experience of pedestrians walking by them. There are two general aspects to this concept. The physical is when we think about the mechanics of how humans of various abilities will move in the space, how hard it will be to navigate each part of the neighborhood and what barriers they may encounter along the way. The psychological is where we ask questions like: does this area feel safe for a person on foot? Does it feel welcoming? Would people choose to be there?



# 5.4 COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

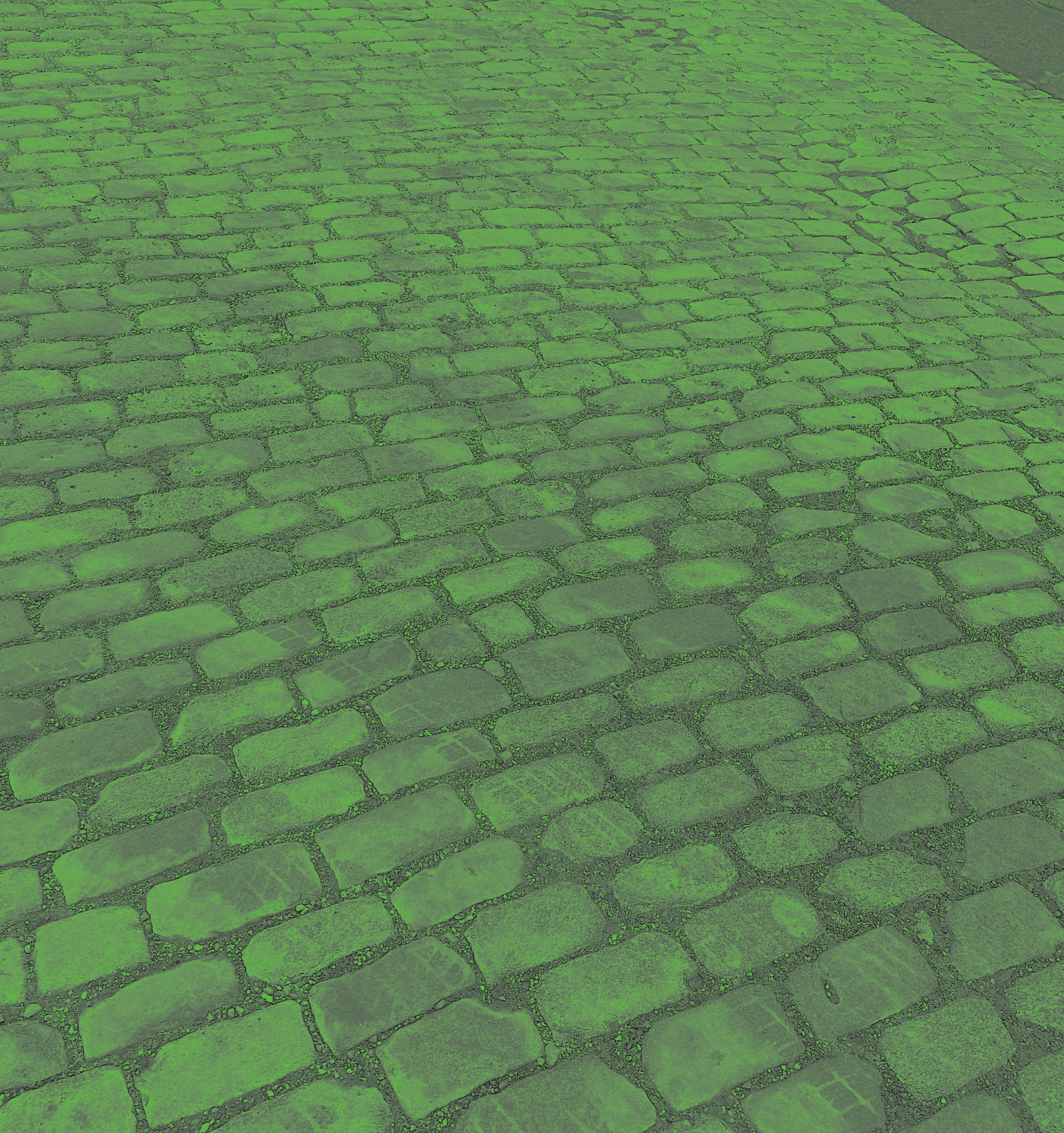
## Support Economic Development

This Plan lays out how we can intentionally guide the neighborhood's retail, laboratory, art, industrial, and research development to encourage a well-rounded business ecosystem. This plan aims to amplify the economic potential associated with the creative community; however, we see opportunities in the area for multiple types of businesses that can all thrive and complement one another. For this strategy to succeed, this plan calls for a coordinated workforce development initiative as part of its implementation.



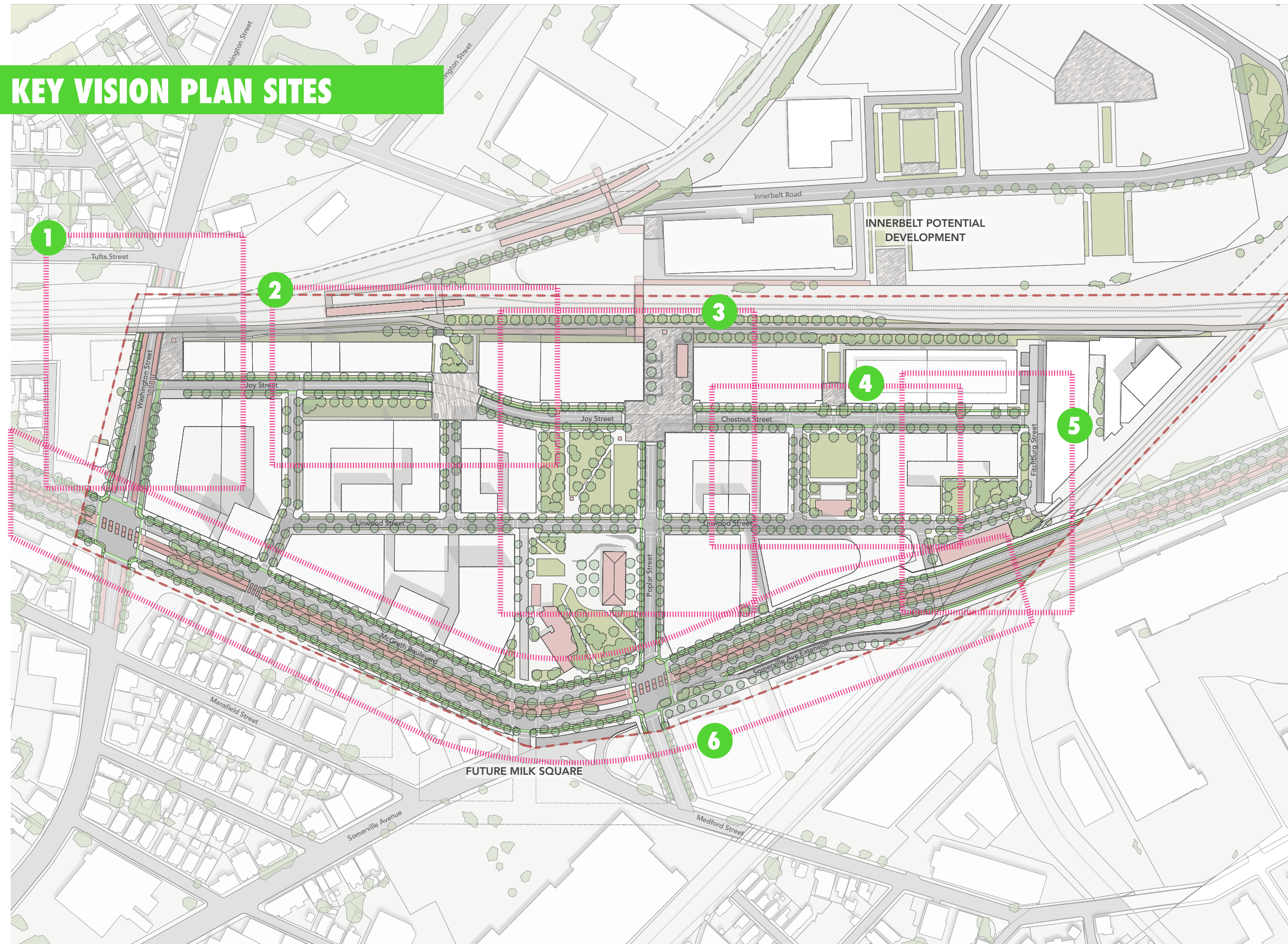
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MAIN ACTIONS**

- Well-balanced Development of Commercial, R&D, and Lab spaces
- Spaces to Amplify the economic Potential of the Creative Community
- Build Spaces to Foster Activities, Education, and Experiences



## **6. KEY SITES**

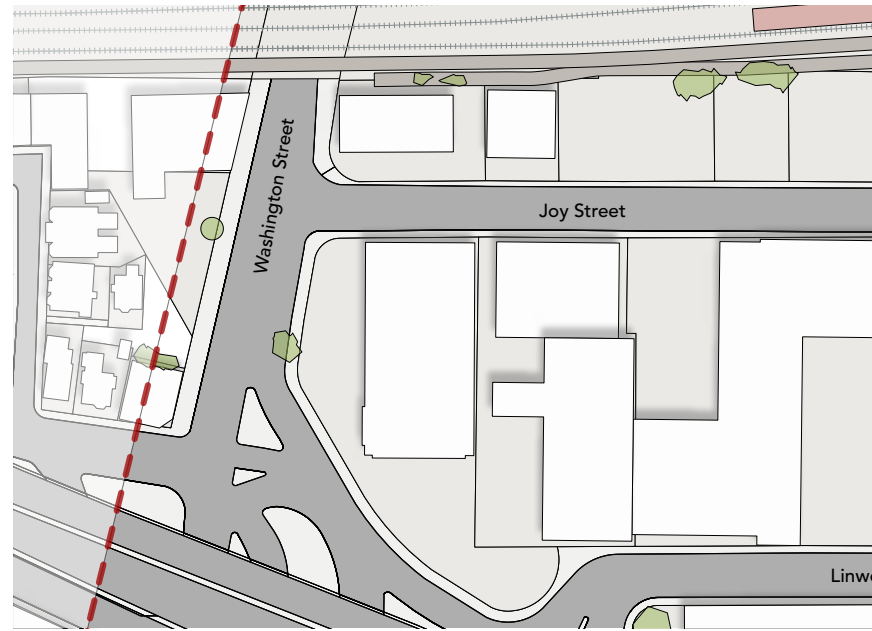
# KEY VISION PLAN SITES



## Brickbottom Key Sites

- SITE 1: Brickbottom Northern access. Washington Street & Joy Street
- SITE 2: Joy Street Park
- SITE 3: Poplar Street Corridor
- SITE 4: Chestnut Street Corridor
- SITE 5: Fitchburg & Linwood
- SITE 6: McGrath Highway

# SITE 1: BRICKBOTTOM NORTHERN ACCESS



The main access point for Brickbottom is from the north, at the Joy and Washington Street intersection. It is a challenging location given the proximity of McGrath Highway, Washington Street's downward slope under the rail bridge, and the volume of vehicular and bus traffic.

Like much of the Brickbottom area, Washington and Joy Streets are car-oriented and lack clear and welcoming spaces for pedestrians and cyclists. The only access point to the new East Somerville Green Line Station, and the only entrance to the extended Community Path, will be located approximately 100 feet to the east of the intersection. Even with the new bike lanes and a bus lane, Washington Street still does not act as a gateway, nor will it provide clear visible access to the East Somerville Green Line station or connections to the surrounding neighborhoods.

*View of the current conditions of the intersection of Joy and Washington Streets*



## Development Strategies

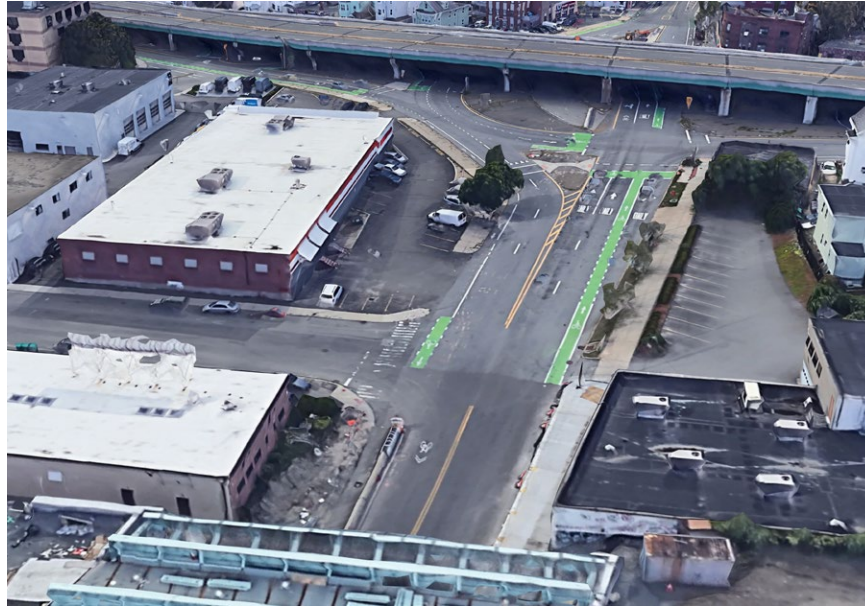
This access point only increases in importance as the new Green Line Station comes online and must become a welcoming gateway for people arriving by train, bus, foot, bicycle, or car. The main urban design challenges to achieving this are creating a comfortable and safe environment for people given traffic volumes and increasing the visibility of the Green Line station and Community Path access from the intersection.

### LEGEND

- A. Somerville Community Path Extension passing over Washington Street.
- B. Currently planned access ramp up to the new MBTA Green Line station and the Somerville Community Path off from Washington Street.
- C. Potential location of an art piece to serve both as welcoming landmark to Brickbottom and to the new MBTA station.
- D. Plaza to serve as gateway for the neighborhood, MBTA station and Community Path.
- E. Improved intersection at McGrath and Washington Street, with new pedestrian crosswalks and better distributed street space for bikes and pedestrians.
- F. Bus lane for a potential new Silver Line or other Rapid Bus service on Washington Street.
- G. Increased set-back of the southern parcels along Washington Street to provide more sidewalk space and better view of the station access and plaza.
- H. Left-turn lane to McGrath Boulevard
- I. Multi-modal McGrath Boulevard with space for Rapid Bus service, new tree canopy, and bike lanes.
- J. New streetscape design for Joy Street to include segregated bike lanes, wider sidewalks, and new tree canopy.
- K. Avoid additional setbacks on the parcels between Joy Street and the MBTA R.O.W. to maintain developable depth.
- L. MBTA East Somerville Green Line station.

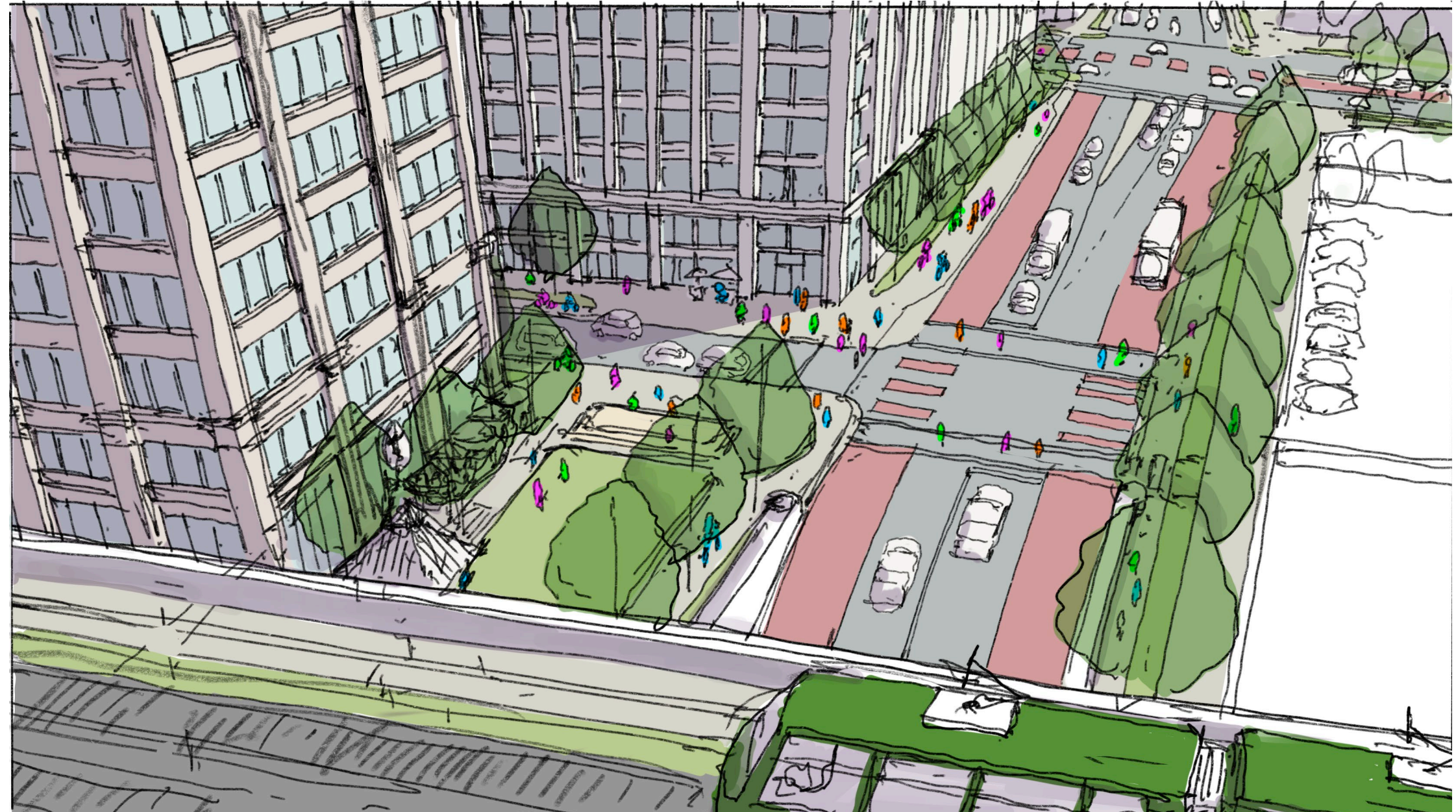






### A. Rethink the intersection:

The complex intersection at Joy and Washington streets requires a design that improves the comfort and safety of users. This site's proposed vision is to treat the intersection as a pedestrian crossing, with a pavement that visually connects the two sidewalks and a welcoming plaza next to the Green Line entrance. This design attempts to transform a conflicting vehicular intersection into a slow-moving one. The final street design for this intersection will also depend on what happens with the potential Bus Rapid Transit (Silver Line) extension currently being analyzed by the MBTA along Washington Street and McGrath Boulevard. A transfer stop with the Green Line station on Washington Street will be needed at this intersection, increasing the importance of having a gateway in this site.



*Birdseye view of the vision for Washington Street at its intersection with Joy Street. The Green Line and Community Path are visible in the foreground.*



**B. Build a welcoming gateway public plaza:**

Any development happening in the southeast corner of Joy and Washington Street should be setback from the sidewalk to increase the visibility of the Green Line and Community Path access and the Brickbottom neighborhood, creating a welcoming plaza. The buildings surrounding this plaza should provide active ground floors and conveniently accessible space for workshops, studios, and residences on above-ground floors occupied by businesses serving the community.

