

CONNECT CHELSEA:

Three Visions for a Gateway City

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Harvard University Graduate School of Design
Urban Planning Core Studio

Cover - *(Nguyen)*

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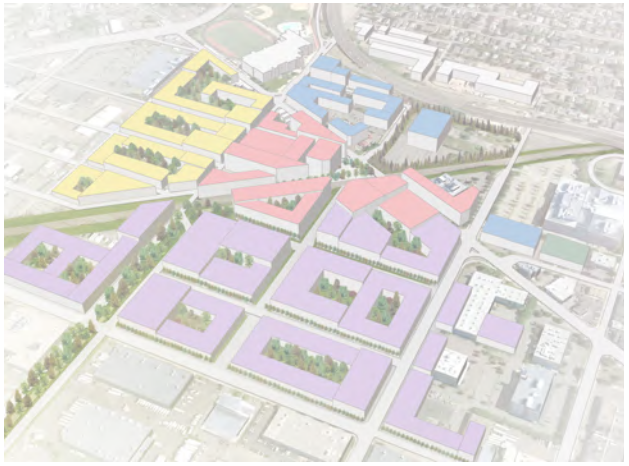

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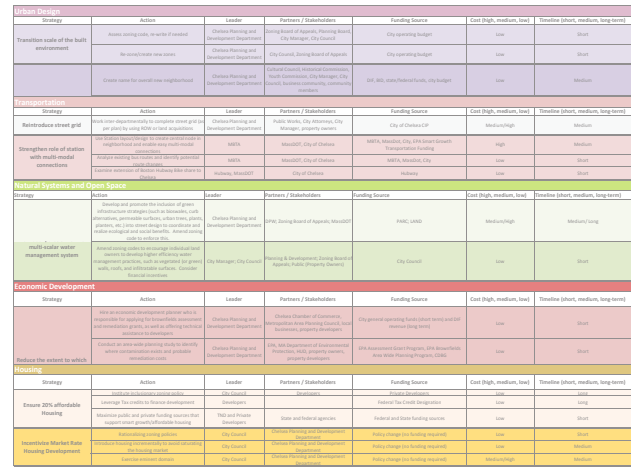

Urban Design						
Strategy	Action	Leader	Partners / Stakeholders	Funding Source	Cost (high, medium, low)	Timeline (short, medium, long-term)
Transition scale of the built environment	Assess zoning code, re-write if needed	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Board, City Manager, City Council	City operating budget	Low	Short
	Re-zone/create new zones	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	City Council, Zoning Board of Appeals	City operating budget	Low	Short
	Create name for overall new neighborhood	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	Cultural Council, Historical Commission, Youth Commission, City Manager, City Council, business community, community members	DIF, BID, state/federal funds, city budget	Low	Medium
Transportation						
Strategy	Action	Leader	Partners / Stakeholders	Funding Source	Cost (high, medium, low)	Timeline (short, medium, long-term)
Reintroduce street grid	Work inter-departmentally to complete street grid (as per plan) by using ROW or land acquisitions	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	Public Works, City Attorneys, City Manager, property owners	City of Chelsea CIP	Medium/High	Medium
Strengthen role of station with multi-modal connections	Use Station Impact/design to create central node in neighborhood and enable easy multi-modal connections	MBTA	MassDOT, City of Chelsea	MBTA, MassDot, City, EPA Smart Growth Transportation Funding	High	Medium
	Analyze existing bus routes and identify potential route changes	MBTA	MassDOT, City of Chelsea	MBTA, MassDot, City	Low	Short
	Examine extension of Boston Hubway Bike share to Chelsea	Hubway, MassDOT	City of Chelsea	Hubway	Low	Short
Natural Systems and Open Space						
Strategy	Action	Leader	Partners / Stakeholders	Funding Source	Cost (high, medium, low)	Timeline (short, medium, long-term)
multi-scalar water management system	Develop and promote the inclusion of green infrastructure strategies (such as bioswales, curb alternatives, permeable surfaces, urban trees, plants, planters, etc.) into street design to coordinate and realize ecological and social benefits. Amend zoning code to enforce this.	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	DPW; Zoning Board of Appeals; MassDOT	FARC; LAND	Medium/High	Medium/ Long
	Amend zoning codes to encourage individual land owners to develop higher efficiency water management practices, such as vegetated (or green) walls, roofs, and infiltratable surfaces. Consider financial incentives	City Manager; City Council	Planning & Development; Zoning Board of Appeals; Public (Property Owners)	City Council	Low	Short
Economic Development						
Strategy	Action	Leader	Partners / Stakeholders	Funding Source	Cost (high, medium, low)	Timeline (short, medium, long-term)
Reduce the extent to which	Hire an economic development planner who is responsible for applying for brownfields assessment and remediation grants, as well as offering technical assistance to developers	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	Chelsea Chamber of Commerce, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, local businesses, property developers	City general operating funds (short term) and DIF revenue (long term)	Low	Short
	Conduct an area-wide planning study to identify where contamination exists and probable remediation costs	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	EPA, MA Department of Environmental Protection, MAD, property owners, property developers	EPA Assessment Grant Program, EPA Brownfields Area Wide Planning Program, CDBG	Low	Short
Housing						
Strategy	Action	Leader	Partners / Stakeholders	Funding Source	Cost (high, medium, low)	Timeline (short, medium, long-term)
Ensure 20% affordable Housing	Institute inclusionary zoning policy	City Council	Developers	Private Developers	Low	Long
	Leverage Tax credits to finance development	Developers		Federal Tax Credit Designation	Low	Long
	Maximize public and private funding sources that support smart growth/affordable housing	TND and Private Developers	State and federal agencies	Federal and State funding sources	Low	Short
Incentivize Market Rate Housing Development	Rationalizing zoning policies	City Council	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	Policy change (no funding required)	Low	Short
	Introduce housing incrementally to avoid saturating the housing market	City Council	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	Policy change (no funding required)	Low	Medium
	Exercise eminent domain	City Council	Chelsea Planning and Development Department	Policy change (no funding required)	Medium/High	Medium

