

City of Newton

# California Street Manufacturing District Zoning Study

April 27, 2023

# Agenda

1. Project Introduction and Goals
2. Site History and Context
3. Transportation and Public Realm Improvements
4. Market Considerations
5. Potential Development
6. Next Steps & Discussion

# Project Introduction

The California Street Manufacturing District is changing. How should we shape its future?

- Once an industrial hub, this area now hosts a diverse range of commercial, residential, and recreational uses.
- The district will continue evolving in the decades ahead. Why? Because the greatest demand for land here is no longer for industrial use.
- This project seeks to forecast how this area may evolve, what Newton would prefer to see here, and which tools the city can utilize to ensure a desirable future for this land.

# Project Goals

The goal of this study is to create zoning recommendations that will:

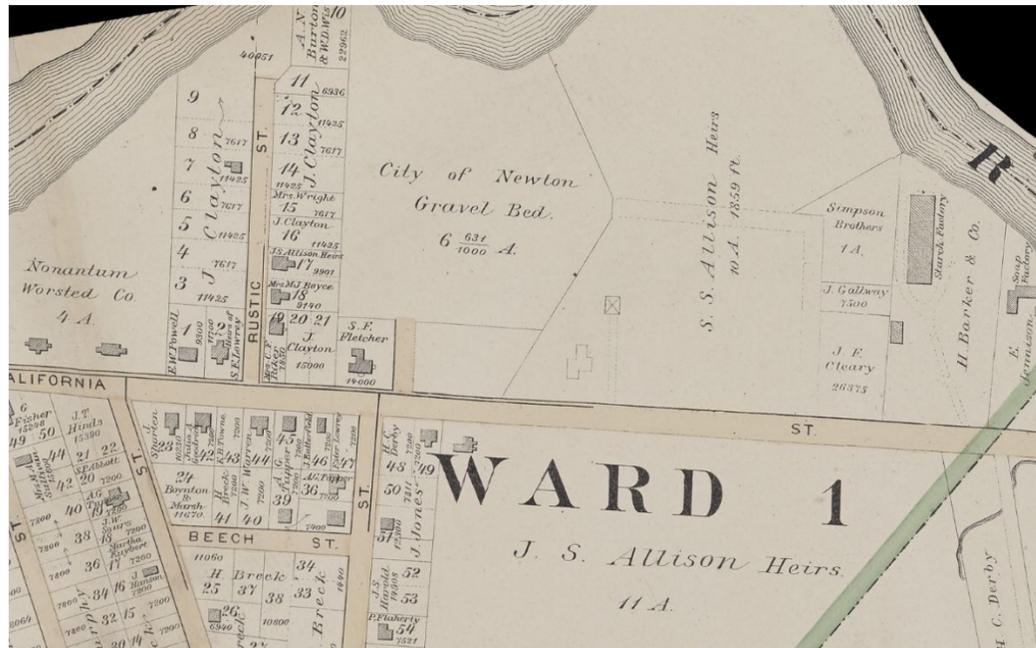
- Encourage the growth of the commercial tax base
- Enable the creation of appropriately-scaled housing
- Ensure that some land is preserved for 21st century commercial and industrial purposes, including light manufacturing and flexible spaces for creative economy businesses.