**C. Connect housing to transit:**

The parcels on the north side of Joy Street, abutting the rail embankment, are very narrow, limiting their development potential. The streetscape design for Joy Street must consider this constraint and not reduce the lot depth further. We should leverage proximity to the new Green Line and potentially a Silver Line extension and maximize housing in these parcels.

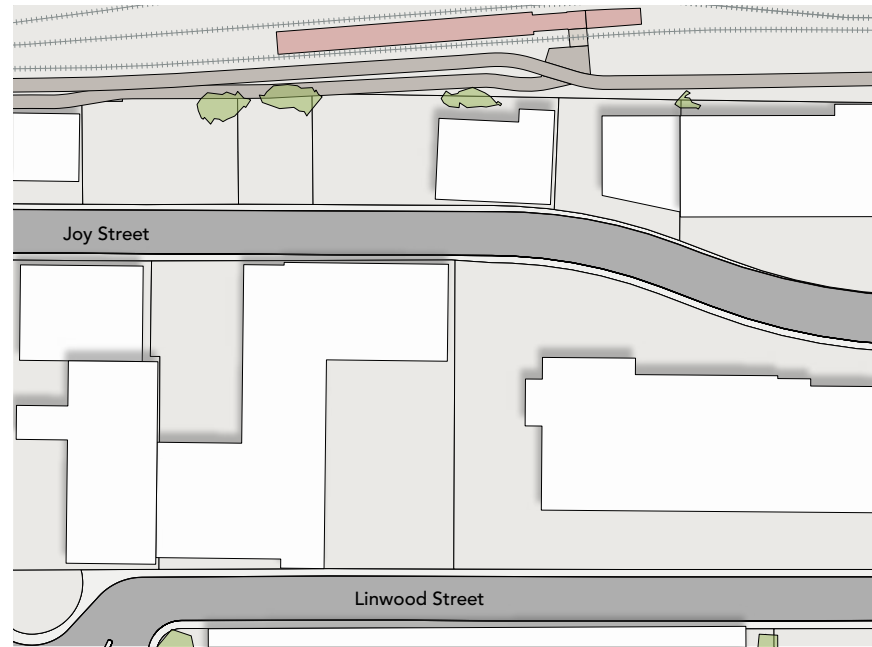
**D. Increase visibility from the future McGrath Boulevard:**

Any future development occurring in the parcels between Joy Street and McGrath Boulevard along Washington Street should also be setback from the sidewalk to increase the visibility of the public plaza and the access to the Green Line Station and the Community Path. This plaza will also provide more sidewalk and public space along Washington Street.



*Street level view of the potential vision for the intersection of Washington and Joy Street.*

# SITE 2: A NEW JOY STREET



Joy is a bleak street with narrow sidewalks and no vegetation. The road dedicates all the available space to vehicles mainly due to the current uses which include car shops, storage facilities, parking lots and garages.

The street reflects the industrial and auto-oriented focus of the area over the last decades and is not compatible with robust access to bus and mass transit.

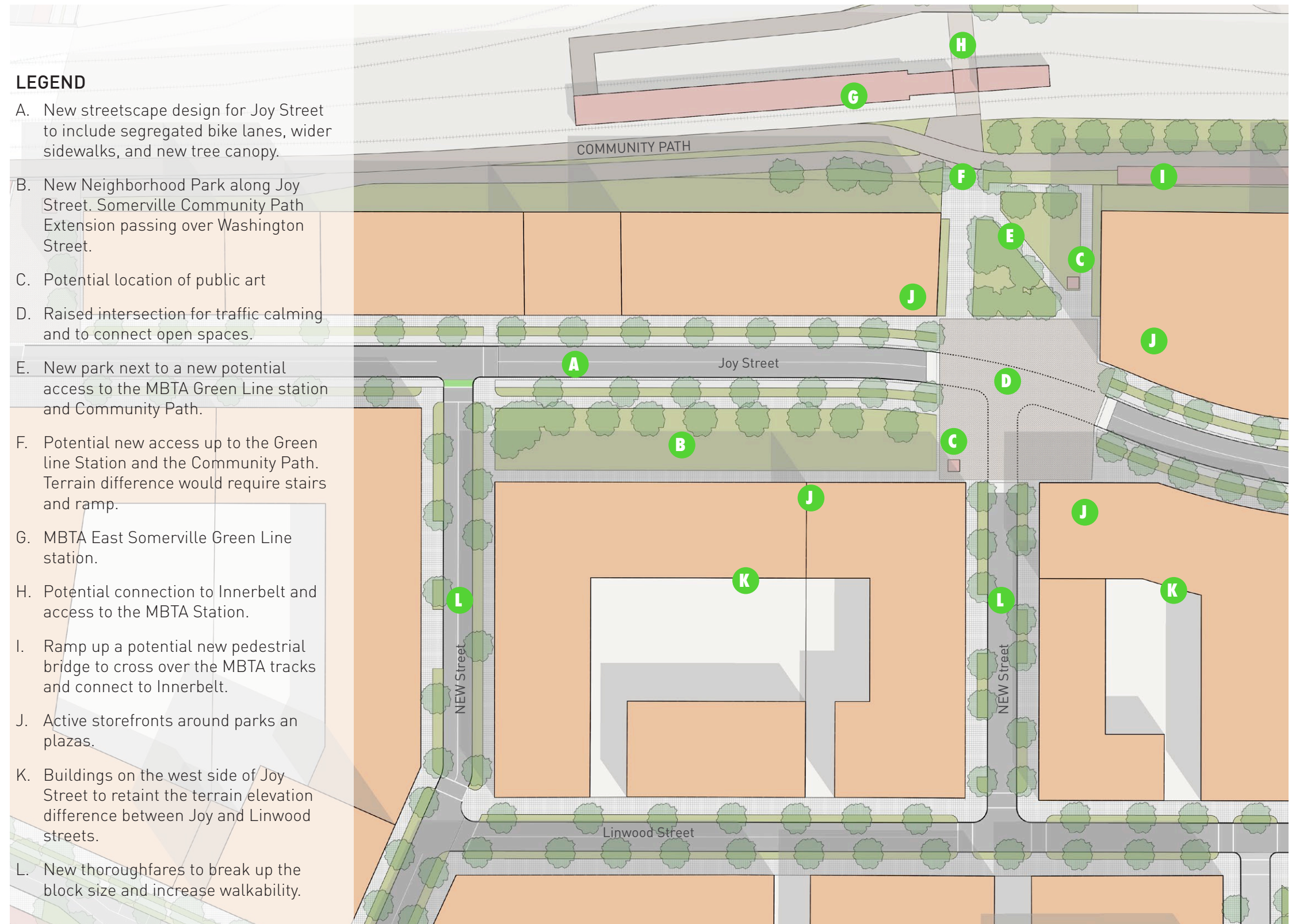
Going into the neighborhood, Joy Street slopes down from Washington Street while it wiggles to align with Chestnut Street. An Eversource facility flanks this section of the street on the west and, on the east, the Joy Street Artist Studios, fronted by leftover land from the realignment of Joy and Chestnut streets used as surface parking.

*View of the current conditions of Joy Street with the new Green Line station showing on the left*



## Development Strategies

As a continuation of the gateway on Brickbottom's northern access, Joy Street needs to be transformed into a welcoming street for all people. Joy Street also offers an opportunity to build new open public spaces and a secondary access to the Green Line station and the Community Path.





**A. Build a new neighborhood park:**

A new park along Joy can take advantage of the wiggle where Joy Street transitions to Chestnut Street and the change in grade that occurs to Linwood Street. By setting buildings along the western side of Joy Street back from the street, the plan can create a substantial open space to serve as a landmark for people entering the neighborhood and as a central square that would complement the more intense development in the northern section of Brickbottom. This new public space is an opportunity for an attractive focal point that can serve as a community gathering space, public art display, and host live performances, fairs, and other events. It could also accommodate porches or loading areas to serve nearby makers, arts, and fabricators while providing much-needed open green space. The buildings surrounding this new open space should provide active ground floor uses that support and complement the activities happening in the park. The new development on the parcels to the west will also need to address the grade change by serving as a terrain retaining element between Joy Street and the lower level at Linwood Street.



*Birdseye view of the vision for a park along Joy Street.*



View from the potential secondary access to the Community Path and Green Line Station mid-block along Joy Street, opening to the new park.



View from the Community Path looking south towards the new Green Line Station. Potential new development along the ROW could activate the access ramp from Washington Street.

**B. Create a secondary access to the Green Line station and the Community Path:**

The location of the Green Line station entrance is over 600 feet away from the current sole access at Washington Street. A secondary and more direct access to both the station and the Community Path from within Brickbottom would greatly benefit the neighborhood by reducing the walking time for people commuting in and out of Brickbottom. We should pair this new access with another open space that includes public art and greenery, serving as an entryway to the station.

**C. Encourage development around the new park:**

Being immediately adjacent to the Green Line station, we should consider the parcels surrounding the park vital to providing mixed-use residential development.

**D. Reduce the block size:**

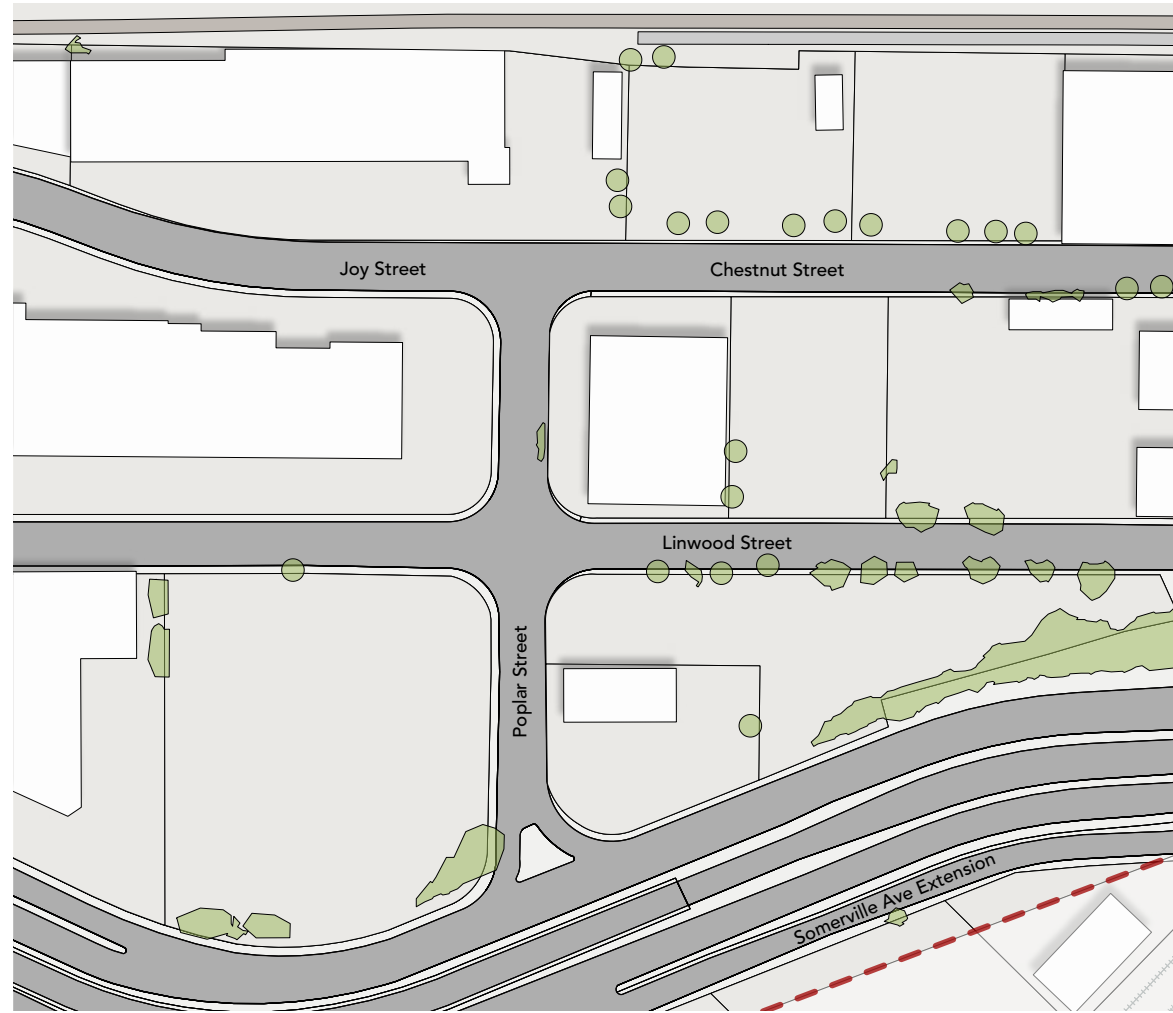
Brickbottom blocks, especially those along Joy Street, are too large, decreasing the neighborhood's walkability. Any new development happening here must also break down the block by creating new east-west thoroughfares that connect Joy and Linwood streets.

**E. Pursue a new connection to Innerbelt across the Green Line station:**

The Innerbelt parcel abutting the Green Line tracks across from Brickbottom has no connection to the station, which would be a waste for future workers and residents. The terrain topography allows direct access to the station at the exact location as the proposed access on the Brickbottom side, so we should pursue a strategy to extend this connection across to Innerbelt.



# SITE 3: POPLAR STREET CORRIDOR



Poplar Street is the east-west connector of the neighborhood, running through the middle of Brickbottom. It extends from McGrath Highway through to Chestnut Street, with its right-of-way ending at the Green Line track.

After the construction of McGrath highway, Poplar Street was partially cut off from the surrounding street network, no longer functioning as access into the neighborhood. The current conditions around Brickbottom have not allowed Poplar to serve as the main corridor. Like all the other streets in the neighborhood, it has inadequate pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and the properties are underutilized.

The proposed grounding of McGrath Highway, and the new street network included in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan and the recently approved Milk Square Urban Design Framework, offer the opportunity to reconnect Poplar and make it the primary access to Brickbottom from Union Square and Somerville Avenue.

*View of the current conditions of Poplar Street at its intersection with Joy/Chestnut Streets*



The construction of ArtFarm on the northwest corner of Poplar Street includes a new streetscape and redesigned intersection to improve pedestrian and biker access. A better-designed Poplar can potentially extend to the Green Line and allow it to end in a new access to the Community Path.

In discussions since 2015, ArtFarm was conceived as a unique urban space bringing together residents and visitors. With strong support from community members and the Somerville Arts Council, Mayor Curtatone committed to making 10 Poplar Street ArtFarm's permanent home. The site, a former waste transfer station, is a self-sustaining art and urban agriculture laboratory designed to foster community engagement and creativity with a park, urban agriculture site, and community center for performance and exhibit spaces.

The Poplar Street Pump Station project will develop a portion of the ArtFarm site to provide critical stormwater management infrastructure in an underground tank and a building to house the necessary mechanical equipment. It is part of a series of projects underway to relieve flooding in the city, boost climate change preparedness, and reduce Combined Sewer Overflows in the region (where sanitary sewer and stormwater share the same drainage pipes). On top of the underground tank, there will be expanded park space for ArtFarm and the neighborhood.



*View of the current conditions of Poplar Street looking towards McGrath Highway*



## Development Strategies

We want Poplar Street to become the neighborhood's main artery and a gateway into Brickbottom.

### A. Create a public space in the end of Poplar Street with access to the Community Path:

The right-of-way of Poplar Street continues after Chestnut Street to the new Community Path extension, and we intend it to be part of an MBTA service access road. Given its location this area is ideal for creating a public plaza that incorporates pedestrian and bike access to the Community Path and the Green Line station while maintaining the access to the MBTA service road. We are calling it the Neon Williams Plaza, since it can incorporate the existing Neon Williams building and celebrate the crafts and artistic activities of the neighborhood. The design should also include a raised intersection at Poplar, Joy, and Chestnut streets, creating an extension of the proposed public plaza.



#### LEGEND

- A. Potential new pedestrian bridge to cross over the MBTA tracks and connect to Innerbelt
- B. Access to the Somerville Community Path extension
- C. Potential location of public art
- D. Somerville Community Path
- E. MBTA Service Access Road
- F. New "Neon Williams" Plaza to serve as gateway space, Poplar Street terminated vista, and space for art. Plaza would need to sort out elevation change up to the MBTA ROW.
- G. Raised intersection for traffic calming and to connect open spaces.
- H. New central neighborhood park extending ArtFarm all the way to Joy/Chestnut streets. This space would add approximately 1 acre of space for more forested and recreational uses.
- I. ArtFarm
- J. Active storefronts around parks and plazas.
- K. Terminated vista for the Milk Square-ArtFarm-new park network

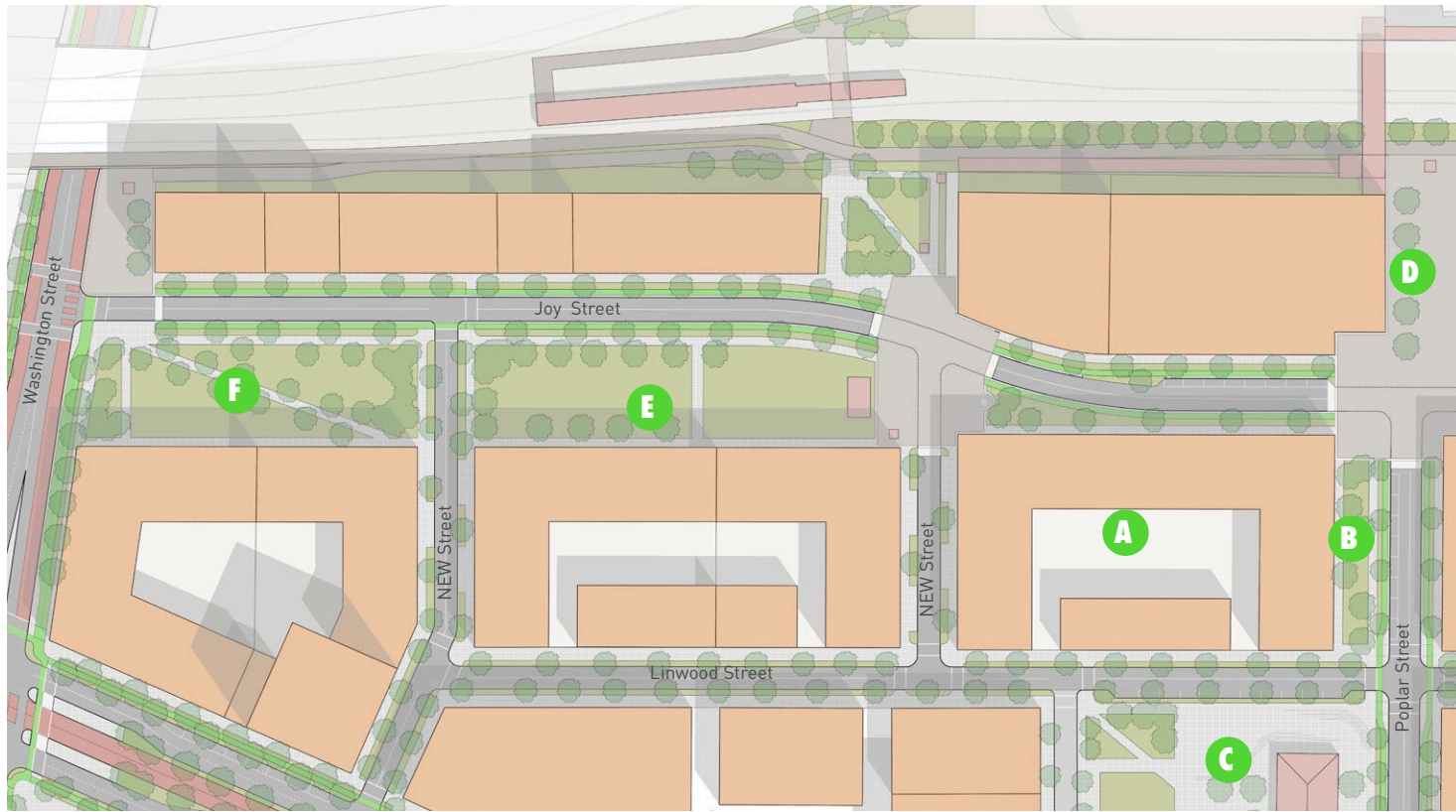


**B. Create a central neighborhood park as extension of ArtFarm:**

A new central green space would improve the connection of ArtFarm with the proposed open space at the end of Poplar and the access to the Community Path. We are offering several alternatives for the location of additional open spaces within Brickbottom, given the land acquisition challenges. However, this central forested open area was the most favored by the community, adding a contiguous space of over 1 acre. A green heart in the center of Brickbottom could connect to a network of different civic spaces, including the future Milk Square, ArtFarm, and the Neon Williams Plaza, and serve as an ideal site to host large outdoor community events and recreational activities. It would offer a considerable space to add to the tree canopy. To achieve this central neighborhood park, we will need to work with Eversource to explore the future development of their property.