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONNECT CHELSEA

Chelsea has seen spectacular growth recently, as new hotels, residences and offices have sprung up throughout the city. Now, with the announcement of the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) Silver Line extension linking Chelsea to downtown Boston, the future looks ever more promising. Most notably, the western part of Chelsea around the proposed station offers great development opportunities in the coming years. However, while this crucial area can be a major asset for the city, the specific uses for it are still largely undefined.

Connect Chelsea: Three Visions for a Gateway City is a project of the Spring 2014 Core Urban Planning Studio at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. The project focuses on the area immediately to the west of Route 1, which includes the "Everett Avenue Urban Renewal District," a priority district as identified by the City of Chelsea, and the terminus of the proposed MBTA Silver Line extension. By adding capacity to the City's planning department and supporting local community development efforts, the studio will help anticipate economic development and land use in the area in advance of the potential changes that this major infrastructure investment will bring.

Chelsea is a complex city with competing priorities, diverse stakeholders, and many different visions for the future. As the team of students conducted background research, engaged with community members, and planned for the future, the team was constantly confronted with the multifaceted nature of the city. The recommendations of Connect



Figure 2 - Planning Focus Area *The plan focuses on the area to the west of Route 1, which is dominated by parking lots, vacant lots, industrial uses, and big box retail.*

Chelsea are presented in the form of three scenarios, each of which examines Chelsea from a distinct viewpoint. The scenarios stand alone and can be read individually, but they are also complementary when considered together as forming a spectrum of possible approaches. In this way, the project addresses the broad range of challenges in Chelsea by offering solutions from a multitude of perspectives.

Figure 1 - *(Nguyen)*

CONTEXT

As a diverse community with a significant immigrant population, Chelsea embodies the concept of a Gateway City. The city has long been an affordable and inclusive option for working-class people from various backgrounds. Now, due to the promise of a mass transit option and its proximity to Boston, Chelsea is becoming more and more attractive to middle class professionals.

The Silver Line extension will have an especially significant effect on the study area of western Chelsea, which is characterized by large land parcels, industrial functions, surface parking, and big box retail. This area was devastated by the fire of 1973, but gradual redevelopment provides a foundation for growth. Indeed, western Chelsea has attracted new hotels, market-rate housing, health care institutions, and even the regional FBI headquarters in recent years. The Silver Line extension will only spur this process as developers move to capitalize on Chelsea's growing reputation and advantageous location.

However, development is also limited by certain physical conditions. Because of Chelsea's industrial past, land contamination will most likely create substantial legal and financial barriers for developers. Furthermore, Chelsea's location on the Mystic and Island End Rivers makes it susceptible to rising sea levels and flooding. Indeed, western Chelsea's relatively low elevation puts it almost completely within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain.