# Site History and Context

Manufacturing legacy and current uses in the district

# Historic Maps

1886



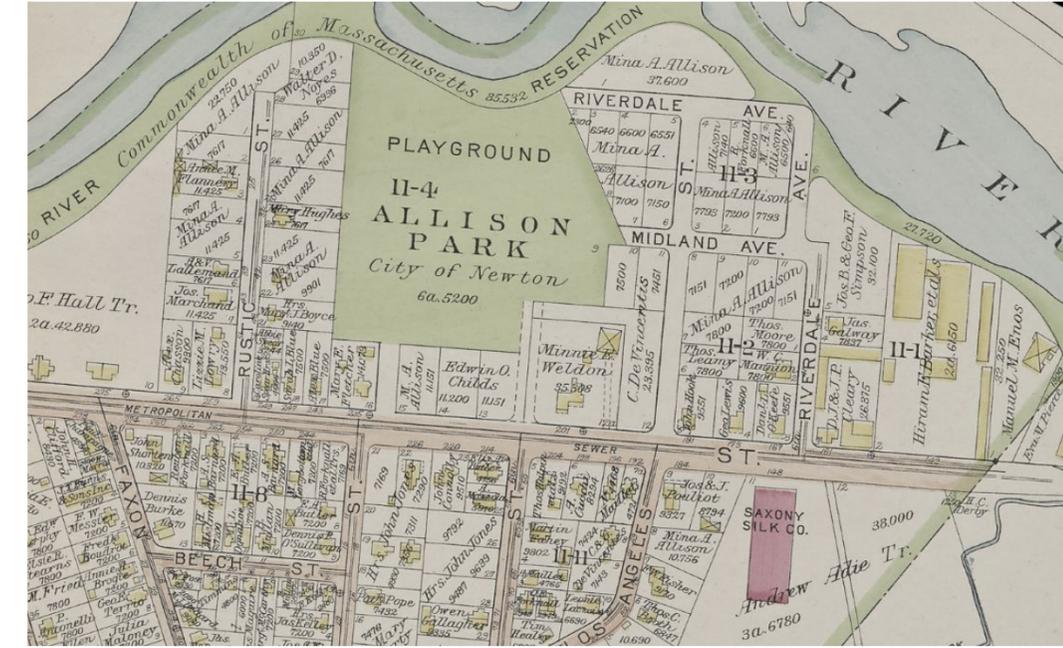
- Residential development west of Allison St
- Factory development north of California St
  - Nonantum Worsted Co.
  - Starch Factory
  - Soap Factory

1895



- Introduction of Los Angeles St
- Increased residential development
- Increased factory development south of California St
  - Nonantum Worsted Co.

1917

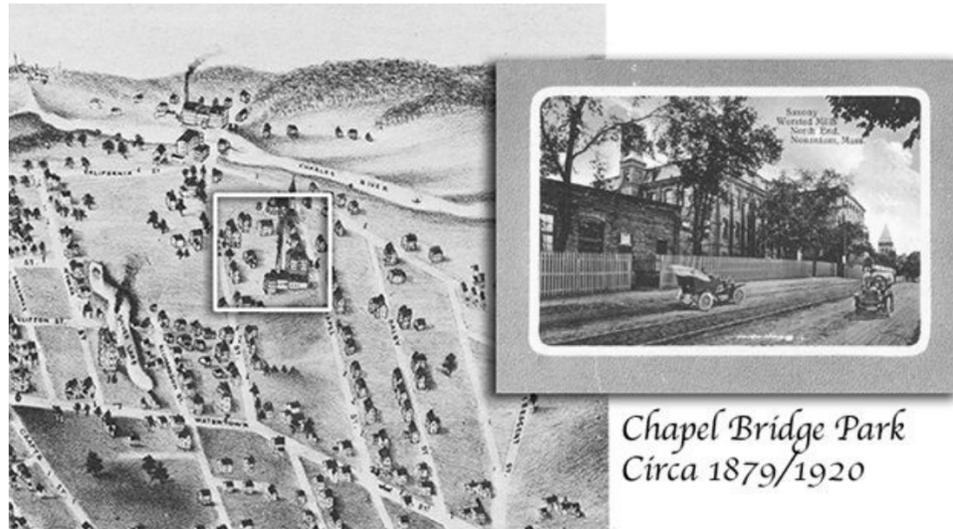


- Establishment of Allison Park
- Increased residential development
- Increased factory development
  - Saxony Silk Co.
  - Aetna Mills

Note: Historic maps sourced from: <https://atlascope.org>

# Manufacturing Legacy

## Nonantum Worsted Mills



Chapel Bridge Park  
Circa 1879/1920

- 1850s: Stocking and hosiery mill
- Post-Civil War: Wool production
- 1896: Purchased by Saxony company

## Bemis Mill



- 1779: Paper mill
- 1822: Textile manufacturing
- 1920: Production of automobile fabrics

## Silver Lake Mills



The Silver Lake Mills at Newton.