*Birdseye view of the vision for Poplar Street, ArtFarm and the potential new open civic space creating a central neighborhood park.*



**Alternative Option:**

An alternative to the new central park is enlarging the park proposed for Joy Street in the previous Key Site. This park would extend all the way to Washington street, creating a long linear park along Joy, instead of a central open space along Poplar Street in order to maintain the overall new open space goal for the neighborhood. This alternative option maintains a linear green space along Poplar Street, preserving the direct connection between the future Milk Square, ArtFarm, and the Neon Williams Plaza.

**LEGEND**

- A. No central green space.
- B. Linear green space to maintain the open space connection between ArtFarm and the Plaza at Poplar and Joy/Chestnut streets
- C. ArtFarm
- D. "Neon Williams" Plaza
- E. Larger version of the proposed park on Joy Street increasing in width, reducing abutting parcels size.
- F. Joy Street park extending all the way to Washington Street.



*Street level view of the vision for Poplar Street looking towards McGrath Boulevard*





**C. Activate Poplar Street with short-term tactical amenities:**

Keeping buildings set back from the street will allow people to make a visual connection from McGrath Highway and the ArtFarm through to the plaza and Community Path access. Attractive paving options, a creatively designed layout, and sustainable landscaping will enhance the corridor and create a functional space where people enjoy spending time. The idle spaces along Poplar Street can be activated with temporary or “pop-up” uses until there is new development along the street.



*Birdseye sketch of the interim vision for the corner of Poplar and Linwood Street including short-term tactical amenities.*

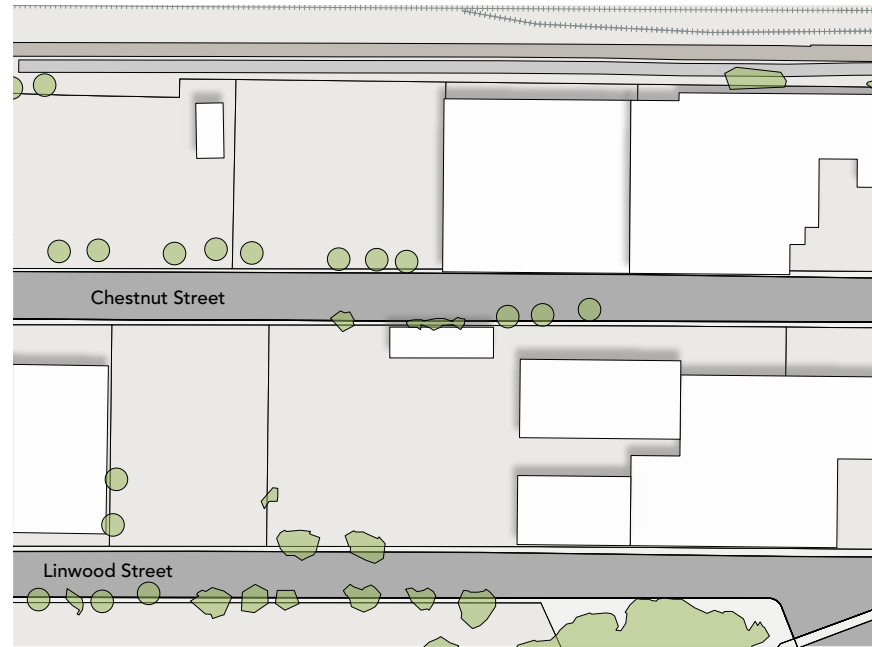
**D. Redesign Poplar Street into an active corridor:**

Long term, we should make Poplar Street the corridor serving as the main east-west connector for Brickbottom. The street level of adjacent buildings should house active uses ranging from retail to creative space, light and clean industrial to residential lobbies and amenities. We should design the streetscape to accommodate all users by implementing ample sidewalks, connected bike lanes, green stormwater management, and space for outdoor business and dining.



*Birdseye view of the vision for the corner of Poplar and Linwood Street, with the new civic space to the left and the plaza connecting to the Community Path and the Green Line in the background.*

# SITE 4: CHESTNUT STREET CORRIDOR



Like the rest of the neighborhood, Chestnut Street has long blocks, extensive impervious paving, and low land utilization.

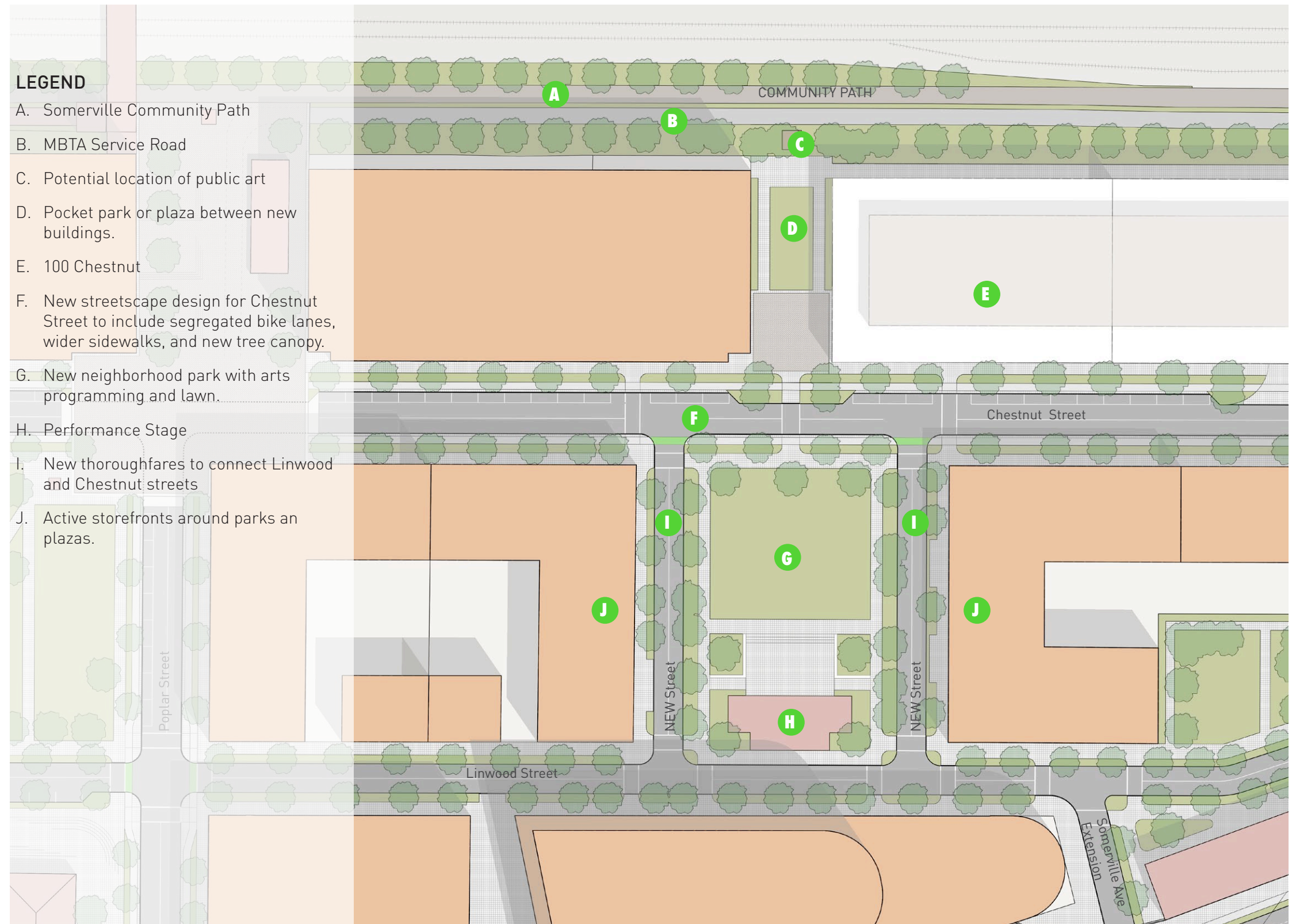
This area, south of Poplar Street, is also the most remote corner of Brickbottom, aggravating accessibility challenges. It also hosts the new lab building at 100 Chestnut which has prompted improvements to the streetscape and will require connections for workers.

*View of the current conditions of the block between Chestnut and Linwood Streets, with McGrath Highway and the Squires Bridge in the background*



## Development Strategies

The vision for Chestnut Street is to take an underutilized and undeveloped space and allow the vibrancy around the proposed Joy Street Park to flow down the hill and transition to a less dense but similar land use mix, with smaller, easily walkable blocks.





**A. Create a neighborhood park for the southern section of Brickbottom:**

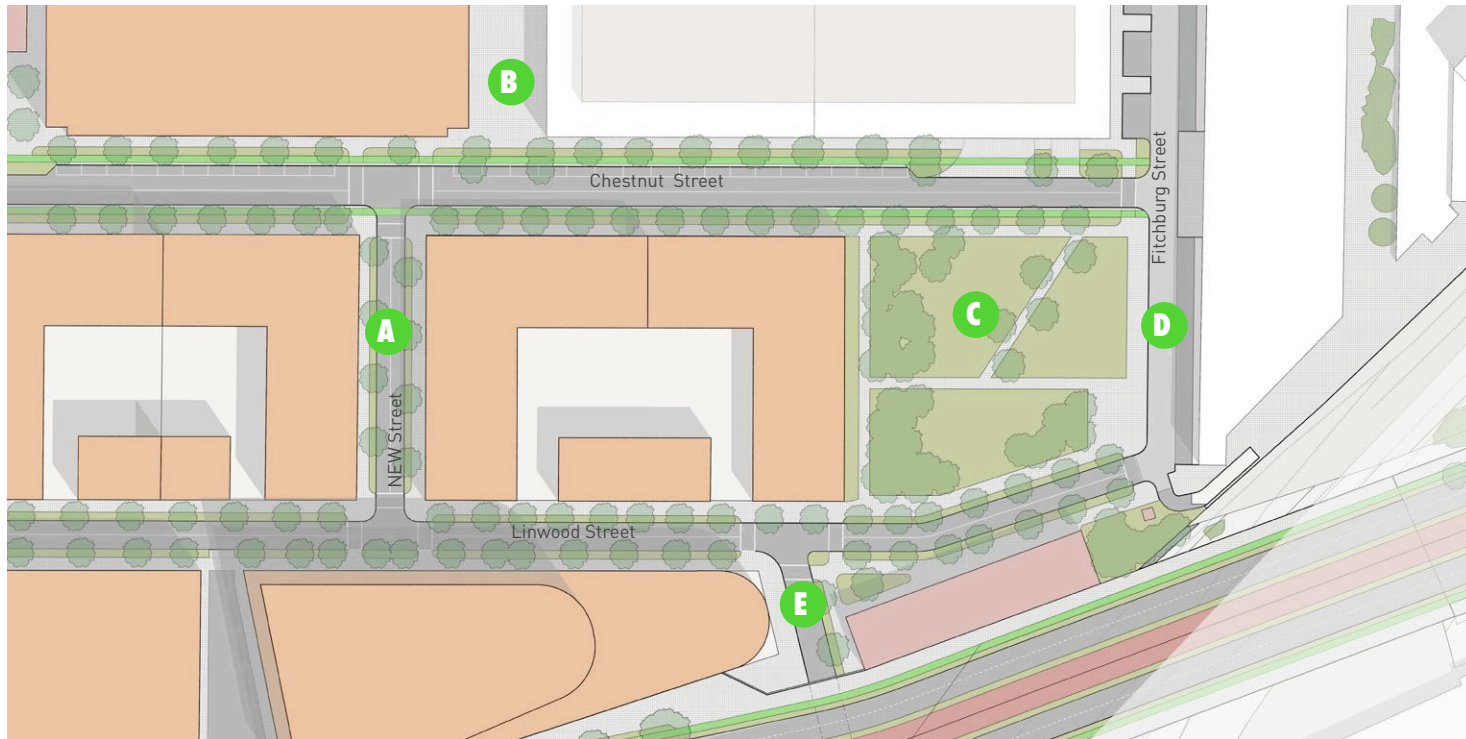
The new development along Chestnut Street can be organized around a new park stretching from Linwood Street to Chestnut Street, cutting through the existing block. This new neighborhood park will fit within the smaller-scale buildings envisioned in this part of Brickbottom. The space should invite local businesses, studios, and workshops, to spill out into the public realm. The park could also be the location of a public performance stage and enhanced with public art, like murals, sculptures, and installations.

**B. Build a pocket plaza next on the east side of Chestnut Street:**

Pairing the neighborhood park on the west side of Chestnut Street with a small pocket plaza would help break up the long block and improve the pedestrian experience. This space could include some seating to complement mixed uses on the ground floor of the potential commercial building between the Neon Williams Plaza and the 100 Chestnut building.



*Birdseye view of the vision for the mid-block park between Chestnut and Linwood Streets. The Brickbottom Artists Lofts can be seen in the background.*



**Alternative Option:**

An alternative vision removes the mid-block park between Chestnut and Linwood and combines it with the green open space and improvements at Fitchburg and Linwood Street (to be described in the following key site). A park of this size can accommodate a dog park, a playground, community gardens, other neighborhood amenities, and a buffer for commercial development. This alternative still maintains a new thoroughfares to break up the block size, creating a new connection between Chestnut and Linwood Streets.

**LEGEND**

- A. No mid-block green space. New thoroughfare between Linwood and Chestnut streets is maintained.
- B. Pocket plaza
- C. New neighborhood park at the end of the block of Chesnut-Fitchburg-Linwood streets.
- D. Fitchburg street's cobble preserved
- E. Somerville Ave Extension intersection with Linwood Street.



**C. Improve the streetscape design along Chestnut Street:**

The streetscape improvements would continue along Chestnut Street to Fitchburg Street, allowing convenient and safe access for pedestrians, cyclists, and local motorists. The shorter blocks would allow users to move to and through the space more efficiently and create additional street frontages options for new businesses.



*Street level view of Chestnut Street looking north towards Poplar Street.*



# SITE 5: FITCHBURG + LINWOOD STREET



The southernmost corner of Brickbottom along Fitchburg Street is the site of the Brickbottom Artists Lofts, the only existing residential use in the neighborhood. Fitchburg Street still maintains the old cobblestone pavement, creating a unique area within the neighborhood that we want to buffer and preserve.

The Squire's Bridge, carrying McGrath Highway over the rail tracks at the south end of Brickbottom, creates a hard barrier for the neighborhood that will be maintained even after the grounding of McGrath Highway. Crossing the train tracks is currently limited to climbing a neglected pair of stairways on both sides of the bridge's embankment to reach the bridge's narrow sidewalks. The only path access across (under) McGrath is limited to the one-way single-lane Somerville Avenue Extension nicknamed "Scary Way" that intersects Fitchburg and Linwood Street. During the implementation phase, we want to explore options to address those issues with a well-designed vertical access going up and down McGrath Highway. We also need to explore a better solution for a vehicular, pedestrian, and biking connection under the bridge.



*Current view of Fitchburg and Linwood Streets and the intersection of Somerville Ave Extension ("Scary Way") after crossing under the Squires Bridge in McGrath Highway. Stairs going up the bridge are visible in the corner.*

## Development Strategies

The vision for the southern corner of Brickbottom is to reimagine the currently flawed Fitchburg and Linwood Streets intersection to create a buffer to the Artist's Lofts and Fitchburg Street, deterring pass-through traffic and adding some additional open spaces in the area.

### A. Build a Civic Building that includes vertical circulations up the Squires Bridge:

A new civic building can house new stairs and an elevator to climb up the Squires Bridge into the future McGrath Boulevard. This building could serve as a southside gateway into Brickbottom and host spaces for arts, events, and galleries.





**B. Build a small park in the corner of Fitchburg and Linwood Streets:**

A small new park in this intersection will buffer the residential uses from new development. With a redesigned intersection between Somerville Ave Extension ("Scary Way") and Linwood, it would serve as a filter between incoming traffic and the historical Fitchburg Street. The open space would allow for a pocket park which could be the location of a dog park, a playground, or other neighborhood amenities.

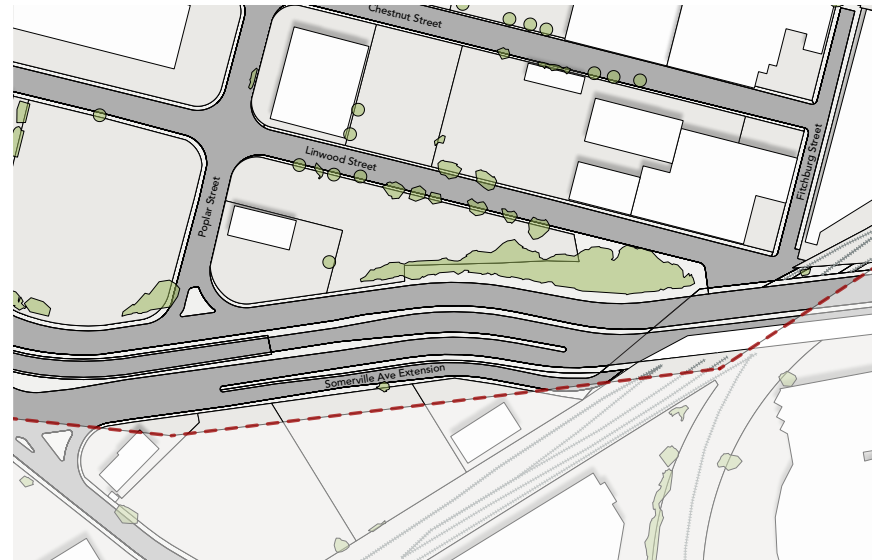
**C. Redesign the intersection design between "Scary Way" and Linwood Street:**

As discussed in the following Key Site, the grounding of McGrath Highway would require the redesign of the northern Squires Bridge ramp and potentially the bridge embankment. This is an opportunity to seek an alternative solution to the current alignment of Somerville Ave Extension (Scary Way) away from the intersection of Linwood and Fitchburg Streets and the residential lofts. This is a long-term solution that we must include in the conversation regarding the future of McGrath Highway. A potential new alignment for Scary Way would also allow some additional pocket green spaces next to the new civic building.



