



Harvard and Brighton Avenues, Allston, at dawn.



ALLSTON HERITAGE
FOUNDATION

WHITE PAPER

A market-clearing housing strategy for Boston and Allston-Brighton

What is wrong with Boston's housing market, how many homes it would take to hold rents steady or bring them down, and what that would mean for Allston-Brighton's residents.



WHITE PAPER

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

This white paper sets housing targets for Greater Boston, Boston and Allston-Brighton and lays out the zoning, review and building-code reforms that would let private builders meet them. Its estimates are planning estimates, shown with ranges, measured against the current trend.

The model legislation that puts the reforms into law (a Zoning Commission petition, a City Council order and a state enabling act) is published separately.

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ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Allston Heritage Foundation is an independent public-policy research organization for Allston-Brighton, Boston and New England. We study housing, urban design, transportation and the economics of building, and we publish our evidence and methods.

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AT A GLANCE

Rents are high because the region has not built enough homes. Clear rules would let it.

Allston-Brighton's rents are high because the region has not built enough homes, and today almost nothing new can be built at a price renters can pay. This paper diagnoses why, sets housing targets for the region, Boston and Allston-Brighton, shows what meeting them would mean for the neighborhood's residents, and lays out the reforms that would let private builders do the work.

14,500

new homes in Allston-Brighton over ten years: 6,000 in Allston and 8,500 in Brighton

About 9%

lower rents in real terms than today's path would bring (range 5–11%)

~\$220

a month saved by a renter at the median rent by 2035 (range \$115–\$255)

Planning estimates measured against the current trend, assuming about 470,000 new homes across Greater Boston, 2026–2035. Sections 05, 07 and 09.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Holding rents steady** takes about 160,000 new homes in Greater Boston this decade, the Commonwealth's own estimate. Allston-Brighton's share is about 5,000.
- **Bringing rents down** takes more. Our abundance target of 470,000 homes in Greater Boston, including 110,000 in Boston and 14,500 in Allston-Brighton, would leave rents about 9% lower in real terms than on today's path (range 5–11%). In Allston-Brighton, that is about \$220 a month at the median rent.
- **New buildings still have to pay for themselves.** Today, a new six-story building needs rents 73% above what new apartments rent for. Our reforms close almost all of that gap. The traditional design standard adds about 1%.



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SECTION 01

Executive summary

Boston is one of the most productive labor markets in the country, and people want to live here. When the number of homes cannot keep up, the extra demand shows up as higher rents, crowded apartments, long commutes and displacement.¹² Allston-Brighton feels this more than most places: 82 percent of Allston households and 77 percent of Brighton households rent.¹

Two things now block new housing. The first is zoning. In Allston-Brighton, a building of ten or more homes must provide two parking spaces per home, set aside 17 to 20 percent of units at below-market rents, fit an envelope that wastes floor area, and win discretionary approval that takes about two years.^{4,5} The second is cost. Construction costs rose about 68 percent and construction interest rates nearly doubled between 2015 and 2026, while rents rose about 52 percent.³ Economists increasingly see these as one problem: land-use rules keep projects small and one-off, which holds back construction productivity.⁷

We measure the combined effect with a break-even rent: the rent per square foot a new building must charge to pay for itself with a normal return. For a typical six-story Allston-Brighton building, it is **\$7.96** under today's as-of-right rules. New apartments in the neighborhood rent for about **\$4.61**.^{2,3} Nothing gets built as of right, and the little that is built depends on case-by-case relief.

Our reform package lowers the break-even rent step by step: no parking minimums, no inclusionary set-aside, efficient envelopes, by-right approval, Boston's existing Chapter 121A tax treatment for new homes and a state single-stair code. Together they bring it to about **\$4.82**, within 5 percent of what new apartments rent for today. The savings that come from building repeatable projects by right would finish the job. The traditional design standard in our cost study adds about 6 cents, roughly \$50 a month on an average new apartment. It does not change height, density or unit count.

How many homes? Holding real rents steady requires about 160,000 new homes in Greater Boston this decade, roughly 16,000 a year against about 9,000 permitted in 2024.^{13,20} Bringing rents down requires more. The best recent evidence finds that each 1 percent increase in a region's housing stock lowers its rents by about 0.5 percent.^{8,9} Our abundance target of 470,000 homes would therefore leave regional rents about 9 percent lower in real terms than if today's pace continued. The range across studies is 5 to 11 percent.

For Allston-Brighton, the plan assigns **6,000** homes to Allston and **8,500** to Brighton over ten years. At full build-out, a renter at the neighborhood's median rent would pay about **\$220 less a month, or \$2,600 a year**. Renters in the neighborhood as a whole would save about **\$78 million a year**. Section 9 sets out what that means for students, families, immigrants, seniors, low-income households and homeowners.

The legal package has three parts. A Boston Zoning Commission petition creates an Allston-Brighton Housing Abundance Overlay District. A City Council order starts hearings and asks the City to make its existing Chapter 121A tax treatment available to overlay housing. A state act



gives Boston clear authority for as-of-right districts and directs a single-stair building code. The full texts are on our model legislation page.