- 1866: Production of braided cord and steam packing

# Building Age

## Building Age

- Before 1900
- 1900 - 1940
- 1941 - 1980
- After 1980

**Bemis Mill Office; ca. 1779**

**Chapel Bridge Park Office/R&D; ca. 1850s**

**Chapel Business Center Office/R&D; ca. 1900**

**150 California St Office; ca. 1910**

# Current Zoning

## Newton Zoning

- Business (BU)
- Manufacturing (LM, M)
- Multi-Residence (MR)
- Single Residence (SR)
- Mixed Use (MU)
- Public Use & Open Space (PU, OS/R)

## Watertown Zoning

- Business (NB, LB, CB)
- Industrial (I)
- Multi-Family (T, R, CR)
- Single Family (S)
- Pleasant St Corridor District (PSCD)
- Open Space / Conservancy (OSC)



Limited Business (LB)

Two Family (T)

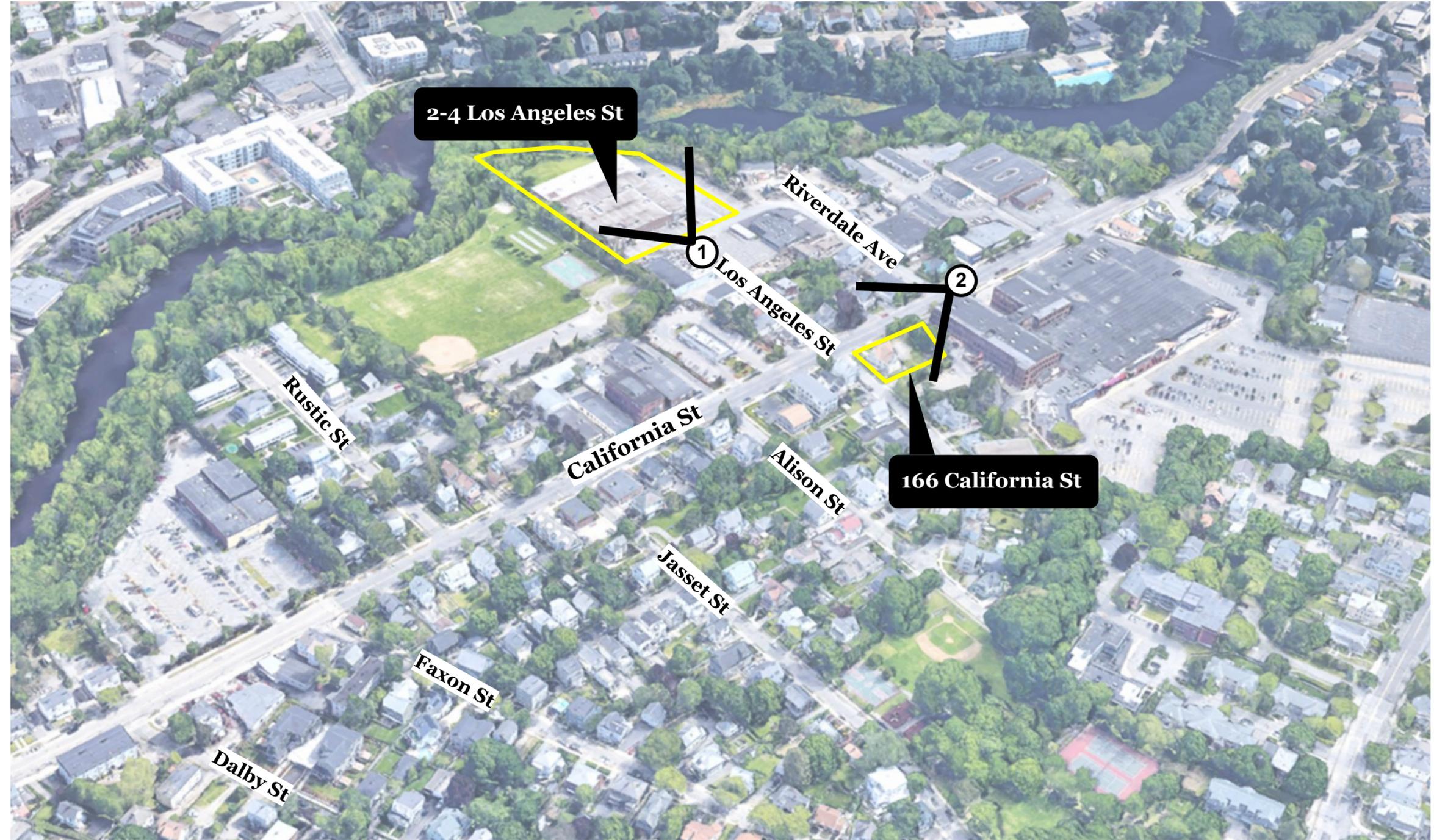
# Current Zoning



1. 5-story multi-family construction (40B development)