*Street level view of the vision for the intersection of Somerville Ave Extension ("Scary Way") and Linwood Streets.*

# SITE 6: MCGRATH HIGHWAY

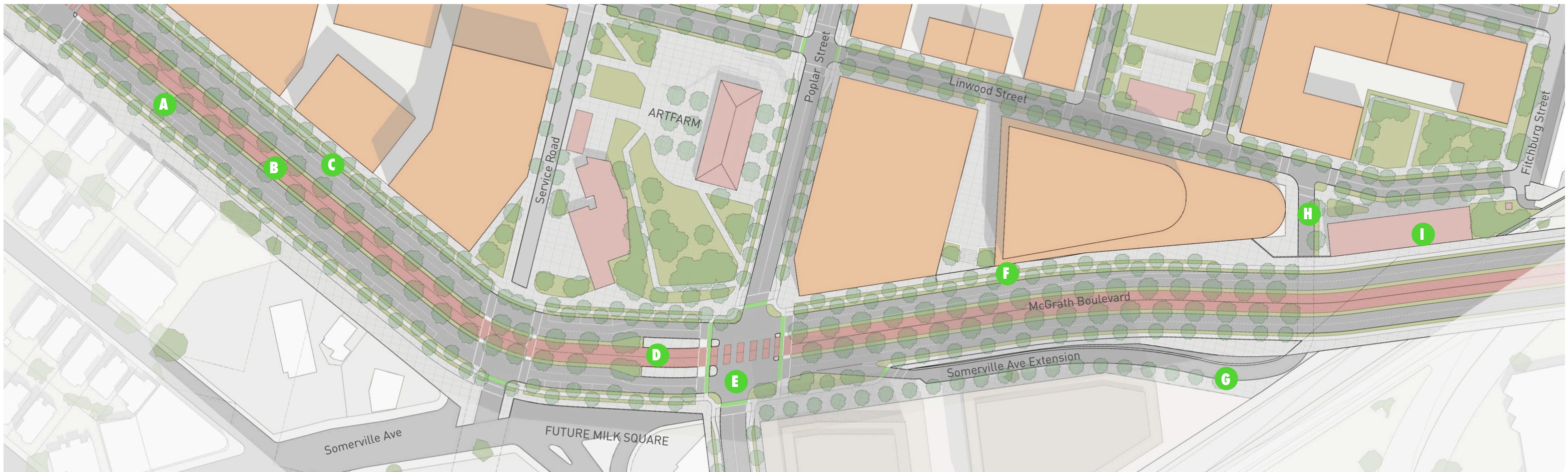


The properties within Brickbottom that are adjacent to McGrath Highway face several challenges. They are next to an uninviting, raised highway surrounded by underdeveloped, mainly industrial sites.

While the properties along McGrath can act as a buffer between the current highway and most of the neighborhood, those properties need to contend with the challenges of neighboring the highway infrastructure.



*View of the current conditions McGrath Highway at Somerville Ave Extension ("Scary Way")*



**LEGEND**

- A. Two lanes of traffic and street parking
- B. Rapid Bus exclusive lanes lined by trees
- C. Segregated bike lanes lined by trees
- D. Rapid Bus stops
- E. Improved intersection at McGrath and Poplar Street, with new pedestrian crosswalks and better distributed street space for bikes and pedestrians
- F. Potential development lining up the Squires Bridge embankment
- G. Somerville Avenue Extension
- H. Realigned Somerville Ave Extension ("Scary Way") and redesign of the intersection with Linwood street
- I. Public Stair, elevator, art space and gallery. Stair to climb up the Squires bridge and cross over the MBTA ROW.

**Development Strategies**

**A. Work with MassDOT on the grounding of McGrath Highway and to redesign the Squires Bridge embankment:**

Improving the conditions along McGrath Highway is a necessity. There are already plans to implement a road diet in the short term and remove the elevated sections in the longer term. These plans provide an opportunity to transform the highway into a boulevard. The grounding of the elevated sections of McGrath Highway will allow visual and physical connections across the highway that are not possible now.

Even with the grounding of most of McGrath, the roadway must still ramp up several stories at the Squires Bridge to cross over the rail tracks at the southern end of the neighborhood. As mentioned in the previous Key Site, the redesign and transformation of McGrath should include rebuilding the embankment of Squires Bridge.

Redesigning and rebuilding the embankment could provide several benefits including a shallower slope to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists while allowing adjacent development to connect to the sidewalk directly. Under the new embankment, the relocation and realignment of "Scary Way" can improve access and circulation. Finally, converting McGrath into an urban boulevard will allow for a straighter path and more space for public improvements.

The coordination between the City and MassDOT will be critical for this crucial transformation in the neighborhood. and the residential lofts. This is a long-term solution that we must include in the conversation regarding the future of McGrath Highway. A potential new alignment for Scary Way would also allow some additional pocket green spaces next to the new civic building.

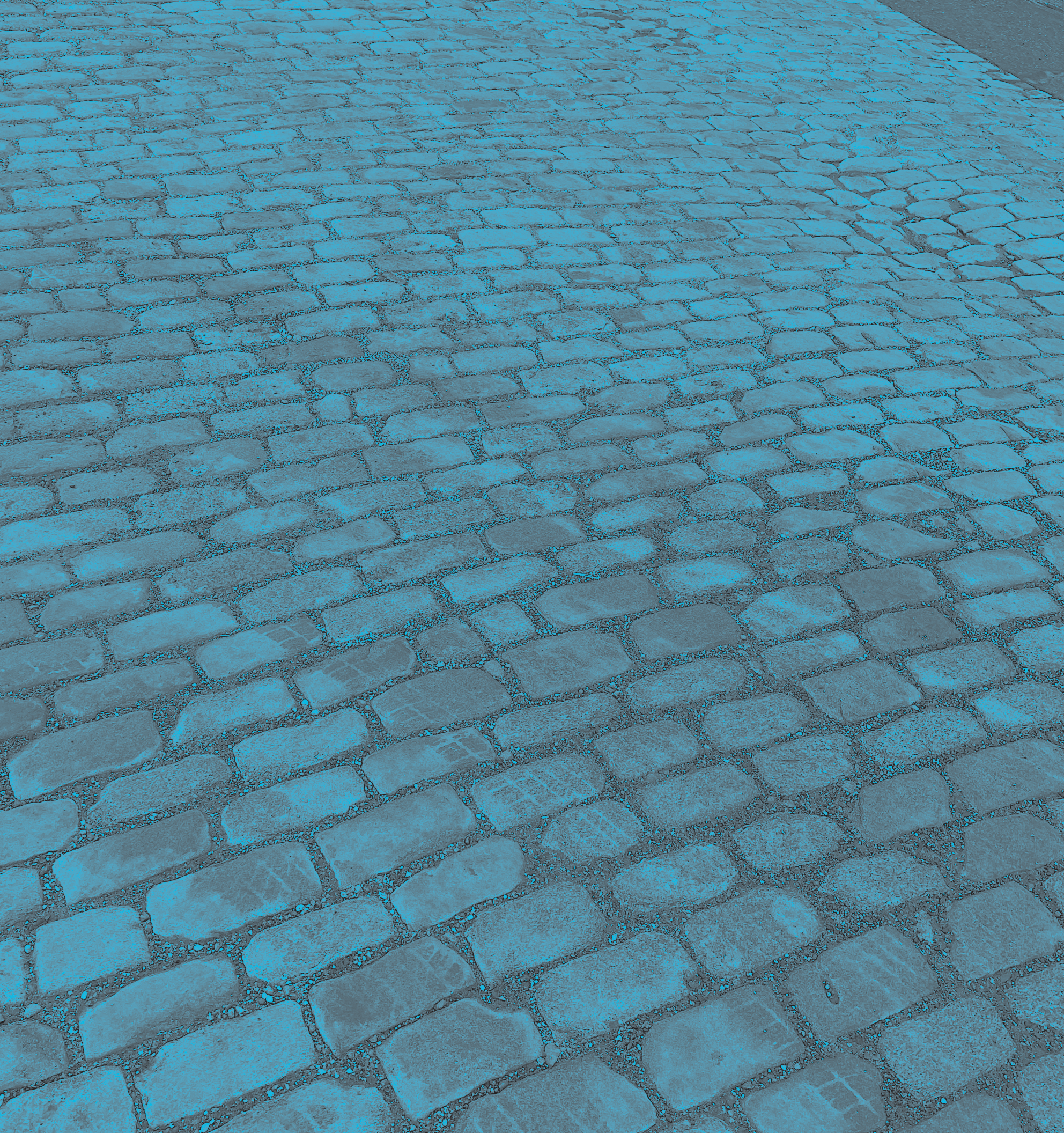


**B. Consider new or adjusted building types to encourage development in the parcels abutting McGrath Highway:**

Irregular block or parcel shapes can challenge efficient redevelopment, especially if existing zoning and development regulations are not flexible. The community should consider new building types or adjustments to existing ones to encourage high-quality and timely redevelopment of particularly physically challenging sites. While the grounding of McGrath and the transformation into an urban boulevard will benefit critical sites along the highway, the significant development opportunities these sites represent can be realized more quickly with that support. Projects which address broad neighborhood goals should be assisted as the opportunities arise. Furthermore, depending on the final design for McGrath Boulevard, there could be leftover right-of-way that could benefit potential new development happening along the future urban boulevard.

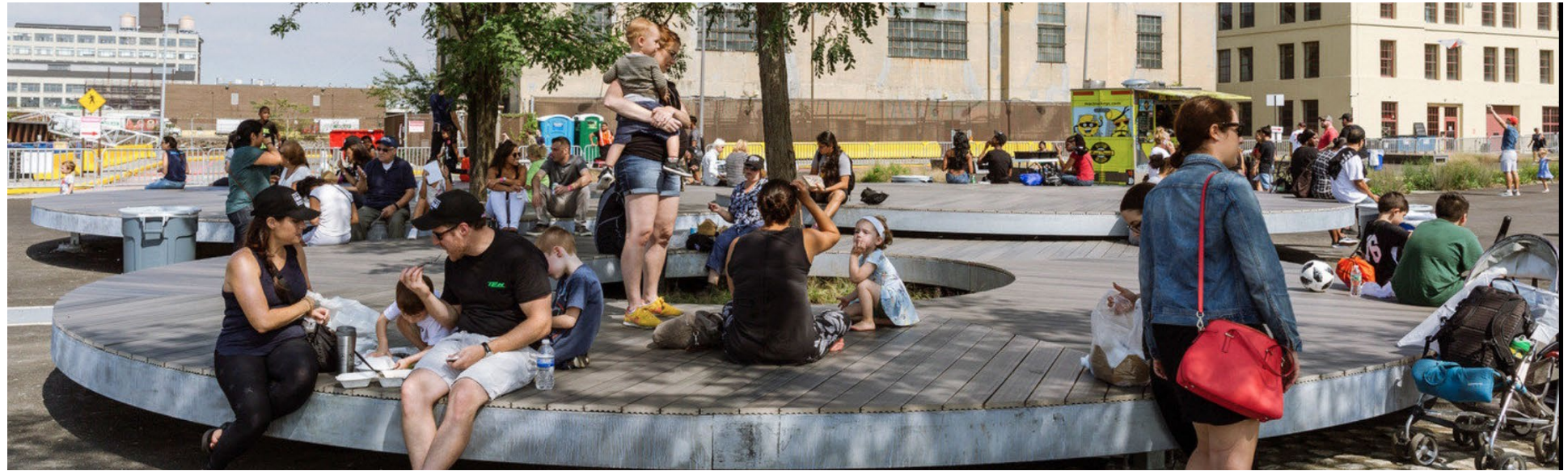


*McGrath has the potential of becoming a welcoming boulevard for Somerville by rethinking the bridge's embankment.*



## **7. PRIORITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Several interconnected goals for each of the Community Priorities are at the center of this plan. Each goal has a corresponding set of action items that illustrate how we can achieve it. The outlined design principles provide public and private investment goals in the neighborhood, while the placemaking concepts specify particular recommendations for new development. Together, these principles and concepts will inform the neighborhood's new design standards and guidelines.



# 7.1 CREATE A COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOOD

“Complete Neighborhood” refers to a neighborhood where residents and visitors have safe and convenient access to the goods and services needed in daily life.

An essential element of a Complete Neighborhood is built on a human scale, allowing for easy and convenient walking and biking. Thriving neighborhoods have enough people living and working near local shops and services to create a vibrant local economy that can meet the needs of people of all ages and abilities. Ensuring Brickbottom grows into a complete neighborhood will align it with the community's larger goals as outlined in SomerVision 2040.

“(We need to) Sustain a community that is creative and diverse”

## SomerVision2040 Goals

**Support families and promote their longevity in Somerville.** Families have long been a building block of community in Somerville. Families often prefer to stay in one place longer and have more reasons to connect with the larger community (for example through schools, sports, activities) than the average individual. As a result, families can play an essential role in building the rich community fabric we value. We need to prioritize helping Somerville residents who want to stay in the city do so and devote significant resources towards supporting those communities who are most at risk of displacement.

**Help all residents connect.** The current reality is that Somerville's population has seen high levels of turnover. In addition to resisting the displacement of current residents, we should actively welcome new residents and be deliberate about facilitating connections between all members of the community.

**Ensure diversity of the housing stock.** For Somerville to be a lifelong community, it needs housing for all stages of life. From infancy through old age, people's individual and family needs change. This relates to the size of units, but also their location, type of building, and accessibility to name a few. Somerville has a fairly monotonous housing supply of 1, 2, and 3-family wood frame homes. We need to strive to create different types of housing suitable for the different stages in life, even if that does introduce differences in our housing stock.

**Promote continuity.** By increasing the diversity in our housing stock, we can better promote continuity of the community, increase the age diversity, and further enforce our overarching vision of making Somerville an exceptional place to live, work, play, raise a family, and grow older.

**Design.** Although people may think parks have one use, such as a playground or playing field, there are many users in one space because generally people use open space that's within easy access to their residence. Park designs should include elements for a wide variety of user.



## Plan for A Future Centered on People, Not Vehicles.

When we plan our spaces and community around people, we get vibrant places where people want to spend time. We should begin by imagining what kind of environment we want to live, work, and play in before limiting our vision to accommodate utilities. Designing places to accommodate vehicles first has often led us to inhospitable, unwelcoming environments. Vehicles are tools that assist in the quality of life in a neighborhood, but they should not be the primary focus of the neighborhood's public space.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Create places that are hospitable and welcoming to all people.
- **Action:** Accommodate vehicles only as needed to further the community's vision and goals.
- **Action:** Create spaces that are flexible and multi-purpose so they can accommodate people at times and vehicles at others.

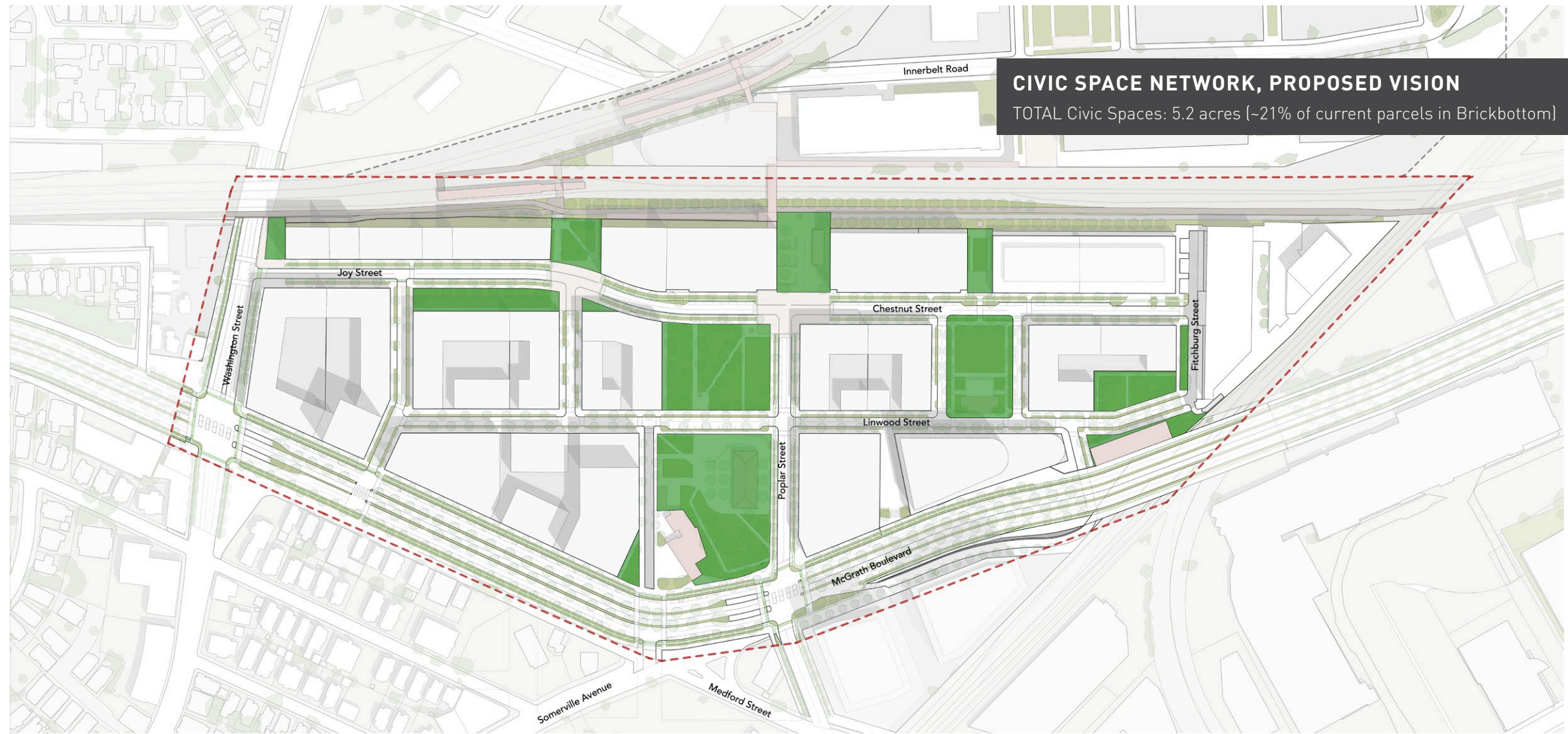


## Create New Quality Open Spaces.

Brickbottom is a relatively compact land area with no neighborhood parks or public civic spaces. The streets are also largely devoid of landscaping, creating a harsh environment. The community has invested a lot of time and effort to make ArtFarm a reality, but no other planned green or open civic spaces exist. We recognize the need for additional open civic spaces as an essential component of creating a complete neighborhood.