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SECTION 02

What is wrong: Boston's and Allston's housing problem

Too few homes for the people who want to live here

Greater Boston's rents rose about 52 percent between 2015 and 2026.³ Over the same period, building fell. Greater Boston permitted 13,682 homes in 2015 and 8,993 in 2024. The City of Boston went from 4,955 to roughly 2,000, its lowest since 2012.²⁰ In Allston-Brighton, new apartments in large buildings ask \$2,632 for a studio, \$3,124 for a one-bedroom and \$4,593 for a three-bedroom.²

Zoning that makes housing illegal or unbuildable

- **Parking minimums.** Article 51 requires two off-street spaces for every home in buildings of ten or more units.⁴ Structured parking costs about \$34,000–\$59,000 a space above ground and \$106,000–\$152,000 below.¹⁵ Built as written, the requirement alone pushes a building's break-even rent about 50 percent above market. Projects survive only by winning relief one at a time. A citywide repeal was filed in April 2026.²²
- **Inclusionary set-asides.** Since October 2024, Article 79 requires 17–20 percent of units in projects of seven or more homes to rent at an average of 50–60 percent of area median income. In 2026 that means about \$1,600–\$1,930 for a one-bedroom.^{5,21} The below-market rent is paid for by the other tenants or by not building at all. In our model, the set-aside adds about 11 percent to the break-even rent. Studies of inclusionary zoning find higher prices and, in some markets, less construction.¹⁸
- **Envelopes that waste space.** Height limits, setbacks and odd lots push buildings into inefficient shapes. The Brighton building behind our cost model can rent only 77 percent of its floor area. A regular building can rent 85 percent, which by itself lowers the break-even rent about 9 percent.³
- **Discretion instead of rules.** Almost every meaningful project needs variances, Article 80 review and negotiated mitigation. That takes about two years before construction and favors large, well-capitalized players.²⁴
- **Much of the neighborhood is off limits.** Most residential land allows only one-, two- and three-family homes. The bigger regulatory cost falls on homes that are never proposed at all.³



Costs that outran rents

Boston's multifamily hard costs are among the highest in the country: \$290–\$390 per square foot by one index and \$400–\$590 by another.^{14,15} Between 2015 and 2026, hard costs rose about 68 percent and construction debt went from about 4 to 7.5 percent. That roughly doubled the rent a new building needs to break even.³ New apartments in Allston-Brighton now rent at or slightly below that level, and residual land values are near zero.³ The regulatory burden has not gone away. It has moved inside construction cost, because rules that keep projects small and one-off also keep builders from getting faster and cheaper.⁷

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SECTION 03

Baseline data

The Boston Planning Department reports Allston with 31,810 residents and 11,758 homes, and Brighton with 55,869 residents and 25,805 homes, as of January 1, 2025. Allston is 82.4 percent renter-occupied and Brighton 77.2 percent.¹ Allston's occupied homes are 42.5 percent studios or one-bedrooms, 32.1 percent two-bedrooms and 25.4 percent three-bedrooms or larger. Brighton's are 39.7, 32.6 and 27.7 percent.¹

Rents in this paper are asking rents for new-construction-quality apartments, per rentable square foot per month: \$4.61 in Allston-Brighton, with a range of \$4.39–\$4.82.² Median rent across the neighborhood's occupied homes is about \$2,400 a month. The median building dates from around 1954, and 41 percent of homes predate 1940.³ All figures are planning estimates. We give ranges because no rent, cost or unit count can be known exactly.

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SECTION 04

The economic model

Rents fall until building stops paying

In a market where builders can enter freely, new homes get built as long as rents cover the full cost of building them plus a normal return. Economists call that threshold the minimum profitable production cost.⁶ We express it as a break-even rent per rentable square foot. It covers hard and soft costs, construction interest, operating costs, Boston's property tax and a required yield of 6.85 percent (the 5.1 percent market cap rate plus a normal 1.75-point development spread).³

Two implications drive this paper. First, new supply can push rents down only until they reach the break-even rent. Below that, building stops. Second, anything that lowers the break-even rent lowers the floor that rents can fall to, and so raises the number of homes the market will build. Zoning reform is therefore cost reform.



How much each reform moves the break-even rent

The table follows a six-story, wood-frame building on a small concrete base, the most common new building type in Allston-Brighton, at a contractor-grade hard cost of \$395 per gross square foot. That figure sits inside the published Boston ranges of \$290–\$390, \$370, \$390 escalated to about \$436, and \$400–\$590.^{14,15,16,17} Each row adds one change to the one above.