2. 3-story multi-family development



# Current Uses on Site



# Transportation and Public Realm Improvements

Creating stronger neighborhood connections

# Site Connectivity



**Charles River Greenway**

**Watertown Square**

**Watertown**

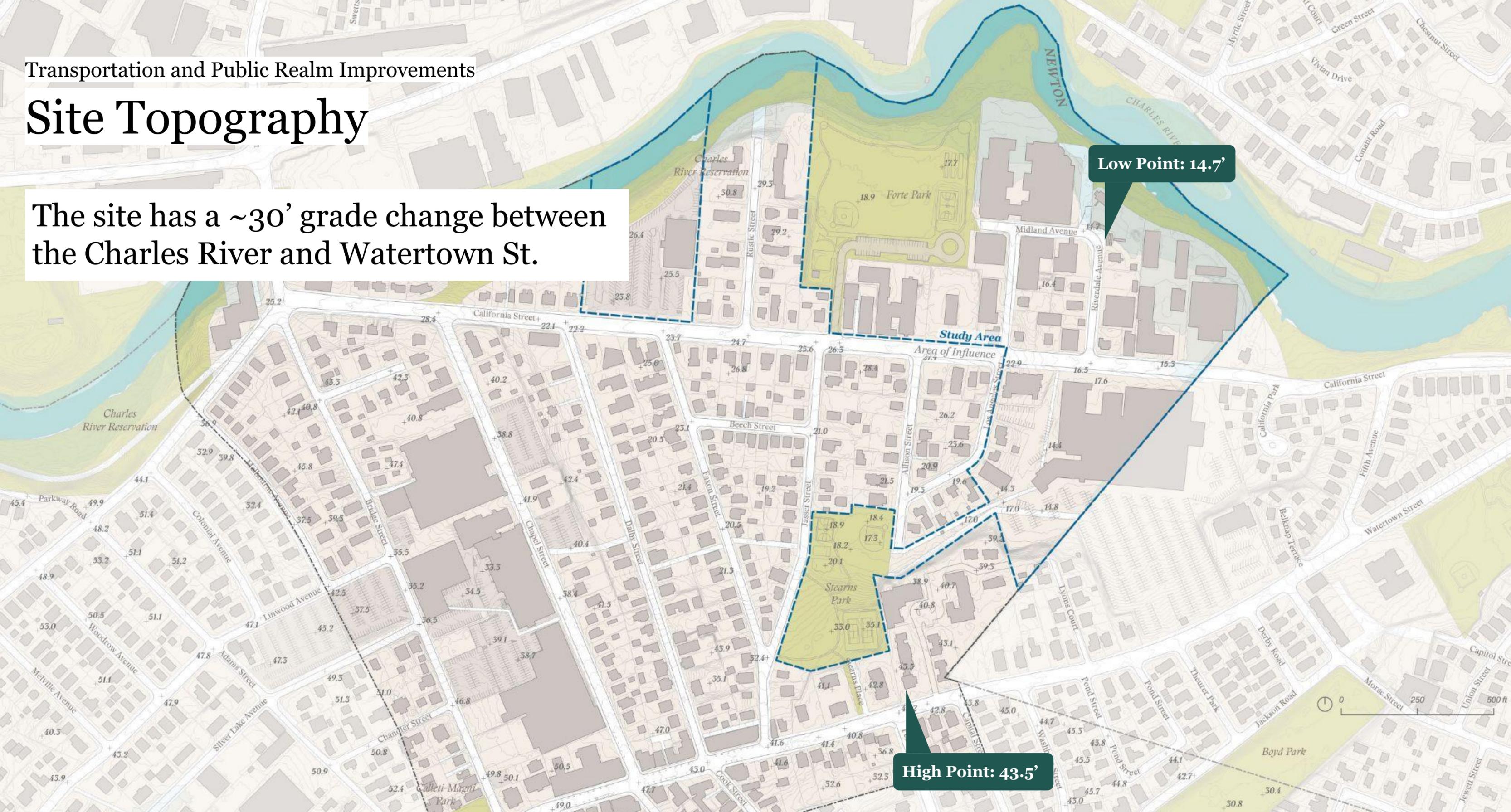