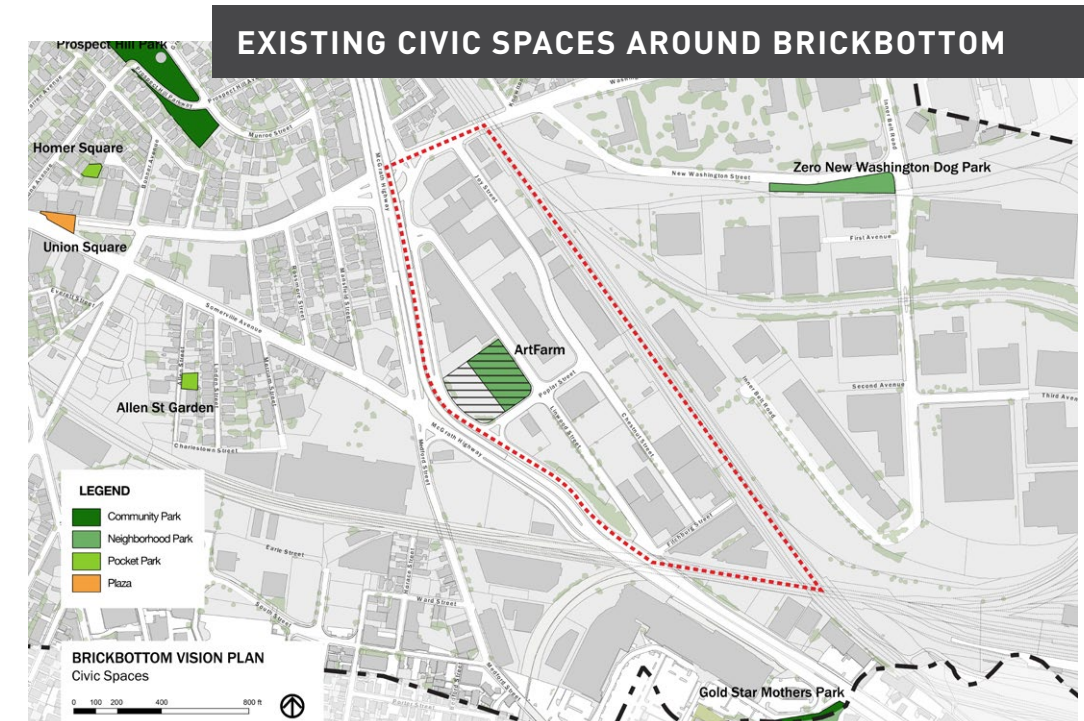
### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Ensure that there is a small-scale civic space like a Pocket Plaza or Pocket Park, as defined in the Zoning Ordinance, within a 3-minute walk of every building. Ensure there is a medium-sized civic space, such as a Through Block Plaza, a Green, or a Neighborhood Park, as defined in the Zoning Ordinance, within a 5-minute walk of every building in Brickbottom.
- **Action:** Develop a regulatory framework for implementing new civic spaces in an organized and coordinated fashion to ensure public space development is not left solely to the private sector. To meet the SomerVision open space goals as a transformational area, Brickbottom should dedicate 20% of its land to open space (around 5 acres for Brickbottom).
- **Action:** Encourage a balance of abundant plantings and usable open spaces. Include substantial tree canopy coverage in the design of private and public spaces to create a more pleasant and sustainable area.
- **Action:** Develop a coordinated plan that defines activities, uses, and goals for civic spaces of different scales around the neighborhood.



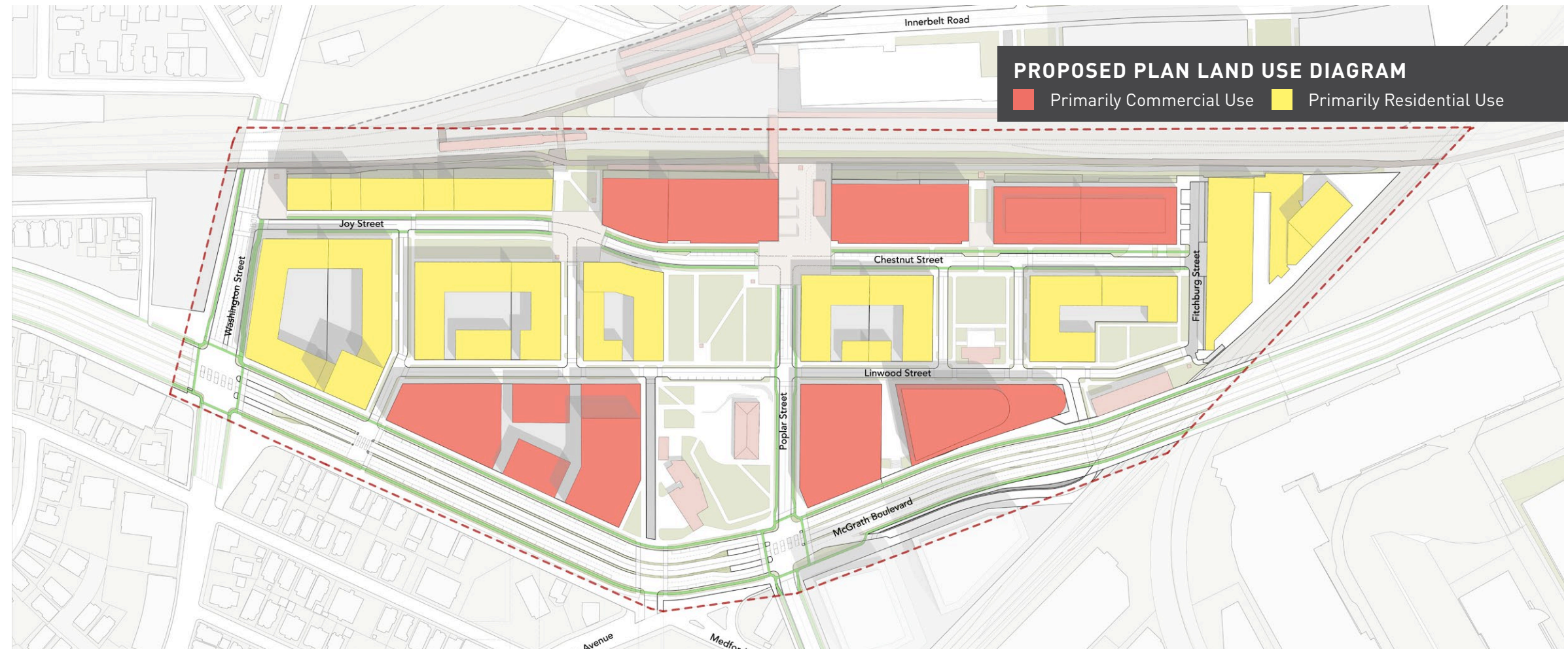
“(We need) Outdoor spaces to congregate”

“Civic Spaces with grass and places to sit”



## Pursue A Balance of Integrated Land Uses.

The community sees Brickbottom evolving into a more vibrant neighborhood while also maintaining some of its current industrial character. Great neighborhoods have a mix of different uses which complement one another. Many people find the idea of maintaining the current “funky vibe” while also adding new uses and users a compelling vision. Making Brickbottom more inviting for residential, commercial, and other uses should contribute to developing a balanced and functional neighborhood.



### Proposed Vision Plan General Areas:

- **Current Parcels:** 24.84 acres
- **Commercial Uses:** aprox 9.3 acres
- **Residential/Mixed Uses:** aprox 10.1 acres
- **Civic Spaces:** aprox 5.2 acres\*

\* ArtFarm (aprox 1.5 acres) + New Civic Spaces (aprox 3.7 acres)



## Foster Places Where People Know Their Neighbors.

The existing residents of Brickbottom enjoy a close-knit community, and that social aspect of the neighborhood should be encouraged. As Brickbottom grows in population, bringing daily services and businesses within a short walk of residents and workers is vital. A local cafe and a corner store will help create spaces where neighbors could meet by chance, expanding and strengthening the social bonds in the neighborhood.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Encourage small local shops, restaurants, and any other type of spaces that cater to locals and encourage social interaction.
- **Action:** Support the creation of a neighborhood group that is open to everyone living and working in the neighborhood. This group could host social functions and assist with guiding the area's transformation.

*Pedestrian Street in the Hackney Wick Arts District in London.*



## Promote Vibrant Daytime Street Life.

Today Brickbottom's streets are mainly empty. People fear the quick-moving truck or car coming around the corner. The community desires a public realm that feels safe and welcoming to pedestrians. The streets in Brickbottom should be vibrant places filled with trees and people, walking dogs, unloading gear for performances, sitting and enjoying each other's company, or making their way home.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Ensure that civic spaces in the neighborhood are welcoming and have places for people to linger in public, which are not monetized or commercially focused.
- **Action:** Encourage active ground floor uses and variety along key streets like Chestnut, Joy, Linwood, and Poplar through incentives and regulation.
- **Action:** Make it easy for businesses and residents to use sidewalks and public spaces for sales displays, outdoor dining, art installations, and other social uses.
- **Action:** Ensure all public spaces have activities and programming that consider 18 hours of activity. Public open spaces should be active morning, afternoon, so they are not deserted at certain times of the day.

## Preserve and Create Varied Housing Types.

Brickbottom can and should contribute to the City's larger SomerVision 2040 goals for housing production. The creation of affordable homes presents a significant opportunity to help the neighborhood transform. Because of the area's relatively small size, consideration should be given early in the redevelopment process to integrate plans for a range of housing types.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Work with the OPSCD's Housing Division, the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust Fund, landowners, and other housing resources to create a housing implementation plan for the area.
- **Action:** Create an economic and investment plan for preserving both affordable residential units as well as arts and creative enterprise spaces in the neighborhood.
- **Action:** Allow and pursue a range of housing types which can accommodate a variety of lifestyles

“Artists are not all single people. Artists have families too.”

# 7.2 SUPPORT ARTS & CREATIVE USES

Foster the existing arts community while expanding into new and related fields and developing a reputation as an arts destination.

## SomerVision2040 Goals

**Support and protect artists.** With rising costs, special effort is needed to preserve and extend Somerville's status as a home for artists and musicians.

**Find ways for commercial development to support small businesses.** Explore how to leverage new development to provide additional benefits including small retail spaces or more affordable space for new and existing independent, local businesses.

**Continue to support small businesses.** Work to create an environment that enables existing small businesses to thrive and produce entrepreneurial opportunities for new ones. Ensure that the regulatory environment supports the innovative business models necessary for businesses to adapt.



Studio space in Joy Street Studios.

## Promote Equitable and Inclusive Access to the Arts

The Somerville artist community is struggling with the lack of affordability of both living and workspaces. As new spaces are created special attention must be paid to keeping costs low through all possible strategies. Creating art spaces close together not only fosters community but also facilitates the use of shared facilities and the pooling of resources for materials and tools suitable for sharing, decreasing costs.

Different approaches to housing development oriented towards cooperative living and shared common spaces, and/or minimalistic living areas with large central spaces that could work well as studios, tend to be particularly beneficial for artists.

As it develops, the Brickbottom Art District can also offer programs to help foster a new generation of young artists, particularly those from low-income backgrounds that may otherwise not have the opportunity to be exposed to the professional art world. This could include mentorship programs, internships, and art classes funded by the City and offered particularly to low-income students, youth living in public housing, and at-risk youth. Such initiatives would offer more work for local artists, introduce art as a career option, and provide a broad social benefit to youth given the inherent personal growth value of artistic expression.

### Recommended Actions:

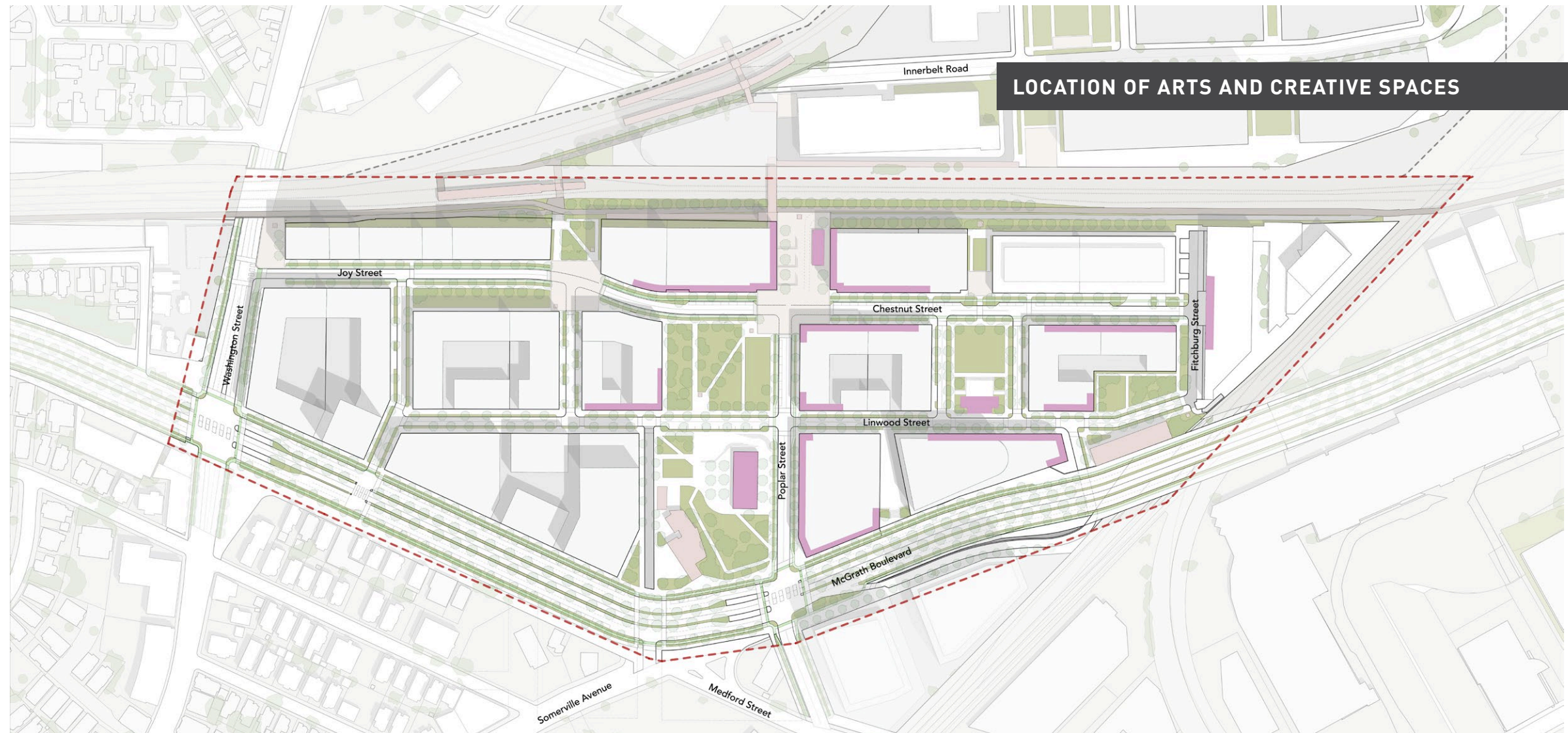
- **Action:** Explore ways to incentivize and facilitate the development of cooperative art and creative uses-oriented spaces with a focus on shared facilities, to reduce the cost to individual artists.
- **Action:** Explore ways to incentivize and facilitate the development of cooperative-style housing with flexible spaces that could double as studios. While these spaces would not be limited to the use of artists, they are particularly appealing to creative workers.
- **Action:** Assist the Somerville Arts Council and Public School System to explore the creation of a mentorship program connecting youth interested in the arts with experienced local artists.
- **Action:** Provide City funding and leverage both existing local youth social program and the Brickbottom Art District facilities and community as it develops to provide free art, theater, dance, and other creative-type classes to at-risk and low-income youth.

## Prioritize Spaces for the Arts and Creative Activities.

The vision for Brickbottom calls for leveraging and building upon the existing art community to enable the neighborhood to grow into a destination for arts and culture. To realize this vision for a new Art District, the area will need a broad range of spaces for art to be made, shown, sold, taught, and enjoyed. There is a unique opportunity, given Brickbottom's history and growing accessibility, to create a variety of new creative use spaces over the following years. Preserving existing social bonds and relationships will also be essential and will require ensuring the existing art community has access to good quality workspaces within the neighborhood while it redevelops. The neighborhood will also need a greater variety of creative uses in addition to more artist studios, including performing arts theaters, music practice spaces, maker spaces, art and crafts class spaces, galleries, and gallery hybrids.

### Recommended Actions:

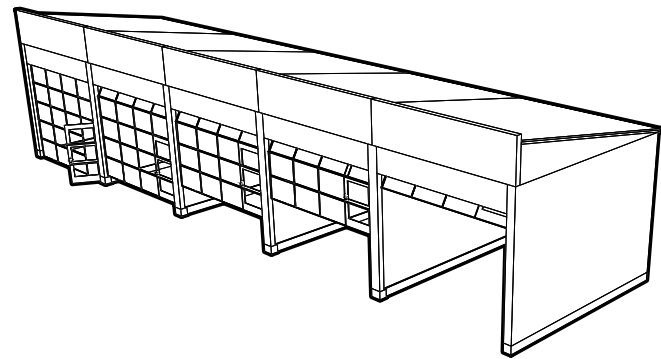
- **Action:** Cultivate an arts-oriented neighborhood by providing the resources and support needed to maintain the existing creative community and expand it. Foster the emergence of a diverse, vibrant, and authentic arts scene by enabling the presence of many different creative fields living, working, showing, and performing in the same neighborhood.
- **Action:** Update the current zoning policies so that the percentage of required arts and creative enterprise space more specifically addresses the space needs and economic conditions of the current art community and those the neighborhood needs to attract.
- **Action:** Develop policies and regulations to allow ACE space requirements from multiple developments to be combined and generate creative hubs.
- **Action:** Establish alternative pathways for large development projects to financially support the creation of arts and creative enterprise spaces.
- **Action:** Provide density bonuses or other incentive mechanisms in exchange for developers building more art spaces than is required.
- **Action:** Assist in creating artist-led local organizations to support the existing arts community. Enable this organization to ensure a more open and productive dialogue occurs between the community, developers and property owners, and the City.
- **Action:** Launch a Comprehensive Cultural Plan to analyze the full ecosystem of ACE uses and spaces that support ACE uses and to recommend an art spaces development strategy.
- **Action:** Coordinate with developers and help establish viable transition plans if any existing art space will be redeveloped to ensure those communities can stay in the neighborhood in the interim.
- **Action:** Study how specific areas in the neighborhood can accommodate theaters, clubs, music venues, and other performance spaces to further support the arts. Ensure that the needs and impacts of these uses are considered and that coexistence with residential uses is addressed appropriately.
- **Action:** In addition to the studios, workshops, and performance spaces, the envisioned creative community will need cafes, bars, galleries, music halls, public squares, and other "third spaces" that allow the people to bump into neighbors and colleagues— "The Bump Factor"



## Encourage Pop-up or Temporary Arts and Cultural Spaces

The underused land areas industrial businesses and property owners in Brickbottom currently have available can be offered to the community for creative uses in the short-term, until more long-term spaces are established. With relatively minor changes to parking lots, service or work yards, and fencing, many areas could have inexpensive, temporary art spaces installed seasonally or even year-round.