TABLE 1 How each reform moves the break-even rent for a new six-story building

Each row adds one change	Break-even rent (\$/RSF/mo) vs. \$4.61 new-building rent	
Today, as of right: 2.0 parking spaces per home, 17% inclusionary set-aside, constrained envelope, 24-month approvals	\$7.96	+73%
Remove parking minimums	\$6.52	+41%
Remove the inclusionary set-aside	\$5.85	+27%
Allow an efficient building envelope (rentable share 77% → 85%)	\$5.37	+16%
Approve code-compliant projects by right (24 → 6 months before construction)	\$5.31	+15%
Apply the essential traditional design standard (+\$5 per GSF)	\$5.37	+17%
Apply Boston's existing Chapter 121A tax treatment (payments at about 60% of full taxes in early years)	\$4.99	+8%
Legalize single-stair buildings up to six stories (state code)	\$4.82	+5%
Repeatable by-right projects cut hard cost 10%	\$4.39	–5%
Construction debt 7.5% → 6.0% (market, not policy)	\$4.05	–12%

AHF model, calibrated to Working Paper 2026-01: six-story wood-frame building on a small concrete base, \$395/GSF hard cost, 24% soft costs, 65% loan-to-cost construction debt at 7.5%, required yield 6.85% (5.1% cap rate + 175 bp), Boston FY2026 tax rate, land excluded. Parking at \$47,500 per above-ground structured space. Inclusionary rents at about \$2.55/RSF (50–60% AMI average). Uncertainty is about ±5% on every figure.³

Five conclusions follow.

- **Today's as-of-right rules make new apartments impossible.** At \$7.96, a building would need rents 73 percent above the market.
- **Each zoning reform is a large cost reform.** Removing parking minimums saves \$1.44. Removing the set-aside saves \$0.67. An efficient envelope saves \$0.48.
- **The design standard is small by comparison.** It adds \$0.06, about 1 percent of the break-even rent and about \$50 a month on an average new apartment. It costs about one-twenty-fifth of what the parking reform saves.
- **Municipal and state reforms together bring a six-story building within about 5 percent of today's new-building rents.** A four-story wood building, which costs less per square foot, already breaks even once Chapter 121A tax treatment applies.



- **The rest has to come from cheaper construction or cheaper money.** Repeatable, by-right projects are the main lever. Lower interest rates are outside city control.

Taller buildings cost more to build. Concrete or mass-timber buildings of 7 to 18 stories cost roughly \$500–\$560 per square foot, and they do not pay for themselves in Allston-Brighton at today’s rents, even with every reform. The overlay still allows them, because allowing height costs nothing. Institutional builders and later market cycles can use it. Most production this decade will be four- to six-story buildings.

How rents respond to new homes

A housing-demand elasticity cannot simply be inverted into a rent forecast. A metro area is an open market: when rents fall, people move in and households split up, so the price response is smaller than that conversion implies. The better evidence comes from studies that measure how rents actually respond to new supply.^{8,9,10}

TABLE 2 How much rents fall when the housing stock grows 1 percent: estimates from recent studies

Study	Rent change per 1% more homes	Geography
Li (2022)	–0.10%	Within 500 feet of new NYC high-rises
Pew (2025)	–0.14%	ZIP code level, 1,654 ZIP codes
Anagol, Ferreira and Rexer	–0.26%	São Paulo, city-wide, open city
Pew (2025)	–0.50%	Metro level, 223 metros (our central case)
Anagol, Ferreira and Rexer	–0.58%	São Paulo, city-wide, closed city

We use the metro-level estimate of –0.50 as our central case and report the range across studies. Two features matter for Allston-Brighton. A neighborhood’s rents are set mostly by its region, so adding homes across the region has about four times the effect of adding the same share in one neighborhood. The largest benefits go to older, cheaper apartments.⁸ Studies of new buildings in lower-income areas find lower nearby rents and less displacement, not more.^{19,25} Supply constraints raise home prices about twice as much as rents, so more building would also slow growth in home prices.¹¹



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SECTION 05

How many homes

TABLE 3 Ten-year housing goals and their rent effects

Goal (2026–2035)	Greater Boston	City of Boston	Allston-Brighton	Rent effect, real terms
Today's pace (about 9,000 a year region-wide)	≈90,000	≈20,000		— Rents keep rising
Hold the line: keep up with household growth	140,000–180,000	≈37,000	≈5,000	Rents steady
Bring rents down: AHF abundance target	470,000	110,000	14,500	≈9% below today's path (5–11%)

Boston and Allston-Brighton figures for “hold the line” are their shares of the regional total in the abundance allocation (23% and 3%). Rent effect: –0.50% per 1% of regional housing stock (2,081,743 homes), range –0.26% to –0.58%. ^{8,9,13,20}

Holding the line. The Commonwealth’s housing plan calls for 222,000 homes statewide by 2035, of which Greater Boston’s share is about 140,000–180,000. That is the pace needed to keep up with expected household growth.¹³ Greater Boston permitted about 9,000 homes in 2024, so even holding the line means nearly doubling production.

Bringing rents down. Each additional 41,600 homes, about 2 percent of the regional stock, lowers rents about 1 percent. Our target of 470,000 homes is about 380,000 above today’s pace, enough to bring regional rents about 9 percent below that path in real terms (range 5 to 11 percent).

The cost condition. Builders keep building as long as a new building can charge at least its break-even rent. That does not require new apartments to rent for what older ones do. In Allston-Brighton a new one-bedroom asks about \$3,124 a month, against a median of about \$2,400 across all the neighborhood’s homes.^{2,1} New buildings will keep that premium, and every break-even test in this paper is against new-building rents, not the older stock.