**Watertown Yard**

**Nonantum**

**Bus Routes**

# Site Topography

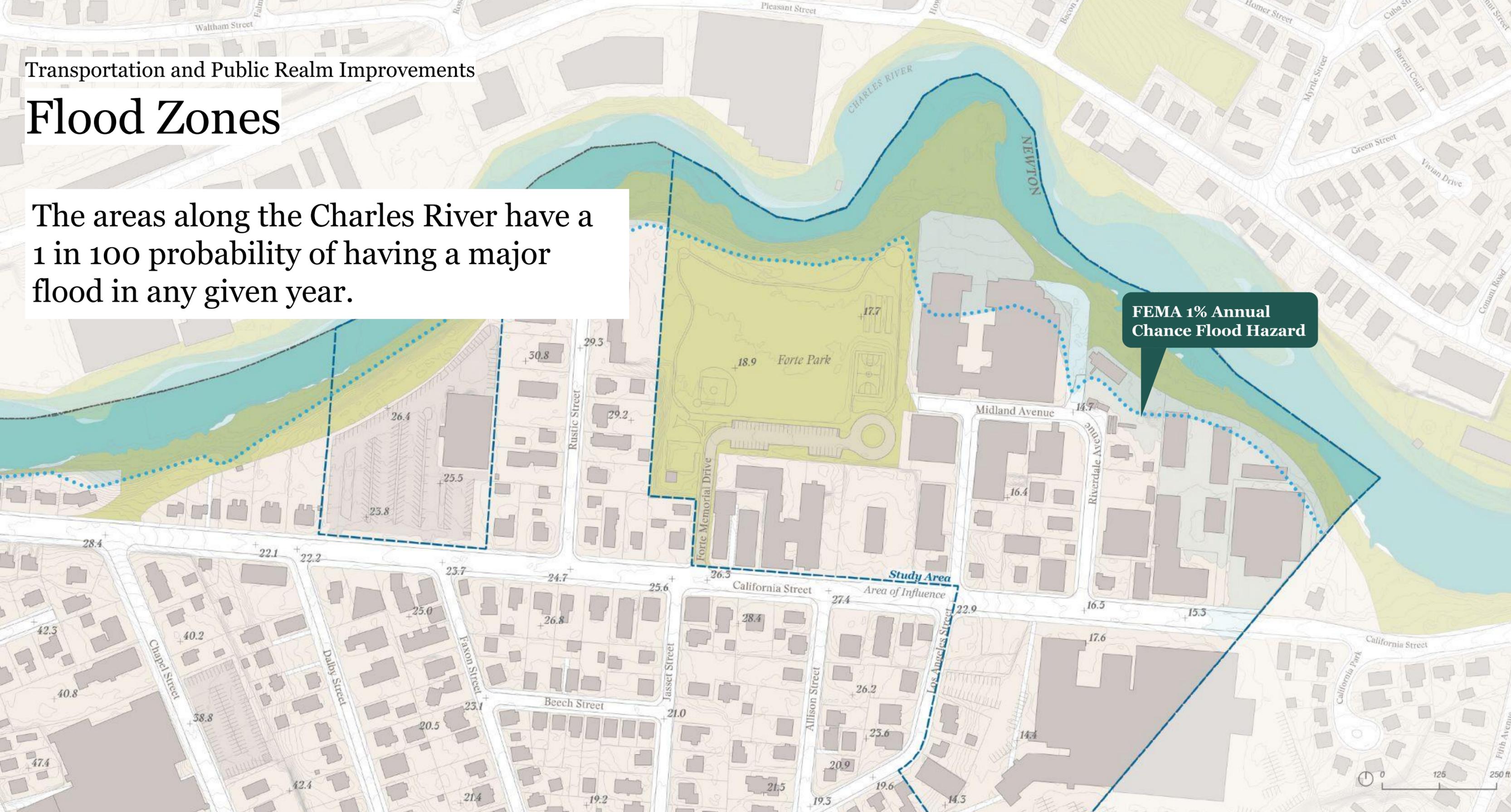
The site has a ~30' grade change between the Charles River and Watertown St.



# Flood Zones

The areas along the Charles River have a 1 in 100 probability of having a major flood in any given year.