The relatively low cost to install facilities built from shipping containers, Quonset huts, or pole barns as temporary or pop-up facilities can enable us to begin attracting more artists and visitors even in the early stages of implementation. These structures could be reused repeatedly across the neighborhood or even in other areas of the City. Temporary installations are also key to testing and refining longer-term ideas, as well as establishing a more collaborative approach to integrating the arts into more permanent infrastructures in the future.



Examples of temporary and pop-up structures for art and cultural spaces



### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Create an implementation plan for methods the City can use to directly support the creation and operations of pop-up spaces, possibly including tax benefits or other financial incentives.
- **Action:** Establish a working group, coordinated with the Somerville Arts Council, to further develop the pop-up concept in parallel with the long-term space needs of the arts and creative businesses in the neighborhood.
- **Action:** Establish a working group, coordinated with the Somerville Art's Council, to further develop the pop-up concept in parallel with the long-term space needs of the arts and creative businesses in the neighborhood
- **Action:** Work with property owners and developers to establish flexible leasing and occupancy programs and solutions for providing power, insulating, and other challenges to make pop-up spaces and temporary installations possible. This quick approach to creating space can be complex, but with support and coordination from various City departments, the City can craft a program to overcome these hurdles.

## Celebrate Art in Public Spaces

To create an Arts District, art must be celebrated at every opportunity. This should include utilizing the neighborhood itself as a canvas and venue for the arts, and ensuring it is continuously evolving. Displaying or performing art in public requires infrastructure that can range from a simple electric outlet for musical instruments to large sculpture installations with significant foundations or possible water needs. Creating permanent and temporary art displays ranging from painted murals on unutilized flat surfaces, to sculptures or installations in public areas, to stage areas that encourage outdoor performances, will be essential to establishing the art's district character and providing local artists with work opportunities.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Create a Public Art Plan for the neighborhood to encourage and guide property owners and developers in providing locations for public art.
- **Action:** Support the Somerville Arts Council in funding, coordinating, and setting up the infrastructure required for the creation of an extensive public art presence in the neighborhood in a wide range of mediums.

Mural by Calo Rosa in East Somerville



## Create Compelling Reasons to Visit and Stay

Brickbottom can play host to art festivals and other performances and activities inspired by how other well-known art districts have done to bring in audiences, visitors, and patrons for the arts. Well marketed initiatives such as art in storefronts programs, open markets, open studio days, art mural tours, live music, and cultural performances can be catalytic to reaching new audiences, driving regional tourism, and creating a brand identity for the district. Creating compelling reasons to spend time in Brickbottom will help enhance the neighborhood's overall public life, ultimately benefitting other types of local businesses as well. Hosting seasonal and special events can also lead to discoveries that can improve the future development of the civic spaces and facilities in the area to continuously improve public activity.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Create recurring Somerville cultural events to attract residents from other neighborhoods in Somerville to Brickbottom and encourage them to support our local artists.
- **Action:** Create and market recurring events in the neighborhood that are attractive to the larger Greater Boston regional art scene.
- **Action:** Enable conditions that will produce a critical mass of art events, activities, and supporting business to make Brickbottom known as a venue for the arts.
- **Action:** Plan for places that the neighborhood residents can use to gather regularly, including wellness activities such as group exercises, dance classes, and artistic collaboration.

## Care for Brickbottom's Identity

Many have mentioned Brickbottom's funky character as an endearing quality, and hope it remains as the neighborhood evolves. The implementation process should include a further definition of what design and architectural traits capture this character so it can be both maintained and expanded to strengthen Brickbottom's identity. Great art districts have an iconic and recognizable character, but care is necessary to ensure that this identity is authentic and sincerely emerges from the arts and creative community.

“We value the [gritty, arts] character of the neighborhood”

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Survey existing building stock to determine the age and condition of structures for potential re-use and expansion rather than demolition.
- **Action:** Create channels for local artists to be actively involved in the neighborhood's planning, design, and construction.
- **Action:** Approach the overall design feel of the neighborhood as a “canvas,” so the art can shine and become its defining character.
- **Action:** Create opportunities for artists and local makers to design and fabricate the civic elements of the neighborhoods, such as street furniture, kiosk, and signage. The City can directly support creating jobs for artists and makers by making these items locally.

Neon Williams in Brickbottom





## Develop Financial Support for the Arts

Creating conditions and opportunities where the public and private sectors financially support the arts requires leadership. There are great examples of places with vibrant arts scenes where direct investment in these efforts was essential to creating the conditions for success. Champions will be needed to help fund, fundraise, and organize support for the arts. History has shown that investing in the Arts can produce great cultural and economic returns on investment.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Leverage the Somerville Arts Council's expertise to lead and organize the funding for the arts in Brickbottom as well as what additional capacity Somerville Arts Council and other City staff might need to ensure Brickbottom remains a long-term vibrant creative hub.
- **Action:** Establish mechanisms to create buy-back standards for ACE space requirements and establish a municipal fund to receive in-lieu payments.
- **Action:** Create a database to track artists' and creatives' workspace needs.
- **Action:** Task the Somerville Arts Council and the City's Economic Development team with determining whether a Business Improvement District would be suitable for this area.
- **Action:** Study establishing Brickbottom as an Innovation District focused on the arts.



Public Art in Wynwood, Miami.



# 7.3 IMPROVE ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY

Enhance connections within and around the neighborhood, prioritizing safe and comfortable pedestrian and bicycle amenities, leveraging mass transit investments, and limiting parking.

## SomerVision2040 Goals

### Increase transportation equity across the city.

Historically, marginalized groups – specifically low-income communities and communities of color – have been left out of planning processes. These groups tend to live in areas with inadequate and unsafe transportation infrastructure. The City should increase access in underserved neighborhoods.

**Reduce.** Minimize the overall space in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles.

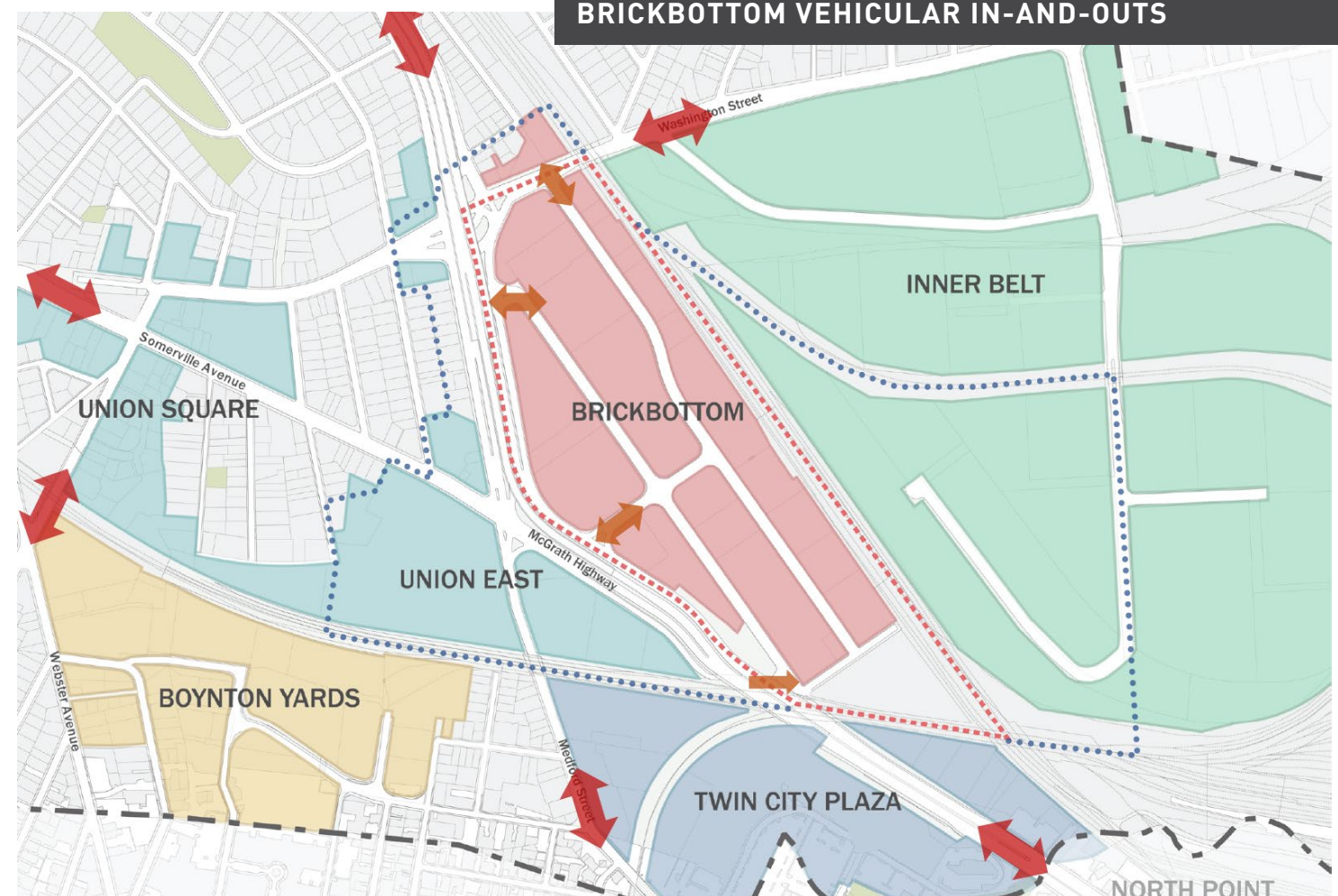
**Prioritize vulnerable road users.** When designing our streets, they must be safe for pedestrians, cyclists, people with disabilities, children, roadway workers, and other vulnerable populations and may require dedicated infrastructure for these users.

**Prioritize walking, biking, and transit access.** Cities are more enjoyable, safer, and more economically prosperous when more space is dedicated to people than cars. Use reclaimed space to create new public spaces, safe infrastructure for sustainable mode users, and other community uses.

“Connect Brickbottom to surrounding neighborhoods and transit”



Brickbottom is currently surrounded by barriers like the MBTA ROW (left) and the elevated McGrath Highway (right), isolating the neighborhood from the rest of the city.

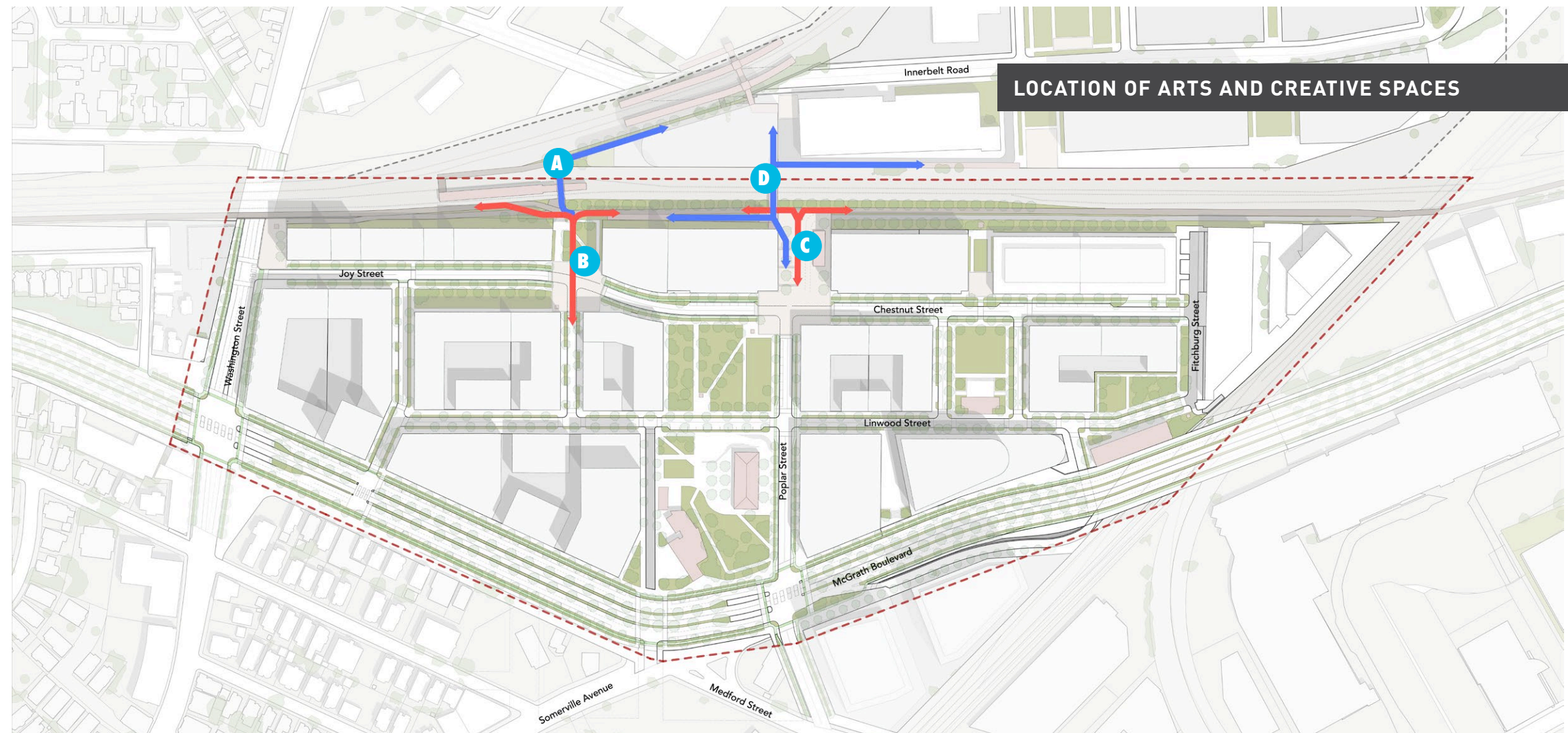


## Create pedestrian and cycle connections between Brickbottom, the Community Path, Innerbelt, and Milk Square.

One of Brickbottom's main accessibility challenges is the limited connections to the larger city street network. This results in insufficient options people to enter or leave the neighborhood. Currently, Brickbottom has only four entry and three exit points.

Due to the location of significant infrastructure, Brickbottom has largely been cut off from surrounding areas. Rail beds to the east and south prevent any access, and the McGrath Highway and overpass to the west reduce pedestrian and even automotive access significantly. The entire neighborhood functions much like a cul-de-sac, with most access, limited to only Joy Street.

Creating connections with surrounding areas is an essential goal of the community and is key to the long-term success of Brickbottom. While Innerbelt has been disconnected from Brickbottom for as long as the railroads have existed in the area, tying the two areas together could provide both neighborhoods significant benefits. Connections to the Community Path and across the rail tracks will shorten the traveled distance to the new Green Line station for most residents.



LOCATION OF ARTS AND CREATIVE SPACES

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Study several potential connections on the east side of Brickbottom that would include:

- Connection(s) across the rail tracks into Innerbelt

- Connection(s) to the Community Path and additional access to the GLX station

All options have different degrees of complexity and require further analysis.

### LEGEND

- Potential new Community Path and Green Line Station Access off Joy Street: Creating an additional access point to the Green Line station directly off Joy Street would improve the service coverage of the station by decreasing the walking distance to the station entrance from the interior of the Brickbottom. This path would also provide additional access to the Community Path and a potential connection across the rail tracks with Innerbelt through the Green Line station.
- At-grade connection to Innerbelt from Brickbottom and through the Green Line station
- Poplar Street connection to the Community Path: Following the easement for stormwater infrastructure, a connection to the Community Path may be possible at the east end of Poplar Street through the envisioned "Neon Williams Plaza". This area should also be studied for a bridge connection over the rail tracks to Innerbelt.
- Potential connection to Innerbelt over the rail tracks

## Create pedestrian and cycle connections between Brickbottom, the Community Path, Innerbelt, and Milk Square.



BRT Boulevard proposed for Northern Los Angeles

### Recommended Actions (cont.):

- **Action:** Support the implementation of the short-term improvements to McGrath Highway underway by MassDOT. A road-diet including infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians is also expected to calm traffic and mitigate automotive hazards.
- **Action:** Actively collaborate with State authorities to design a human-scaled multi-modal McGrath Boulevard. In the longer-term, McGrath Highway is expected to be grounded allowing a better visual and experiential connection across the boulevard, tying Brickbottom to the Union Square and future Milk Square areas.
- **Action:** Analyze alternatives for rebuilding the northern Squire's Bridge embankment and reducing the slope to provide better access to the bridge from abutting parcels.
- **Action:** Collaborate with MassDOT to define strategies to improve the connection over the Squires Bridge for better pedestrian connections south across the tracks towards Twin City Plaza and East Cambridge.

### MCGRATH BOULEVARD WITH CENTRAL RAPID BUS



## Set a standard that 75% of all new person-trips must be by transit, walking, biking, or rideshare.

This plan accounts for the impact to accessibility and mobility that new development in the other neighboring transformation areas will have on Brickbottom. Even with aggressive parking policies, preliminary modeling indicates that development in these areas could include over six thousand new parking spaces. Per SomerVision 2040 and based on projected network capacity, only about 25% of new person-trips could be accommodated with new parking.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Improve the walking and biking environment urgently to induce the use of a variety of modes of transportation from day one of new development activities.
- **Action:** Limit the amount of new parking developed in the neighborhood based on the expected new person-trips for the area.
- **Action:** Ensure all street design encourages walking and biking.

*Current auto-oriented street in Brickbottom vs a People-oriented street in the wharf District in DC.*



## Build a safer, inviting, and continuous environment for walking and biking.

Most street frontages within Brickbottom lack proper sidewalks and pedestrian amenities. Minimal sidewalks exist along McGrath Highway and the neighborhood itself, but they are not pedestrian friendly. Many lots have been paved to the curb with asphalt, while others lack curbing. The intersections along Poplar have received some initial short-term intervention in the form of painted areas along the curb to connect crosswalks. Overall, pedestrian infrastructure is minimal and insufficient.

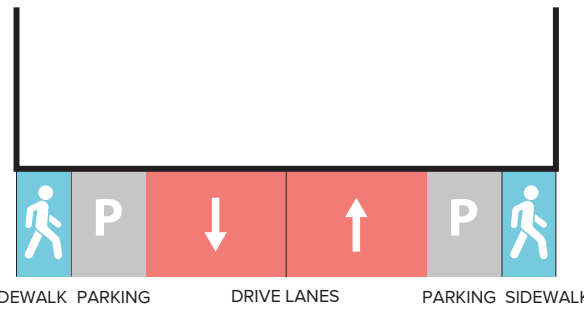
### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Center all design and infrastructure improvements around people. This area needs to shift from an auto-oriented neighborhood to a place that guarantees pedestrian comfort and safety.
- **Action:** Utilize short-term changes to existing streets to improve the streetscape conditions until there are long-term solutions.
- **Action:** Reduce driveway curb cuts and improve sidewalk crossings.
- **Action:** Design new and existing streets to better accommodate comfortable and safe pedestrian and cycle infrastructure within the current right-of-way.