These complicated conditions, as well as the diversity of stakeholders in the city, have sparked many efforts to guide the development of the city. It is important to take these past and present efforts into account. A number of non-profit organizations are active in the community, including the Chelsea Collaborative, Centro Latino, the Chamber of Commerce, and many others. The Neighborhood Developers, the local community development corporation (CDC), has spearheaded revitalization and new affordable housing in the Box District and Bellingham Hill. The CDC is currently working with the city on the Broadway Corridor Action Plan. In the past 10 years, there have been nine planning reports written on the city, with much of the focus on how to attract new development. In light of all this, Connect Chelsea has been structured to respect current initiatives and community process through an extensive outreach and engagement effort with the various stakeholders of Chelsea.



Figure 3 - Intercept Interview on MBTA *Studio members conducted outreach in numerous ways, including intercept interviews with commuters on MBTA busses that serve Chelsea (Pei).*

ENGAGEMENT

The project is grounded in a significant engagement effort during which students reached out to more than 600 people who live, work, manage businesses, or otherwise spend time in Chelsea. Over a period of several months, the studio sought input through online platforms, written "intercept" surveys, in-person interviews, and group workshops. The diversity of techniques employed in this process helped to engage multiple sectors of the community, gather a rich set of information about complex topics, and raise general awareness about potential changes coming to Chelsea.

Participants brought to the forefront some of the key issues surrounding the development of western Chelsea, including:

- City Government and its ability to balance improvements for both new and existing residents
- Uncertainties over the extension of the Silver Line, and its impact on affordability
- Chelsea's industrial base and the shift towards the service economy
- Housing balance and whether new development addresses existing needs

Overall, despite the ongoing nature of discussions over these key issues, there was strong confidence in Chelsea's potential to grow in an inclusive manner. The input from various stakeholders on how to achieve this goal was instrumental to the formulation of the three scenarios put forth in this report.



Figure 4 - Surveys at Market Basket *Located at the heart of western Chelsea, Market Basket is an important center of activity, so studio members sought to solicit community input at the site (Pei).*

SCENARIOS

The three scenarios presented in this plan reflect the multitude of perspectives on the future of Chelsea. Each presents a unified vision built around five topic areas: Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Open Space, and Urban Design. The scenarios examine these topics from the neighborhood level, the city level, and the regional level. In doing so, they offer a wide range of possible interventions, ranging from low-cost, immediate recommendations to ambitious, large-scale development plans.

Scenario 1: Leveraging Local Strengths

The Leveraging Local Strengths scenario offers a set of recommendations focused on the innate strengths of Chelsea in response to the potentially transformative effect of the Silver Line extension. It emphasizes building around realistic and actionable solutions in order to serve the existing community. In doing so, the scenario provides a unified vision of Chelsea that helps to maintain affordability, grow the economy, and strengthen community connections.

The scenario focuses on three core strengths:

- A diverse, socially engaged community that is inclusive and affordable for newcomers
- A solid economic base that supports a diversity of skills and a range of jobs
- A set of strategic, physical, and locational qualities