FEMA 1% Annual  
Chance Flood Hazard



# Green Assets



Stearns Park



Forte Park



Charles River Greenway

# Market Considerations

Market pressures currently acting on and around the district

# Recent Developments



**64 Pleasant St**  
Adaptive Re-use; R+D Life Science



**560 + 580 Pleasant St**  
R+D Life Science



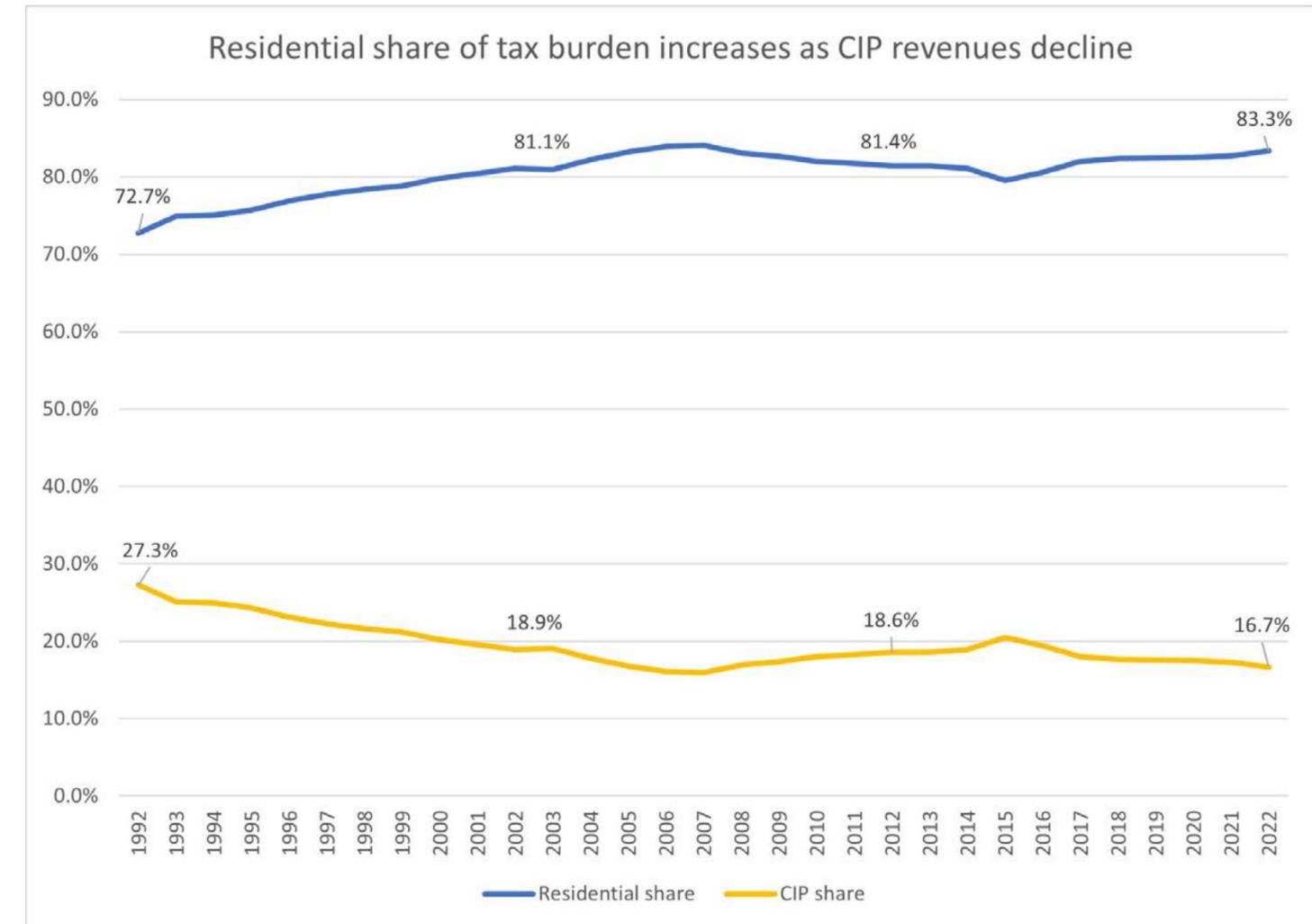
**66 Galen St + 99 Water St**  
R+D Life Science + Commercial

*Nonantum*

# Commercial Development Goals

The long-term fiscal health of any municipality requires a healthy mix of residential and commercial tax revenue.

- Because Newton is largely residential, most of the municipal tax burden falls on homeowners. That share has increased over the past 30 years -- from 72.7% in 1992 to 83.3% today.
- The City has a split tax rate, which means commercial and industrial properties pay around twice as much tax per assessed value.
- Less than one of Newton's 18.2 square miles (4.1% of land) is zoned commercial or industrial. That includes all of the village centers, Route 9, Needham St., Riverside, and the Wells Ave. office park.
- Industrial uses are even more restricted, allowed on only some 73 (0.6%) of Newton's land area.