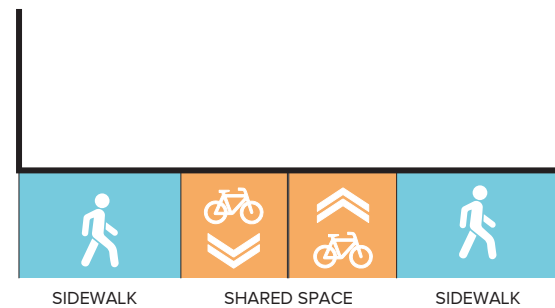


CHESTNUT STREET STREETScape WITH BIKE LANE

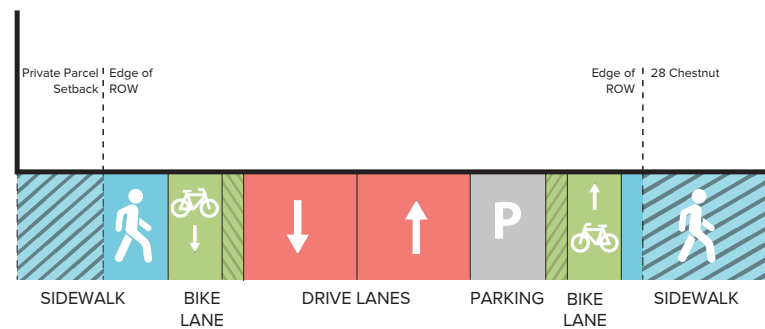
“Make Brickbottom comfortable for pedestrians and bikes”



Existing street section (~50ft ROW)



Wider Sidewalks street section (~50ft ROW)



Chestnut Street Sidewalk Extension (~70ft ROW)



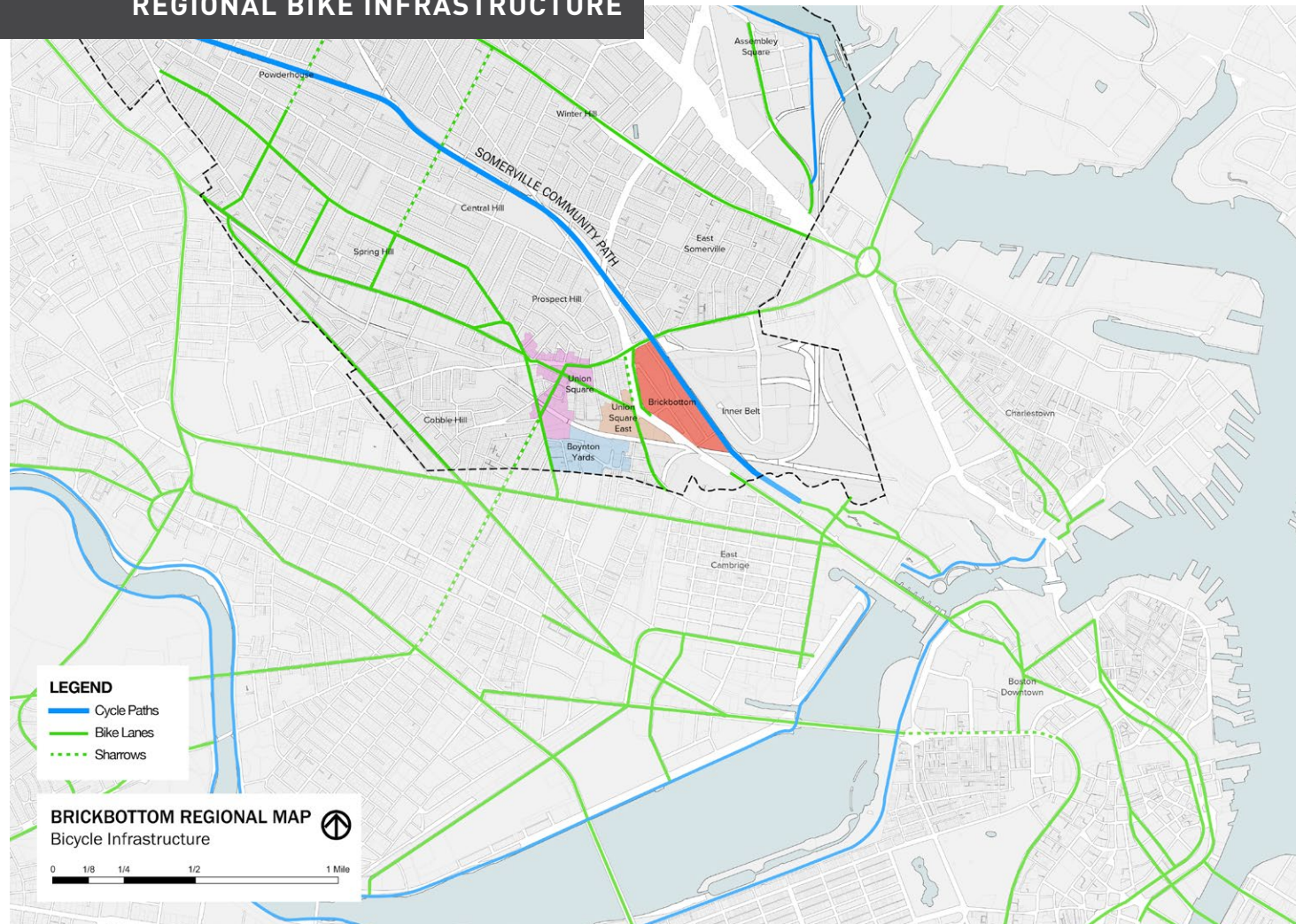
SECONDARY STREETS STREETScape DESIGN

## Build a safer, inviting, and continuous environment for walking and biking.

### Recommended Actions (cont.):

- **Action:** Expand bicycle access from within Brickbottom connecting to the Community Path.
- **Action:** Build safe bicycle infrastructure along key routes within and around Brickbottom, according to Somerville's already successful examples.

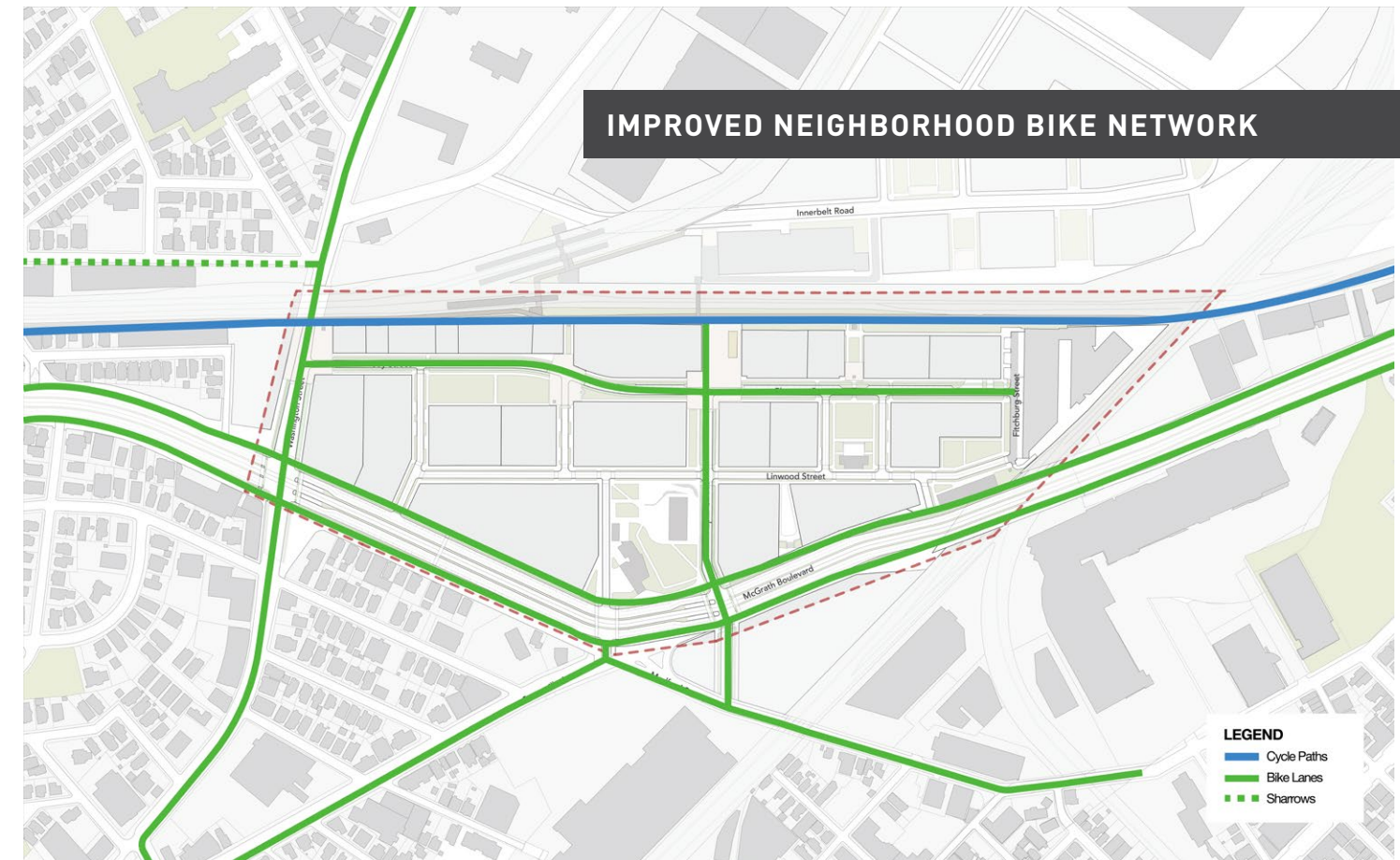
### REGIONAL BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE



### EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD BIKE NETWORK



### IMPROVED NEIGHBORHOOD BIKE NETWORK



## Reduce block length and overall perimeter size.

The existing block structure is the result of a long history of changing uses and informal planning. The current layout is not ideal for local circulation, especially walking, with unusually long blocks (some over 1,000 feet long) and few connections.

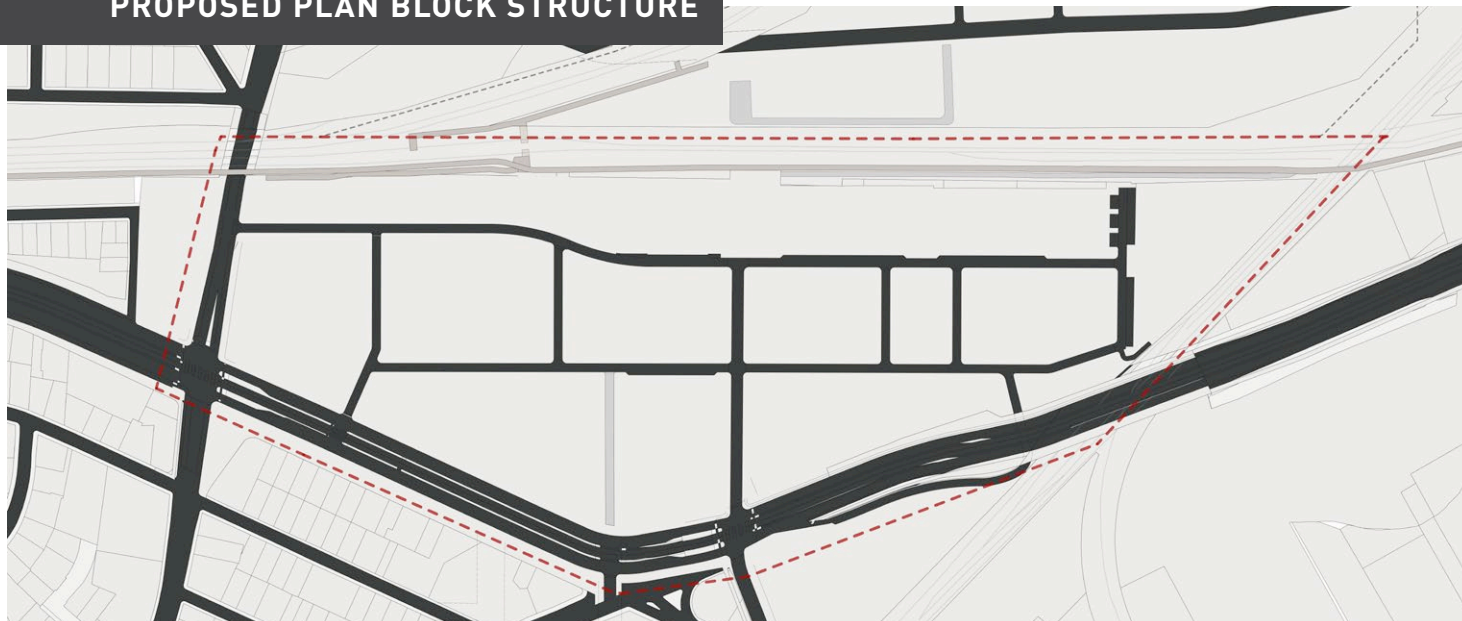
### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Actively collaborate with landowners and developers to break down parcels into smaller parts. The current block dimensions are narrow on the east-west alignment and very long in the north-south direction, meaning that several additional east-west thoroughfares are needed to connect Joy/Chestnut Streets with Linwood Street and McGrath Boulevard.

EXISTING BLOCK STRUCTURE



PROPOSED PLAN BLOCK STRUCTURE



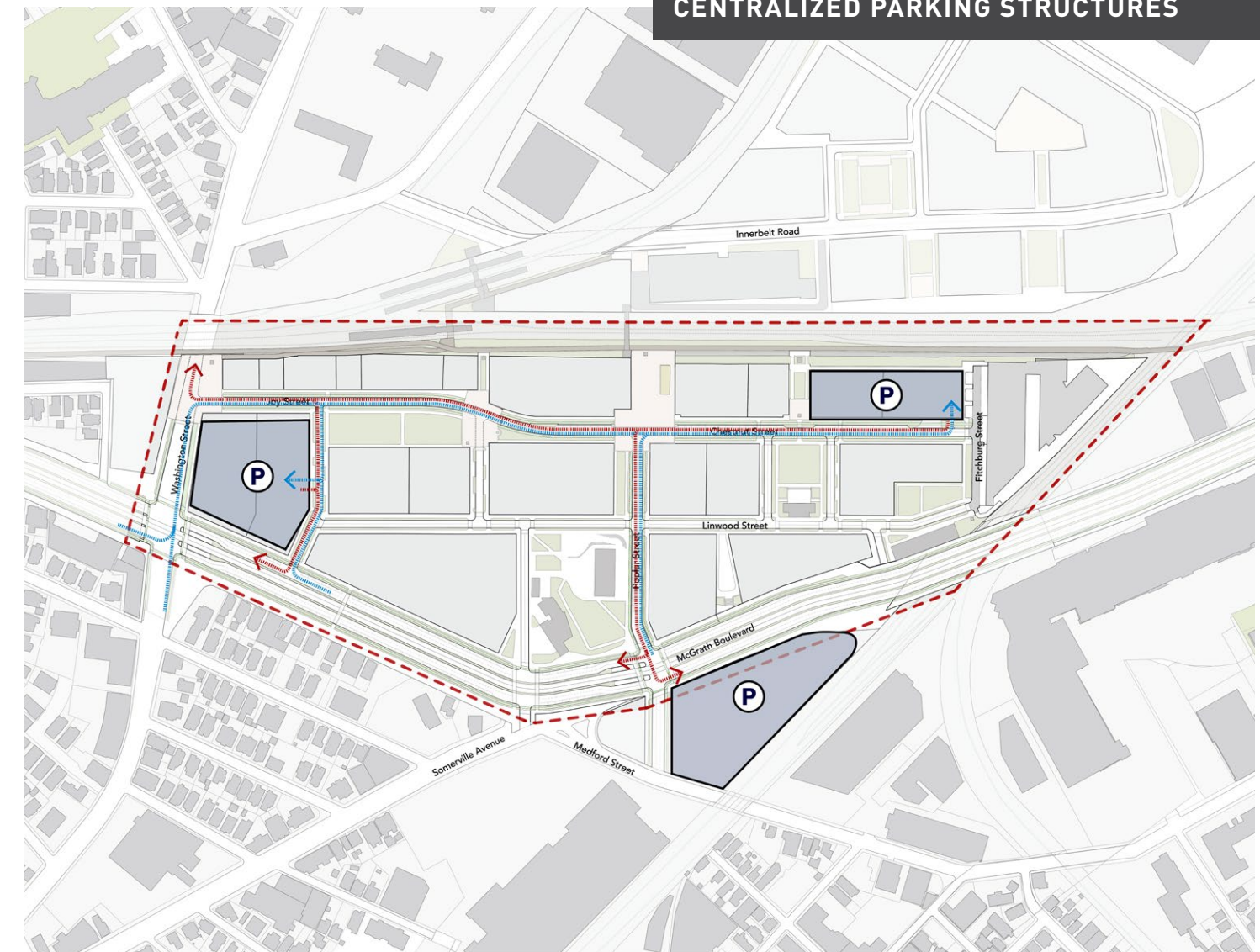
## Avoid 'vertical culs-de-sac' and implement a 'park-once strategy'.