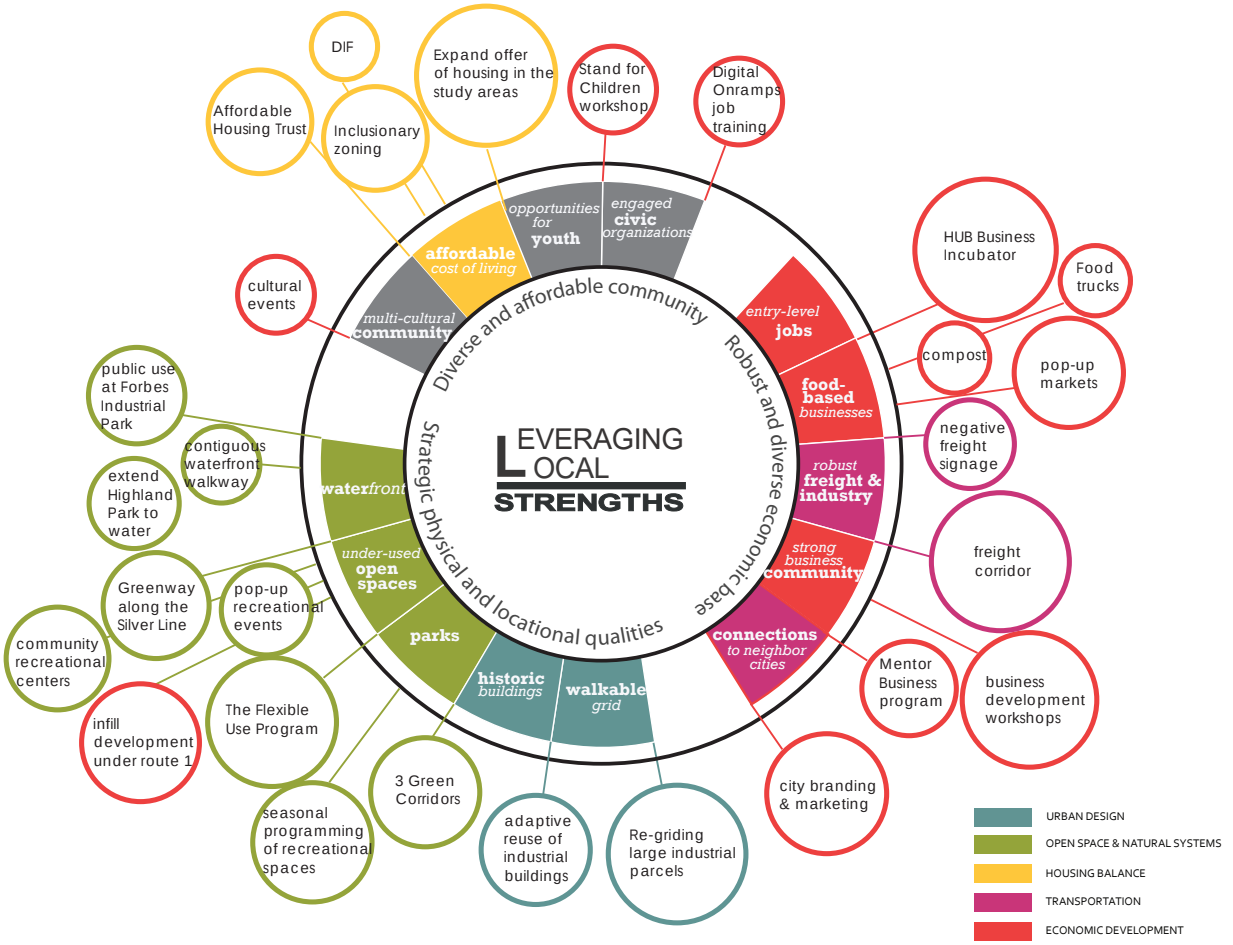

Figure 5 – Chelsea Strengths and Opportunities *Chelsea's strengths range from a thriving freight industry to affordability. Ways in which these strengths can be enhanced are developed within the plan.*

Simple, low-cost steps can be taken immediately to enhance these strengths. Phasing is heavily weighted toward implementation in the first three years, with major physical investments, such as housing or road infrastructure, projected for the next 10 to 20 years. Overall, the scenario plans for 1,500 units of housing, at least 20% of which would be affordable, and proposes more than 20 separate, small-scale interventions ranging from business incubator spaces to a citywide marketing campaigns.

This is a modular set of recommendations, as they can be taken individually and applied on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, all of these interventions come together in order to empower residents, enhance the existing character of Chelsea, foster stronger connections, and inspire civic pride. Thus, Leveraging Local Strengths acknowledges the city's need for a strengthened tax base, while addressing the priorities of current residents.

Scenario 2:
A Network Of Neighborhoods

A Network of Neighborhoods scenario recognizes the importance of a strong and distinct sense of place for western Chelsea. Its interventions focus on creating stable and thriving neighborhoods, as well as their importance to potential investors, residents, and the long-term prosperity of the city.

Chelsea is a city with a well-defined set of commercial corridors and pocket residential districts. However, this neighborhood network does not extend into the Everett Avenue Urban Renewal District. Instead, the area is dominated by surface parking, vacant lots, industrial uses, and big box retail. Key points of interest, such as Market Basket and Chelsea High School, are islands of activity within a landscape that is largely inhospitable to pedestrians. Community input identified this portion of the city as unwelcoming, unexciting, and giving off the perception of danger.