Filtering also means new-building rents do not have to fall as far as the average. Added supply lowers rents most in older, cheaper buildings, as households move up the chain and leave cheaper homes behind.^{8,19} Measured against today’s level rather than today’s path, the abundance target lowers average real rents about 7.5 percent. The decline for new buildings should be smaller. The table shows how far new-building rents could fall from today’s \$4.61 before each building type stops paying.

**TABLE 4** How far new-building rents could fall before each building type stops paying

Rules in force	Four-story building	Six-story building
Zoning reforms and design standard, full property taxes	Needs rents 7% higher	Needs rents 17% higher
+ existing Chapter 121A tax treatment	Pays; 0.5% room	Needs rents 8% higher
+ single-stair code (state)	Pays; 4% room	Needs rents 5% higher
+ 10% hard-cost saving from repeatable by-right projects	Pays; 12% room	Pays; 5% room
+ construction debt at 6.0% (market, not policy)	Pays; 19% room	Pays; 12% room

“Room” is how far new-building rents could fall below today’s \$4.61 per square foot a month and the building still earn its required 6.85% yield (6.35% with 6% debt). AHF model; four-story building at \$365/GSF, six-story at \$395/GSF, both with the essential design standard.³

Under the municipal and state reforms, four-story buildings pay at today’s rents and can absorb a fall of about 4 percent in new-building rents. Once repeatable by-right construction cuts hard costs 10 percent, they can absorb a 12 percent fall, more than the whole average decline, and six-story buildings about 5 percent. That sustains the program even on the cautious assumption that new-building rents fall as much as the average, with six-story buildings joining as interest rates normalize or as filtering concentrates the decline in older stock. Without the cost reforms, the zoning changes would mainly restart building and hold rents steady.

6**SECTION 06**

Where the homes go: Boston

We allocate Boston’s 110,000 homes using three criteria. First, transit and job access. Second, large sites, adopted plans and visible redevelopment potential. Third, fairness: high-opportunity neighborhoods that have grown little should take a meaningful share.

**TABLE 5** Ten-year housing targets by Boston neighborhood

Area	Ten-year target	Primary logic
Allston	6,000	Western Avenue, Cambridge Street, Harvard/Beacon Park/Allston Yards, and gentle-density side-street reforms.
Brighton	8,500	Boston Landing, Guest Street, North Beacon Street, Brighton Center, Commonwealth Avenue, Oak Square, and missing-middle reform.
Fenway and Longwood	8,000	Institution-adjacent mixed-use corridors, medical-area housing, and transit-oriented infill.
South Boston and Seaport	11,000	Dorchester Avenue plan areas, industrial conversions, waterfront infill, and Seaport backfill.
Downtown, Chinatown, West End, North End, Back Bay, and Beacon Hill	6,600	Office-to-residential conversions, upper-floor housing, and selective infill.
East Boston	9,000	Squares, corridors, Blue Line station areas, and waterfront subdistricts.
Charlestown	4,500	Sullivan Square, Rutherford Avenue, and parcel aggregation.
Jamaica Plain	5,000	Orange Line, Green Line, and arterial-corridor infill.
Roxbury	7,500	Squares and Streets tools with anti-displacement guardrails.
Dorchester	16,000	Dorchester Avenue, Blue Hill Avenue, Columbia Road, and station-area nodes.
Mattapan	5,000	Recent zoning update areas, Blue Hill Avenue, and ADUs.
Hyde Park, Roslindale, and West Roxbury	11,000	Main streets, rail-served centers, ADUs, and gentle density.
Mission Hill and South End	9,000	Corridor infill, conversions, and institution-adjacent housing.
Citywide ADUs and small-lot infill buffer	3,000	A citywide program that fills the gap between named neighborhood totals and the 110,000-home target.

Greater Boston

The regional target of 470,000 homes is allocated by county and by subregion. The figures describe where the homes should be built. The rent effect depends on the regional total.

**TABLE 6** Greater Boston targets by county

County or metro division	Existing units	Target homes	Annual pace	Stock growth
Suffolk County	363,590	125,000	12,500 per year	34.4 percent
Middlesex County	670,331	160,000	16,000 per year	23.9 percent
Essex County	332,075	65,000	6,500 per year	19.6 percent
Norfolk County	297,840	55,000	5,500 per year	18.5 percent
Plymouth County	220,710	35,000	3,500 per year	15.9 percent
Rockingham and Strafford Counties, NH	197,197	30,000	3,000 per year	15.2 percent
Total	2,081,743	470,000	47,000 per year	22.6 percent

TABLE 7 Greater Boston targets by subregion

Functional subregion	Target homes
Boston city	110,000
Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop	15,000
Cambridge, Somerville, Everett, Malden, and Medford	65,000
Newton, Watertown, Arlington, Belmont, Waltham, and MetroWest nodes	60,000
Lowell, Route 3, and outer Middlesex town centers	35,000
Lynn, Salem, Beverly, Peabody, and Saugus	30,000
Lawrence, Haverhill, Methuen, Andover, and North Andover corridor	25,000
Other Essex commuter-rail and town centers	10,000
Quincy, Brookline, Milton, Braintree, Dedham, Needham, and Wellesley	45,000
Other Norfolk commuter-rail and town centers	10,000
Brockton and Old Colony rail nodes	25,000
Other Plymouth town centers	10,000
Portsmouth, Dover, Rochester, and Somersworth	20,000
Other Rockingham and Strafford town centers	10,000
Total	470,000

Building types

The strategy does not assume towers everywhere. Most homes come from mid-rise buildings near transit, then small multifamily buildings, ADUs and conversions, townhouses and a smaller number of towers in the core. The overlay sets no bedroom-mix quota. Builders choose the mix renters want, and family-size homes also open up as people move out of older apartments into new ones.