New development should encourage people to be on the streets and use the whole neighborhood. Buildings cannot be allowed to create 'vertical culs-de-sac' where people arrive at Brickbottom via car and park under a building they do not leave except when they leave the neighborhood by car again. 'Vertical culs-de-sac' isolate people from the neighborhood and hurt street life and activity.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Create a plan for consolidating parking into structured underground facilities that are shared by users of the neighborhood. This allows and encourages people who arrive by car to "park once" and then travel within the area by foot.
- **Action:** Set a maximum of zero allowed parking spaces in new residential buildings within a quarter-mile walking distance of the new Green Line station

CENTRALIZED PARKING STRUCTURES



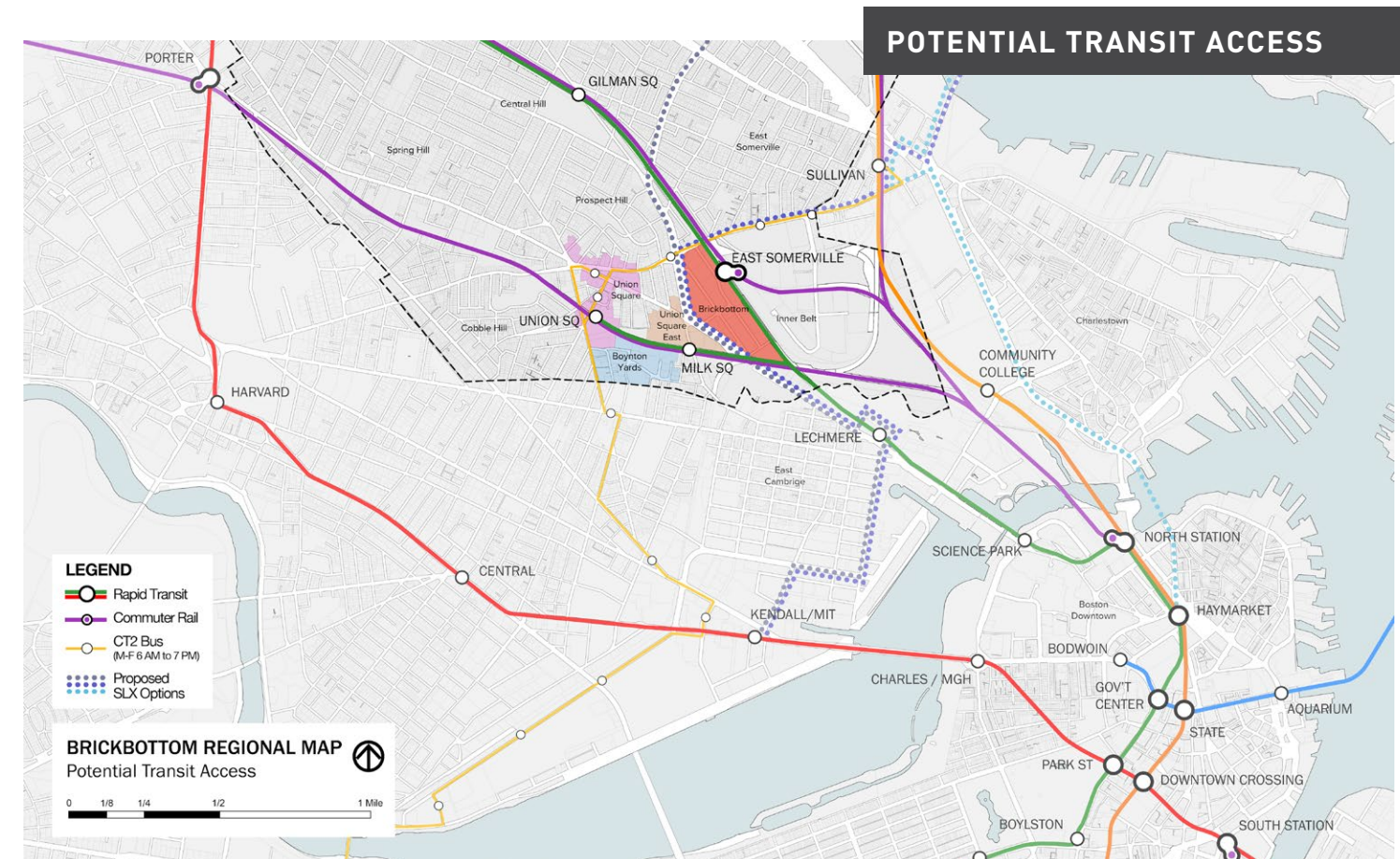
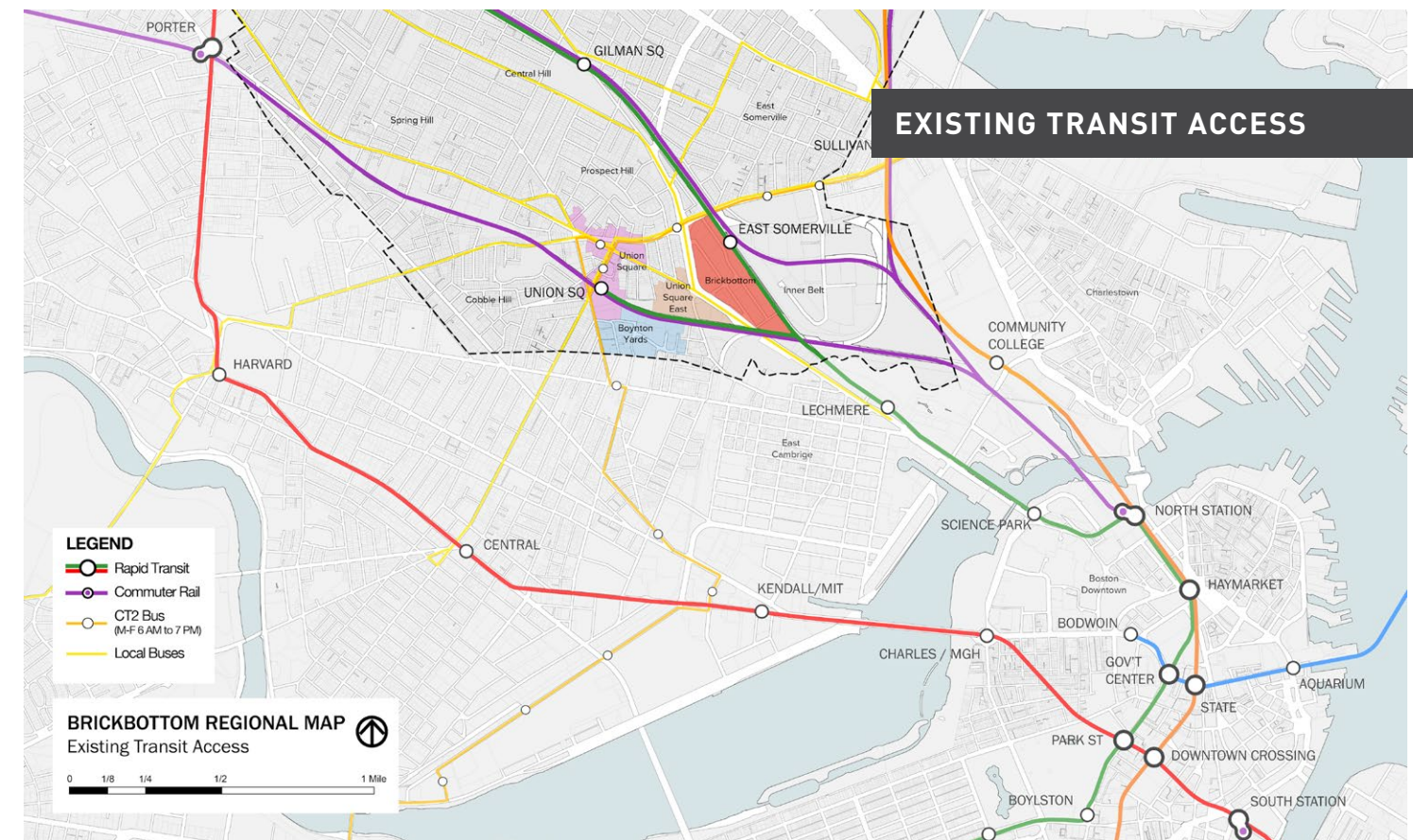
## Leverage and expand upon new and existing transit service.

With MBTA's Green Line (GLX) extension, transit access for Brickbottom will drastically improve. The Green Line's East Somerville Station is directly adjacent to the neighborhood, and the Union Square Station is only about ¼ mile away. These stations will fundamentally change how connected this area is to the region.

While the extension of the Green Line is a crucial improvement, additional work is still needed to strengthen other connections. Accessing many areas in Somerville, Cambridge, and less central sections of the larger Boston area can still be complicated or time-consuming. Further improving Somerville's transit connectivity will help reduce car trips.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Actively collaborate with the MBTA on the analysis of the Silver Line Extension (SLX), which includes several alternatives that could utilize McGrath Highway.
- **Action:** Enhance the bus connections from Brickbottom to Boynton Yards and Kendall Square.
- **Action:** Coordinate mobility management programs with developments in the surrounding transformation areas, especially regarding privately financed systems for carshare, bikeshare and micro-mobility, or shuttle systems.
- **Action:** Engage in conversations with the MBTA to consider changes to the local bus network which can better integrate bus service into the neighborhood. Complimenting new Green Line service, some bus lines could modify their routes to go through or near Brickbottom and incorporate the new East Somerville Station into their service.
- **Action:** Explore the possibility of advocating the addition of a Lowell line Commuter Rail stop adjacent to the new East Somerville Green Line station, especially as the MBTA considers the electrification of the commuter rail lines.





# 7.4 IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABLE & HUMAN-SCALED DESIGN

Ensure a sustainable path forward while keeping the people who live and work in Brickbottom at the center of future growth.

## SomerVision2040 Goals

**Focus on our largest GHG contributor.** Buildings are the largest contributor to Somerville's emissions, and we need to continue to focus on them even though we have limited leverage.

**Promote sustainability in commercial development.** Ensure that commercial development uses sustainable design, technology, and practices.

**Utilize innovative and sustainable solutions.** Updating our water and sewer systems is integral to climate change mitigation in Somerville.

**Prioritize sustainability.** Our parks and public realm are designed with climate and sustainability in mind, which sometimes can be at odds with maintenance concerns or design aesthetic. We need to prioritize sustainability in every public space.

## Establish Incentives and Standards for Green Building Practices.

The new development in Brickbottom has an opportunity to set new standards for green building practices and sustainable urban design. Addressing sustainability issues related to buildings can be a major component in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Incentivize green and sustainable building practices beyond the minimum zoning requirements with density or other bonuses and explore the feasibility of various LEED, ILFI, PHIUS, and other sustainability standards.
- **Action:** Set specific targets and actionable goals to address community wide issues like the heat-island effect and stormwater management.
- **Action:** Consider requirements for the electrification of central heating systems and other means to reduce greenhouse gasses produced by buildings themselves.
- **Action:** Incorporate sustainability interventions throughout the private and public realm.

## Support the Implementation of ArtFarm.

The completion of ArtFarm is essential to the vision for Brickbottom's future. This space will be the center of the neighborhood and provide a unique space for the cultural activities as they expand in the neighborhood.

### Recommended Actions:

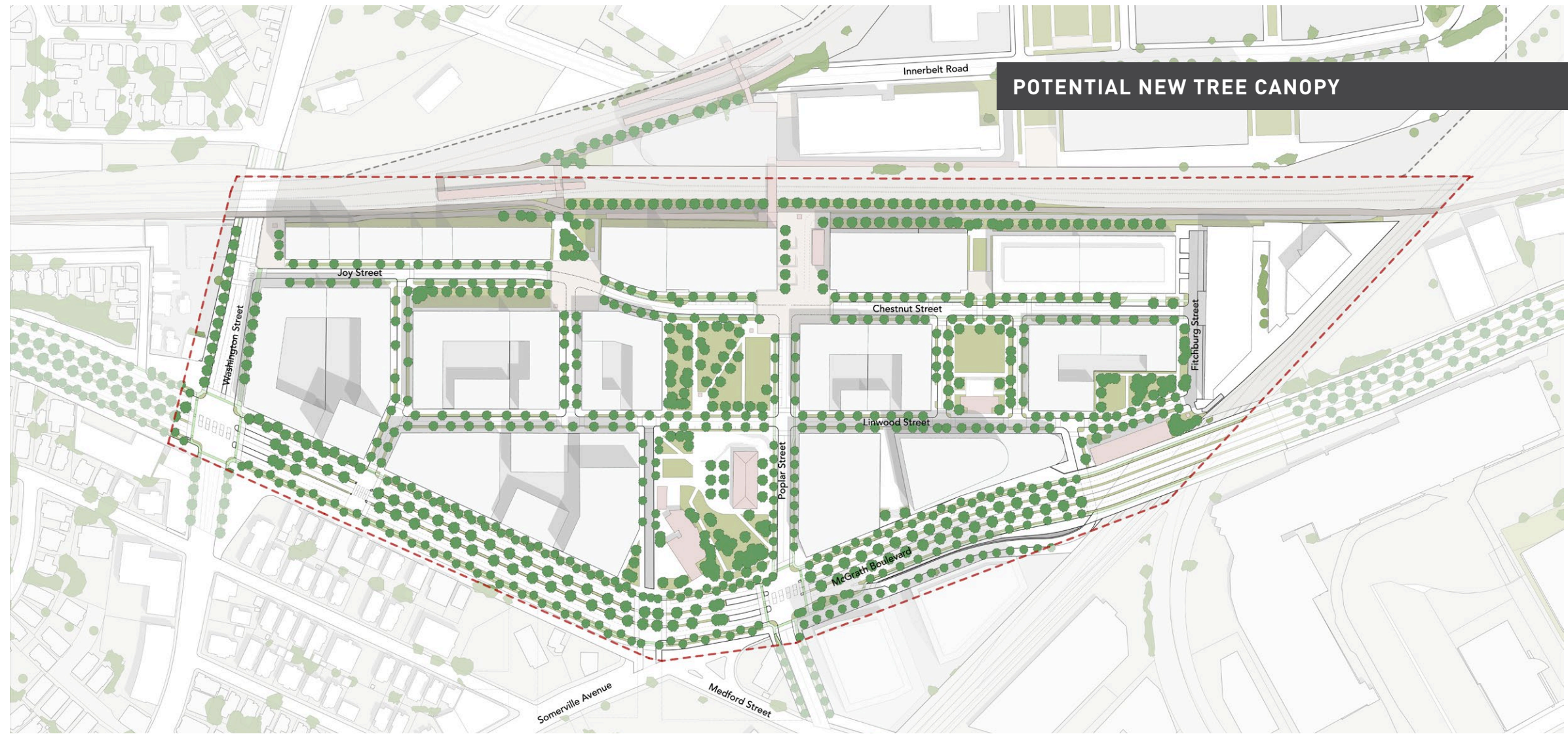
- **Action:** Seek ways for the Brickbottom community to engage with the implementation of ArtFarm throughout the project to encourage support and optimize its usage.
- **Action:** Use the Poplar Street Pump Station as an educational tool for climate change and flooding issues.
- **Action:** Communicate with the community about the steps and interrelated activities occurring to implement ArtFarm.
- **Action:** Build on the success of ArtFarm and set the stage for an extensive open space network within Brickbottom.

## Grow and Maintain a Robust Tree Canopy.

Trees enhance nearly every aspect of city life. The moderate extreme temperatures improve air quality, mitigate stormwater runoff, calm traffic, raise property values, increase retail sales, and provide habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. All of these are in addition to countless other environmental, economic, and public health benefits. Brickbottom is one of the areas in Somerville with the lower percentage of tree canopy coverage. Since Somerville is a densely populated city with challenging conditions for tree growth, a strategic plan is vital to managing the local tree canopy effectively.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Coordinate all urban design and civic spaces with the Urban Forest Management Plan to ensure that the species and planting details are appropriate to increase the tree canopy cover to at least 16% of the Brickbottom area.
- **Action:** Implement complete and green streets to boost roadside cooling and shading. Incorporate trees into traditional water quality and water management infrastructure like roadside planters. Additionally, trees should be included in newer infiltration-based practices like bioswales.
- **Action:** Seek opportunities to reduce hardscaping and expand plantings and green features within civic spaces.



## Minimize Shadows and Maximize Natural Light That Can Reach the Ground.

Urban climate refers to climatic conditions specific to urban areas that are connected to urban development. Considering the direction and effect of sunlight is fundamental for designing buildings and outdoor areas. Outdoor spaces need to be comfortable and welcoming, which warrants careful consideration of light and shadow exposure.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Carefully consider proposed locations of tall buildings in relation to civic spaces.
- **Action:** Pay special attention to solar orientation and interior access to natural light when assessing building design.

## Implement Human-scale Design in Buildings and Civic Spaces.

'Human scale' design means design that is optimized for human use. This approach can be applied to a range of issues, from physical to psychological. This kind of design accommodate people of all abilities and ages.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Adopt design guidelines which require ground-floor design treatments conducive to active and pleasant human use.
- **Action:** Undertake wind studies to reduce the tunnel effect on sidewalks and surrounding areas. The way buildings affect the surrounding microclimate is an important consideration. Strong ground-level winds, often generated around high-rise buildings, can cause pedestrian safety and comfort issues.
- **Action:** Build green infrastructure improvements into regular street upgrades and capital improvement projects to ensure continued investment in heat-reducing practices.



Brickbottom Artist Lofts Courtyard

# 7.5 SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ensure a sustainable path forward and keep the people who live and work in Brickbottom at the center of future growth.

## SomerVision2040 Goals

**Add jobs.** Prioritize commercial development until the number of jobs in Somerville is equal to the number of working residents. This will build a fiscally healthier and more vibrant community. In Boston and Cambridge, the ratio of jobs to working residents is, respectively, 1.6 and 1.8. Currently the Somerville ratio is 0.5..

**Encourage more commercial development.** Develop sufficient commercial property to generate 50% of property tax revenue from commercial sources.

**Find ways for commercial development to support small businesses.** Explore how to leverage new development to provide additional benefits including small retail spaces or more affordable space for new and existing independent, local businesses.

**Promote Somerville as a forward-thinking place to do business.** Enhance Somerville's reputation as a center for technological and environmental innovation.

## Guide intentional office, laboratory, and R&D development and encourage a well-rounded business ecosystem.

Brickbottom has an opportunity to benefit from local and regional conditions, which are attracting office, laboratory, and R&D users to the neighborhood. The community can leverage this demand to address local challenges and ensure a balanced approach while developing the local economy.

## “Collaboration between arts and science”

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Limit the amount and form of office, laboratory, and R&D development within Brickbottom to produce a diverse economy.
- **Action:** Explore ways for apparently conflicting uses such as laboratory and creative enterprise to coexist and complement each other within the local ecosystem.
- **Action:** Require developers of office, laboratory, or R&D space to subsidize the development of artist studios and light manufacturing (maker) space.
- **Action:** Enable light industrial to remain in Brickbottom.

## Amplify the Economic Potential Associated with The Creative Community.

Places often overlook artists and makers as small businesses. Often individuals in these fields are small business owners and contribute significantly to the larger business ecosystem. Arts and creative industries should be developed and fostered as much for the economic benefits as for the cultural benefits.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Recognize artists as small businesses and develop this economic sector like any other.
- **Action:** Encourage the development of spaces that fit the physical needs as well as the financial and economic realities for a range of artists and creative users.
- **Action:** Support increased capacity for the Somerville Arts Council to provide business services and assistance to the arts and creative industries.

## Foster Activities, Education + Experiences

There are already creative people in Brickbottom that are offering classes, showings, and other experiences to the public. These experiences represent an income stream for workers in the creative fields and help build Brickbottom towards a destination for customers looking to buy, learn, and experience art. We need to develop more opportunities, similar to Somerville Open Studios, for inviting and encouraging the public to visit the neighborhood and attend a class, play, live music, or festival.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Recognize artists as small businesses and develop this economic sector like any other.
- **Action:** Encourage the development of spaces that fit the physical needs as well as the financial and economic realities for a range of artists and creative users.
- **Action:** Support increased capacity for the Somerville Arts Council to provide business services and assistance to the arts and creative industries.

## Develop A Larger Ecosystem Within Which Office, Laboratory, Artists, And Creative Users Can All Thrive.

Brickbottom is already hosting a mix of uses that do not appear to belong together but coexist, mostly successfully. The neighborhood should maintain this diversity and strive to accommodate a broad mix of users with a range of needs.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Encourage arts and creativity-related businesses to support the artists and makers, such as suppliers, conservators, repairs, etc.
- **Action:** Implement flexible regulations that can accommodate various users, even some with potentially unique creative needs.
- **Action:** Explore programs to find ways in which seemingly conflicting uses may be able to coexist, if not complement one another.

## Coordinate workforce development initiatives.

Changes to a neighborhood is inherent in redevelopment, but managing those change is essential. We expect some existing users to relocate out of Brickbottom, but we must be committed to supporting all local businesses and employees throughout the process. Connecting the local workforce to growth and development opportunities is a top priority.

### Recommended Actions:

- **Action:** Assist workers with maintaining their livelihood in Somerville when there are business relocations.
- **Action:** Connect existing businesses and employees with workforce development services provided through the City.
- **Action:** Engage with the Somerville Arts Council to foster job growth within the arts.
- **Action:** Promote awareness of job and career opportunities within emerging sectors represented in the district. Promote and make available clear pathways to the training needed for these positions.