This scenario proposes transforming the area by establishing three new neighborhood centers:

- Mystic Square – New mixed use development and creative reuse of industrial space centered on new Silver Line station
- Arlington Corner – A residential hub with local businesses and civic anchors
- Island End – Mixed-use residential and office development with waterfront access

These neighborhood centers would replace vacant lots and parking spaces west of Route 1 and become memorable urban places catering to a population of several thousand people who live, work, and shop in the area. The scenario would add 3,700 units of housing over a 20-year phasing period, starting with the establishment of Mystic Square, and then moving on to Arlington Corner and Island End. Enhanced streets and open spaces would connect the new neighborhoods to Chelsea's existing urban fabric, while also providing important stormwater and flooding risk prevention. New civic spaces and economic development programs would increase human capital and generate a sense of community and identity in a section of Chelsea that is currently very isolated.

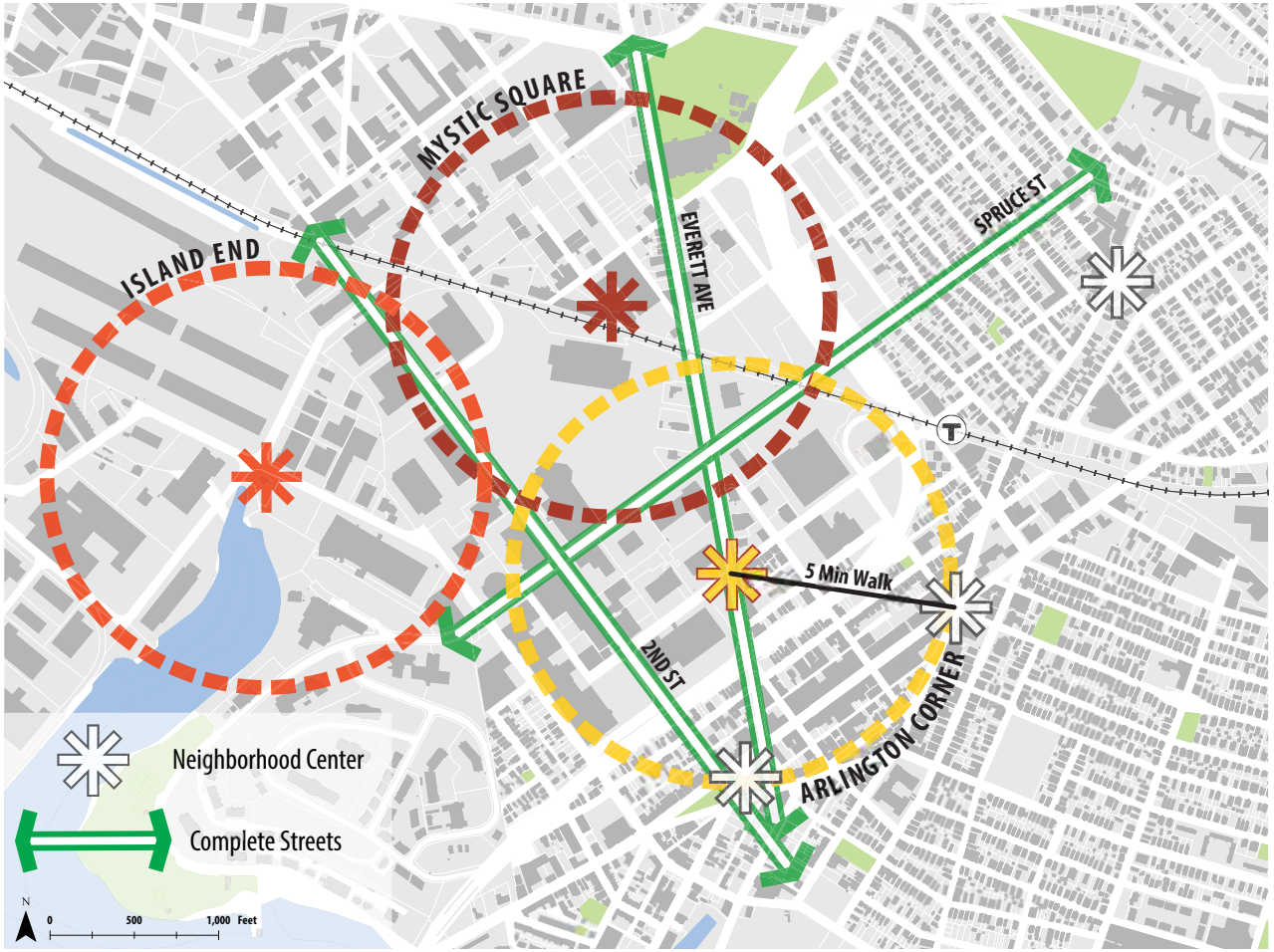

Figure 6 – Interconnected Neighborhoods *Proposed neighborhood centers in western Chelsea, which are memorable public spaces that catalyze other activity, link to existing neighborhood via complete streets.*