**TABLE 8** Greater Boston targets by building type

Product type	Target homes	Typical location	Zoning reform
Core high-rise and tall mixed-use buildings	73,000	Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Quincy, and major downtowns	Twelve to thirty-plus stories, high FAR, no parking minimums, and streamlined large-project review.
Mid-rise transit-oriented development	182,000	Rapid transit, key bus corridors, commuter-rail stations, and town centers	Five to ten stories by right, mixed-use allowed, objective design standards, and no parking minimums.
Missing-middle and small multifamily	90,000	Inner suburbs, streetcar suburbs, and town-center edges	Three to six units by right, fourplexes, courtyard apartments, and small apartment buildings.
ADUs, conversions, and small-lot infill	53,000	Regionwide, especially low-density but transit-accessible suburbs	ADUs by right, single-family-to-multifamily conversions, lot splits, and pre-approved plans.
Townhouses, stacked flats, and garden apartments	50,000	Suburban centers, mall retrofits, office parks, and larger parcels	Two to five stories, townhouses, stacked flats, and master-plan district reform.
Student, senior, supportive, and workforce housing	22,000	Campus edges, medical districts, and regional centers	Institutional master-plan reform, dorm production, and supportive housing by right.
Total	470,000		

Zoning capacity is not production

Owners do not all sell at once, and many parcels have valuable buildings, long leases, contamination or awkward shapes. A credible plan therefore allows much more housing on paper than it expects to be built.

TABLE 9 Zoning capacity needed to deliver each building type

Product type	Delivery target	Zoning-capacity multiplier	Required paper capacity
Core high-rise	73,000	2.5x	About 180,000
Mid-rise TOD	182,000	3.0x	About 550,000
Missing-middle	90,000	5.0x	About 450,000
ADUs, conversions, and small-lot infill	53,000	5.0x	About 265,000
Townhouses, stacked flats, and garden apartments	50,000	3.0x	About 150,000
Student, senior, supportive, and workforce housing	22,000	2.0x	About 45,000
Total	470,000		About 1.64 million



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SECTION 07

Allston and Brighton

The plan assigns 6,000 net new homes to Allston and 8,500 to Brighton over ten years, about a 51 percent and a 33 percent expansion of their housing stock. That is about 3 percent of the regional program, from a neighborhood with under 2 percent of the region's homes. That is reasonable for a transit-served district with Allston's large sites, but most of the rent benefit comes from the regional program as a whole. Allston's target is more physically plausible because it has several large or combinable sites. Brighton's ownership is more fragmented, so it needs a broader program of corridors, squares, Green Line edges, institutional housing, small multifamily buildings and ADUs.

TABLE 10 Allston-Brighton's 14,500 homes by subarea

Subarea	Ten-year homes	Role in the plan
Western Avenue, Barry's Corner, and Harvard ERC	1,700 to 2,100	This area should carry the tallest Allston growth because it has major landowners, large parcels, and a planned mixed-use district.
Beacon Park Yard and West Station area	1,500 to 2,000	This is the largest long-term opportunity, but it depends on the Allston Multimodal Project and is a later-decade tranche.
Allston Yards, Everett Street, Braintree Street, and Boston Landing edge	1,000 to 1,300	This area is already proving that surface-lot and commercial parcels can become housing-heavy mixed-use districts.
Cambridge Street, Brighton Avenue, Harvard Avenue, and Allston Village	900 to 1,200	This should become a five- to eight-story corridor infill zone, with ground-floor commercial where appropriate.
Allston side-street gentle density and ADUs	300 to 500	This should add modest capacity without treating every side street as a major redevelopment area.
Brighton Center, Washington Street, and Oak Square	1,400 to 1,800	This is Brighton's main Squares and Streets opportunity.
Guest Street, North Beacon Street, Market Street, and Boston Landing	2,000 to 2,500	This is Brighton's highest-capacity near-term housing district.
Commonwealth Avenue, Cleveland Circle, Chestnut Hill Avenue, and Green Line edges	1,300 to 1,700	This should absorb mid-rise apartment buildings near transit, especially on underbuilt parcels.
Soldiers Field Road, Leo Birmingham Parkway, and Western Avenue Brighton edge	1,000 to 1,200	This should add larger residential buildings where parcels are deep and buffers can protect side streets.
Institutional and health-campus edges	800 to 1,000	This includes St. Elizabeth's-area housing, senior housing, workforce housing, and institutional master-plan commitments.
Brighton gentle density and ADUs	1,000 to 1,300	This should legalize small multifamily evolution in lower-density areas without relying on towers.