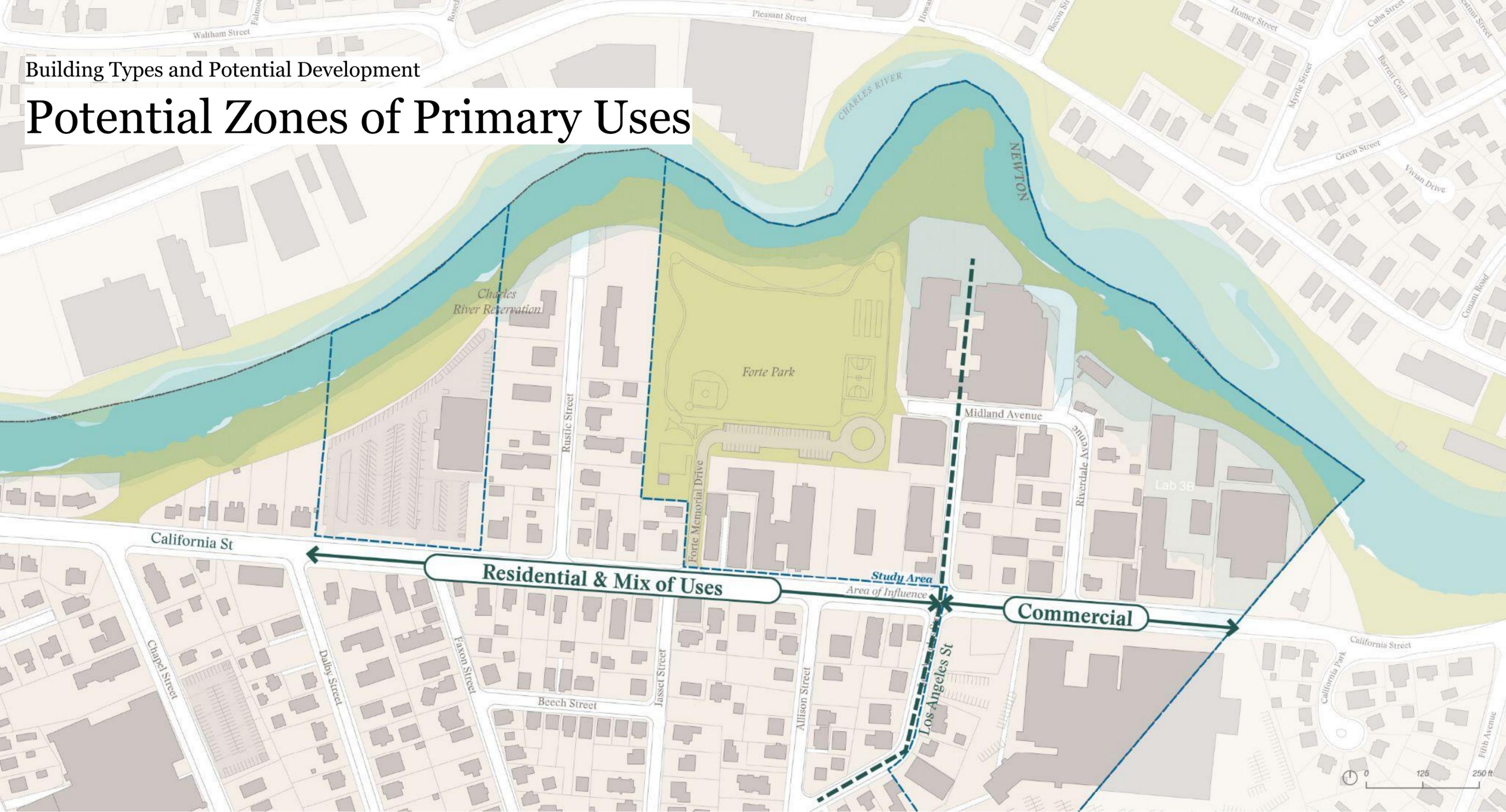


Data from City of Newton Fiscal Year 2023 Classification Hearing, Nov. 21, 2022, p. 11.