With the arrival of rapid transit, Chelsea will have many redevelopment offers for the urban renewal district. These will include buildings that, while well-designed and intentioned, are not strongly integrated into the surrounding land uses. A Network of Neighborhoods argues that the City should proactively seek to place such developments into a wider context of open spaces, people, and amenities.

Scenario 3:
Building For The Workforce

The Silver Line extension brings with it an important connection to the regional economy and major development opportunities. The Building for the Workforce scenario seeks to harness the full potential of development, while connecting residents to all of the opportunities that such development presents.

The scenario emphasizes a long-term outlook that capitalizes on immediate market demand for housing in the Greater Boston area and lays the groundwork for the sustained economic health of Chelsea. Over a 25-year period, the plan proposes the addition of 8,000 housing units, 3.5 miles of greened streets, 28 acres of green space, new employment and training space, and the creation of strong connections between the Silver Line and the spaces where people live and work in Chelsea.

This scenario will guide development in line with three key themes:

- Capitalizing on the city's regional economic advantage by connecting Chelsea residents with the major industry clusters of Greater Boston
- Developing infrastructure to attract and retain important employers
- Creating strong neighborhood identity with distinct district characteristics in order to establish an environment for long-term economic stability

Phasing the scenario over a 25-year period will allow for minimization of risk as well as orderly design. Implementation will proceed in three steps: Phase 1 (5 years, from 2015 to 2020), Phase 2 (10 years, from 2020-2030), and Phase 3 (10 years, from 2030 to 2040). The City can adapt the plan to market changes and avoid unnecessary infrastructure investments.