**TABLE 11** Delivery targets and the zoning capacity they require in Allston-Brighton

Neighborhood	Actual target	Required paper capacity	Reason
Allston	6,000 homes	15,000 to 18,000 homes	A 2.5x to 3.0x multiplier is plausible because Allston has more large parcels.
Brighton	8,500 homes	22,000 to 27,000 homes	A 2.75x to 3.25x multiplier is more realistic because ownership is more fragmented.
Allston plus Brighton	14,500 homes	37,000 to 45,000 homes	This is the legal envelope needed for a credible ten-year production program.

Parcel archetypes and zoning envelopes

TABLE 12 Parcel archetypes and recommended zoning envelopes

Parcel archetype	Examples	Redevelopment probability	Recommended zoning envelope
Large master-plan parcels	Harvard ERC, Beacon Park Yard, Allston Yards, and Boston Landing	High where ownership is consolidated.	Eight to eighteen stories, 5.0 to 7.0 FAR, residential by right, and lab or office conditional or capped.
Surface parking and auto-oriented commercial parcels	Guest Street, Everett Street, North Beacon Street, Western Avenue, and Brighton Avenue	High.	Six to ten stories, 4.0 to 5.5 FAR, and no parking minimum.
One-story retail and small commercial parcels	Allston Village, Brighton Center, Oak Square, and Cambridge Street	Medium.	Four to seven stories, 2.5 to 4.0 FAR, and residential above active ground floor by right.
Industrial or quasi-industrial parcels near transit	North Beacon, Everett, Market, Braintree, and parts of Western Avenue	Medium to high.	Mixed-use residential allowed by right if clean-use standards are met, with six to eight stories as the baseline.
Institutional and hospital-edge parcels	Harvard, St. Elizabeth's, BU, and BC-adjacent areas	Medium.	Require housing commitments through institutional master plans, especially dorms, workforce housing, and senior housing.
Low-rise residential side streets	Existing 1F, 2F, 3F, and MFR districts	Low.	ADUs by right, three to four units by right near corridors, and six to eight units on larger lots near transit.
Historic or design-sensitive residential pockets	Aberdeen, Newton Street, Raymond Street, and comparable areas	Low.	Preserve form controls while allowing internal conversions, ADUs, and small additions where envelope is unchanged.

The near-term work falls to four- to six-story buildings on corridors, squares and transition blocks, the types that break even under the reform package. The tallest envelopes on Western Avenue, Beacon Park Yard and Allston Yards depend on institutional capital or on the cost reforms described above, and most of that capacity will be used later in the decade.



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SECTION 08

The reform package

The local vehicle is an amendment to Article 51, which already governs Allston-Brighton. Because Boston changes zoning through its Zoning Commission under Chapter 665 of the Acts of 1956, the package is written as a Zoning Commission petition, supported by a City Council order and a state enabling act.²⁴

One overlay, six subdistricts. The Allston-Brighton Housing Abundance Overlay District has six subdistricts, with multifamily housing allowed as of right in all but the neighborhood-housing layer:

- **High-capacity sites:** up to 18 stories and 7.0 FAR.
- **Main corridors:** up to 10 stories and 5.0 FAR.
- **Squares:** up to 7 stories and 4.0 FAR in cores, and 5 stories and 3.0 FAR on transition blocks.
- **Neighborhood transition:** 4 stories, with 8–12 homes on qualifying lots.
- **Neighborhood housing:** ADUs, conversions and up to four homes.
- **Institutional and campus:** up to 12 stories.

Where the overlay conflicts with Article 51, the overlay controls.

Rules that lower cost.

- **Parking:** no minimums. Builders decide how much parking to provide, and lenders and renters will want some.
- **Inclusionary zoning:** overlay projects are exempt from Article 79, and there are no negotiated community-benefit or linkage payments as a condition of approval.
- **Unit mix:** no bedroom-mix mandate. Floor area in three-bedroom homes is exempt from FAR as an incentive.
- **Envelopes:** no required setbacks, side yards or minimum lot area per home.
- **Approvals:** code-compliant projects get a written decision within fixed deadlines.

Design that respects the neighborhood without costing homes. Appearance is governed by the objective design schedule in our design standard. It covers street wall placement, window proportion and depth, masonry-like facing, a defined base and roofline, and entrance spacing. These are measurable rules about what the building looks like, and they cannot reduce height, floor area or units. The required package adds about \$2–\$7 per square foot, up to about \$13 with unfavorable bids. We model \$5. Everything else is optional.

Boston's existing tax tool. Boston taxes new apartment buildings on income-based assessments, which takes about a fifth of every new dollar of net operating income.³ The City already uses Chapter 121A of the General Laws to set payments in lieu of taxes for development projects. We propose no new tax program, only that qualifying overlay housing be eligible for that existing



treatment on published terms, with payments of about 60 percent of full taxes during the early years. That lowers the break-even rent about 7 percent. New homes would still pay about \$5,200 a year each, about \$75 million a year once Allston-Brighton's 14,500 are built.