# Potential Development

Imagining future uses for the district

# Potential Zones of Primary Uses



# Example Small-scale Light Industrial Uses

## Boutique Industrial Uses



- Small-batch manufacturing
- Make and sell with retail showroom
- Woodworking
- Metalworking, machining, fabrication
- Product design and 3D printing
- Apparel, textiles, and leather
- Ceramics
- Brewery/Brewpub
- Local food production, packaging, bakeries
- Printing

## Light Industrial Uses



- R&D
- Industrial Services
- Distribution
- Light Manufacturing
- Building Materials sale/storage
- Warehousing
- Contractors: plumbing, electrical

# Example Small-scale Light Industrial Districts

## Somernova

7.4-acre innovation campus in Somerville, MA



- Technology and manufacturing
- Food and beverage
- Art and design
- Fitness and wellness

## Norwood Space Center

300,000 SF mixed-use mill building campus in Norwood, MA



- Retail
- Commercial
- Creative space
- Entertainment

# Next Steps & Discussion

We'd love to hear about your vision for the district

# Next Steps



Public Meeting (Hybrid)

Brief presentation and discussion with the Economic Development Commission at 7pm in City Hall, Room 204 (+Zoom).

Public Meeting (Hybrid)

Discussion of potential and preferred redevelopment scenarios, based on detailed analysis, plus staff and community input, at 7pm in City Hall, Room 207 (+Zoom).

Findings & Recommendations published

Public release of the final report with proposed zoning recommendations to the City Council, and online at <https://www.newtonma.gov/california>

# Discussion

## History of the District

Dating back to the 18th century, this historically industrial area supported a wide range of manufacturing jobs. Many of the distinctive mill buildings are still around today and have been converted into new uses.



## Understanding the District Today

### Current Zoning

Today's land use regulations date to the 1920s, a period when industrial operations could be dangerous and often generated noise and pollution. Municipal zoning was created to separate such activities from residential neighborhoods and to create distance between conflicting uses. However, early zoning could only focus on the types of uses existing at that time. It could not anticipate how much the world would change over the following century.

Today, the underlying regulations for "manufacturing" along California Street have not changed. The rules prohibit a wide range of uses that might be welcome in the neighborhood, animal processing, bottling, dry cleaning, hotels, personal service establishments like hair salons, laboratories, research & development firms, restaurants, or residences. Some of these businesses have existed in this area in some form prior to the current regulations, however the zoning greatly restricts what can be done here today.

### Market Considerations

Many of today's industries did not exist when zoning was created - major sectors like computing, pharmaceuticals, life sciences, and robotics. Modern manufacturing has evolved to become safer, cleaner, and highly technical. Manufacturing has also gone small-scale to create firms that cannot be mass produced. Examples include craft breweries and distillers, specialty bakers, jewelry designers, and "maker spaces" for other artisanal products.

Commercial market scenarios might see this area developed for multifamily housing. Another development scenario might use life science offices and labs, which would create jobs and generate tax benefits for the city. While municipal zoning sets the rules for land uses, those rules need updating.

Modern zoning efforts have evolved to become more forward-looking. Instead of focusing on the prevention of bad outcomes, zoning efforts today engage the community and try to create a shared vision for shaping the future of a place. What is your vision for this district? Should the City update regulations around California Street to attract more modern manufacturing? Would you prefer to see a mix of different uses, both commercial and residential? What do you think?



Current zoning in Newton and Watertown



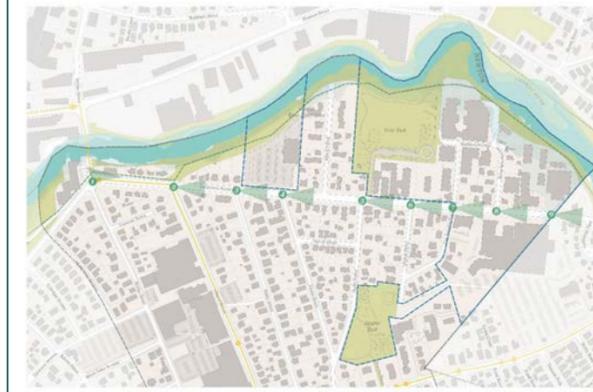
Recent life science and multi-family buildings proposed and under construction

### Tell us what you think!

What changes have you experienced in the district over time?  
Write your answers on sticks and place them below.

## A Walk Down California Street

The following views look east down California Street at major cross sections. Each area has a distinct character and access to different amenities.



## Envisioning the Future of the District

We'd like to hear your thoughts on how the district should evolve. What type of activity would you like to see more of? Write your responses on sticks and place them in the grid below.