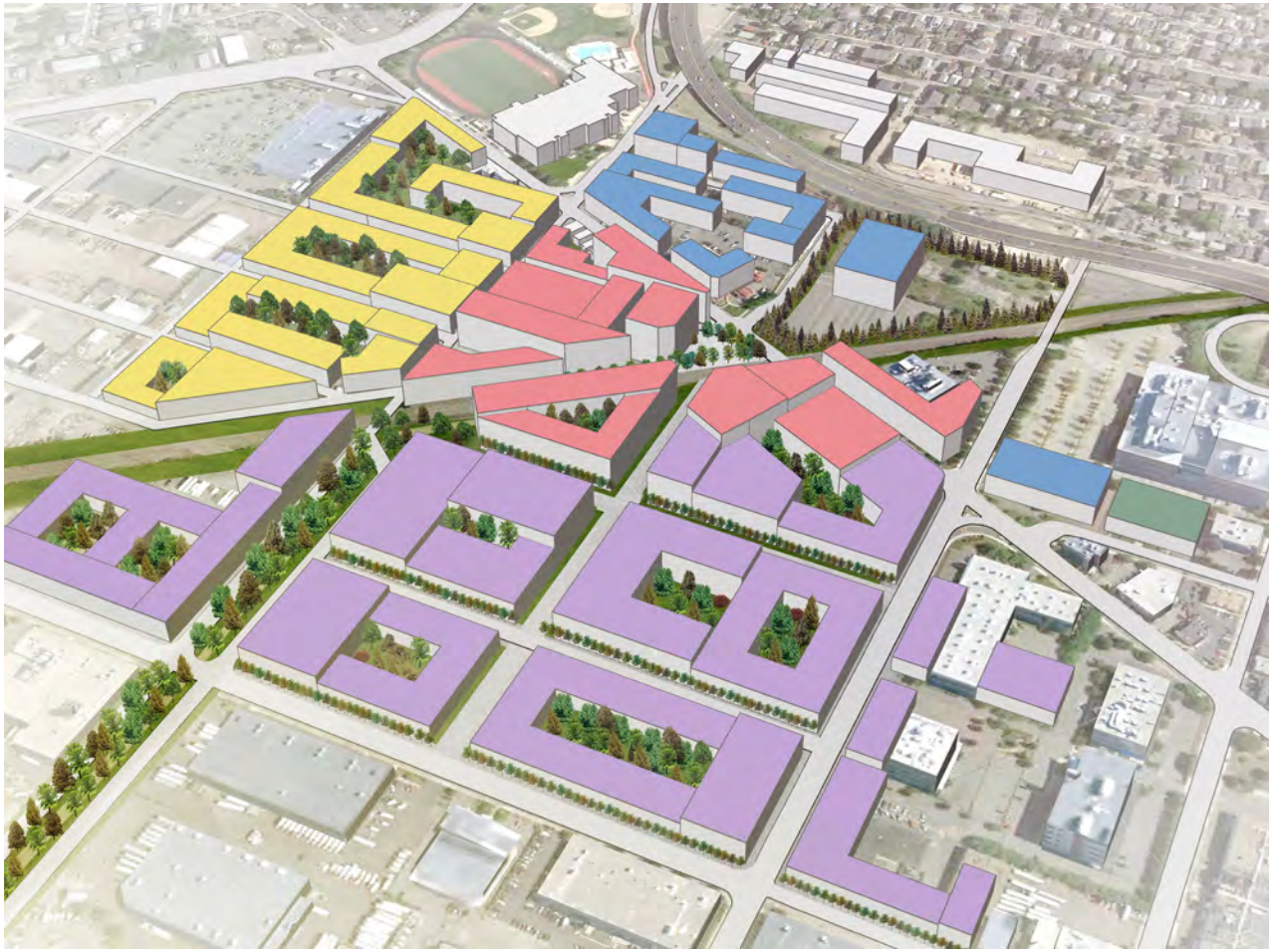

Figure 7 – Full Build Out of Study Area *Building for the Workforce envisions the gradual transformation of western Chelsea into a dense, mixed-use neighborhood.*

The Silver Line extension will enhance connections to nearby Boston, generating new development and employment opportunities in Chelsea. It will accomplish this by attracting employers that are connected to the strengths of the Greater Boston economy and by increasing residents' access to jobs outside of the city. New development, infrastructure improvements, and smart design can bolster Chelsea's current regional position, redefining it as an economic and residential center where urban life, opportunities, and aesthetics converge to offer citizens an optimal neighborhood and community experience.

NEXT STEPS

Connect Chelsea presents a menu of options for the improvement of Chelsea that spans many situations and can be adapted to fill a variety of needs. From the low-cost, immediate interventions of Leveraging Local Strengths, to the neighborhood-building of A Network of Neighborhoods, to the ambitious regional-driven development of Building for the Workforce, the plan offers a framework for realistic, feasible work that could be undertaken right away. At the same time, the plan provides a coherent, long-term perspective.

It is the hope of the studio that this report will be used as a way to think about all of the forces and interests at play in the development of Chelsea. Connect Chelsea is an attempt to engage with the complexity of the city and to represent the numerous components that are important to consider in a unified and encompassing vision. Despite their different perspectives, all three scenarios for the city strive towards the common goal of a safe, inclusive, and thriving Chelsea. For this reason, an essential component of the report is the final section on implementation, which documents the tools and resources that policymakers, businesspeople, organizations, and residents have at their disposal in order to make their vision of Chelsea into reality.

SCENARIO COMPARISONS

Leveraging Local Strengths

The character of Chelsea is valuable. This plan welcomes more of what makes Chelsea unique to complement local housing, industry, and business.

Proposes:
- 1,500 housing units (20%+ affordable)
- 20+ small-scale business interventions ranging from business incubator spaces to a citywide marketing campaign

A Network of Neighborhoods

Chelsea is a city of neighborhoods. This plan establishes new neighborhoods to the west to connect the city as a whole.

Proposes:
- 3,700 housing units
- 3 new neighborhood centers: Mystic Square, Arlington Corner, and Island End
- Soft infrastructure network to manage storm water and increase open space

Building for the Workforce

Chelsea's location is an asset. This plan uses the location to guide development to house and provide jobs for a growing workforce.

Proposes:
- 8,000 housing units (20%+ affordable)
- 3.5 miles of greened streets and 28 acres of green space
- New employment and training space
- Strong connection between the Silver Line and live-and-work spaces.