State action. The state act gives Boston clear authority for objective, time-limited, as-of-right districts. It also directs the building code board to allow single-stair buildings up to six stories, now under study by executive order, which frees floor area and lowers cost on the small lots typical of Allston-Brighton.²³

What we do not do. We do not ask new homes to pay for affordability. Households that need deep help are better served by vouchers and publicly funded homes paid for from broad revenue, which work best when there is enough housing to go around. Tenant protections and relocation help for residents of buildings being redeveloped remain in the petition.

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SECTION 09

What build-out would mean for Allston-Brighton's residents

The figures below use the central estimate: rents about 9 percent lower in real terms by the end of the decade than if today's pace of building continued. The range is 5–11 percent. Pew's research finds the largest slowdowns in older, cheaper apartments, so these estimates are conservative for the neighborhood's pre-war stock.⁸

TABLE 13 What build-out would mean for each group of Allston-Brighton residents

Group (Allston + Brighton)	Size	What build-out means
Renter households	≈29,600	≈\$220/month less at the median rent (≈\$2,600 a year); ≈\$78 million a year neighborhood-wide
Households earning under \$35,000	≈8,700	Savings worth about a month of pre-tax income at \$30,000; biggest gains in older, cheaper apartments
College and graduate students	≈25,500	More small apartments and institutional housing; less competition with families
Children under 15	4–6% of residents (10.8% citywide)	Family-size homes freed up; new three-bedrooms ≈\$420/month less
Foreign-born residents	≈27–32% of residents	More likely to rent, so lower rents reach them directly; more storefronts for neighborhood businesses
Residents 60 and older	≈10,100	Lower rents and new accessible elevator homes
Owner households	≈6,200	New rights to add homes; slower but steadier price growth; broader tax base



Renters

Allston-Brighton has about 29,600 renter households.¹ At the median rent of about \$2,400, a 9 percent reduction saves about \$220 a month, or \$2,600 a year. Across all renters, that is about \$78 million a year staying in residents' pockets. New apartments would rent about \$240 a month less for a studio, \$285 for a one-bedroom, \$370 for a two-bedroom and \$420 for a three-bedroom.²

Lower-income households

About 8,700 Allston-Brighton households, roughly a quarter, earn under \$35,000 a year.¹ For a household earning \$30,000 and paying the median rent, \$2,600 a year is about a month of pre-tax income. Allston's poverty rate is 27.9 percent and Brighton's 19.1 percent. Most new homes are market-rate, but the evidence shows their benefits reach lower-income renters through cheaper older apartments and less competition for them.¹⁹

Students and young workers

About 25,500 Allston-Brighton residents are enrolled in college or graduate school: 43 percent of Allston's population and 22 percent of Brighton's.¹ When studio and one-bedroom apartments are scarce, groups of students outbid families for two- and three-family houses. New small apartments, which make up most of what builders produce, and the institutional-housing requirements in the petition give students and young workers somewhere else to live.

Families with children

Children are scarce in Allston-Brighton. Residents under 15 make up 4.2 percent of Allston and 6.2 percent of Brighton, against 10.8 percent citywide.¹ Families need larger homes, and three-bedroom apartments already make up about a quarter of the neighborhood's stock. As students and roommate groups move into new small apartments, older family-size homes return to families, and a new three-bedroom would rent about \$420 a month less. Exempting three-bedroom floor area from FAR encourages builders to add more.

Immigrant households

About 32 percent of Allston residents and 27 percent of Brighton residents were born abroad. About 9 percent of residents speak a Chinese language at home and 8 percent speak Spanish.¹ Immigrant households are more likely than native-born households to rent, so lower rents reach them directly. Neighborhood businesses on Harvard and Brighton Avenues gain new customers and new storefronts in mixed-use buildings.

Seniors

About 10,100 Allston-Brighton residents are 60 or older, and about a fifth to nearly a third of residents over 65 live in poverty.¹ Lower rents help senior renters stay. New elevator buildings add accessible homes near the Green Line and bus routes, which pre-war walk-ups rarely offer. The petition allows senior and supportive housing as of right.



Homeowners

About 6,200 Allston-Brighton households own their homes.¹ Owners in the overlay gain the right to add homes, ADUs or conversions, which raises the development value of their land. Across the region, home prices would rise more slowly than otherwise, because prices respond to supply even more than rents do.¹¹ That helps first-time buyers and makes longtime owners' gains slower but steadier. New buildings broaden the tax base: about \$75 million a year from Allston-Brighton's new homes, even with Chapter 121A tax treatment.

Workers and commuters

About a quarter of Allston workers and 29 percent of Brighton workers ride transit, and 16 percent of Allston workers walk to work.¹ Every home built here instead of beyond Route 128 or 495 is a household closer to Boston's and Cambridge's jobs, with shorter commutes and less traffic on the roads into the city.

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SECTION 10

Article 80 and agency reform

Code-compliant overlay projects should follow a Housing Abundance Review Track: one completeness notice within 15 business days, and a written zoning and design determination within 60 days for projects under 100 homes, 90 days for 100 to 299 homes and 120 days for larger ones. Nothing settled by the zoning, including use, height, density, parking or unit count, should be reopened in review.²⁴

- **Planning Department.** Publish an Allston-Brighton Housing Abundance Administrative Manual with subdistrict maps, eligibility rules, the objective design schedule, application checklists, fixed review timelines and a public dashboard. The dashboard should track permits, completions, rents and break-even rents.
- **Boston Civic Design Commission.** Review only against the objective design schedule. It should not reduce homes, height, floor area or residential use.
- **Transportation.** Replace negotiated transportation mitigation in the overlay with published frontage standards for sidewalks, loading and curb cuts.
- **Inspectional Services.** Issue a Housing Abundance Zoning Compliance Certificate, so compliant projects never enter variance practice.
- **Assessing Department and Mayor's Office of Housing.** Publish the terms on which overlay housing qualifies for the City's existing Chapter 121A tax treatment.
- **Institutions.** Institutional master plans should require Harvard, Boston University, Boston College, hospitals and other institutions to measure their students', staff's and affiliates' housing demand and commit to plans that house them.



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SECTION 11

Implementation roadmap

TABLE 14 Implementation roadmap

Period	Actions
First 90 days	File a City Council hearing order; ask the Planning Department to prepare zoning text and maps; assemble parcel and pipeline data; begin stakeholder briefings with civic groups, tenant organizations, local businesses, institutions, and housing advocates.
Months 3 to 6	Release a draft Allston-Brighton Housing Abundance Overlay map; publish a parcel-level capacity analysis; release the objective design schedule, the Chapter 121A terms for overlay housing and published frontage standards; revise the draft based on community and technical feedback.
Months 6 to 12	BPDA Board and Planning Department should transmit a formal Zoning Commission petition; City Council should advance related ordinances or orders; Representative Honan or another legislative sponsor should file the enabling act.
Year 1 to Year 2	Adopt zoning and administrative manuals; launch the Housing Abundance Review Track; begin permitting first-wave corridor and large-site projects; publish a quarterly dashboard.
Years 3 to 6	Reach peak production through Western Avenue, Harvard ERC, Allston Yards, Boston Landing, Guest Street, North Beacon, Brighton Center, Commonwealth Avenue, and institutional housing commitments.
Years 7 to 10	Deliver later-decade large sites, including Beacon Park or West Station-related projects; maintain ADU and missing-middle production; adjust zoning if rents, vacancies, or permitting data show underperformance.

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SECTION 12

Implementation considerations

Implementation begins with parcel-level mapping. The Planning Department's capacity analysis should join individual parcels to zoning, assessor, ownership, environmental and transit layers and score each parcel's likelihood of redevelopment, so the overlay map and its subdistrict boundaries are drawn parcel by parcel.

Infrastructure and feasibility will shape delivery. Financing, construction labor, sewer and water capacity, electric infrastructure, schools, the public realm, transit capacity and street redesign all matter. None of them invalidates the target, but they will shape sequencing, public investment and a realistic implementation schedule.

The cost side deserves as much attention as the zoning text. The City should publish break-even rents for standard building types each year, alongside permits and rents. If the break-even rent stays above market rents, the remedy is more cost reform, not more mandates.



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SECTION 13

Separate legislative appendices

The full model legal texts are on our model legislation page. Appendix A is the Zoning Commission petition for the Allston-Brighton Housing Abundance Overlay District. Appendix B is the City Council order. Appendix C is the state enabling act.



Notes

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5. City of Boston, Inclusionary Zoning (Article 79), effective October 2024: market-rate projects of seven or more units; 17–20% of units income-restricted at an average of 50–60% of area median income; 3% voucher set-aside in large rental projects. boston.gov
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12. Albert Saiz, “The Geographic Determinants of Housing Supply,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 125(3) (2010): 1253–1296; Chang-Tai Hsieh and Enrico Moretti, “Housing Constraints and Spatial Misallocation,” *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics* 11(2) (2019): 1–39.
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14. Rider Levett Bucknall, *Quarterly Construction Cost Report, Q1 2026*: Boston multi-family hard cost \$290–\$390 per SF. rlb.com
15. Cumming Group, *Q4 2025 Market Analysis*: Boston market-grade apartments \$400–\$590 per SF (shell and interiors, excluding sitework and soft costs); structured parking \$34,000–\$59,000 per stall above grade and \$106,000–\$152,000 below grade. cumming-group.com
16. Massachusetts EOHLC, *Home for Everyone Construction Finance Explainer*: average hard cost \$370 per SF for four-to-six-story wood-frame housing. mass.gov
17. RKG Associates for the City of Boston, *Inclusionary Development Policy Financial Feasibility Analysis* (February 2023): apartment hard costs \$340 (stick), \$390 (stick over podium) and \$490 (steel) per SF, 2022 basis.
18. Emily Hamilton, “Inclusionary Zoning and Housing Market Outcomes,” *Cityscape* 23(1) (2021); Jenny Schuetz, Rachel Meltzer and Vicki Been, “Silver Bullet or Trojan Horse? The Effects of Inclusionary Zoning on Local Housing Markets in the United States,” *Urban Studies* 48(2) (2011): 297–329.
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