



boston planning &  
development agency

# Introduction to Squares + Streets



WELCOME TO  
FIELDS CORNER  
DORCHESTER  
CITY OF BOSTON

DUDLEY ST

STRAND  
THEATRE  
EST  
1918

15 RUGGLES

WELCOME TO  
UPHAM'S  
CORNER

Grove  
Hall's  
mecca

# 1

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# Squares + Streets Overview

# Overview

Squares + Streets, a new city wide planning and zoning initiative that will focus on housing, public space, arts and culture, and transit in neighborhood centers and along main streets.



# Squares + Streets Values and Goals



## Expand Affordability

+ Facilitate growth in **mixed use zones** on neighborhood centers

+ **Reduce** resident transportation **spending**

+ Incentivize affordable **housing opportunities**

## Promote Resilience

+ Promote **transit-oriented development**

+ Reduce vehicle dependence

+ Strengthen small **business ecosystems**

## Advance Equity

+ **Expand access** to neighborhoods with rich transit

+ Open **investment pathways** for a wider range of property owners

+ **Spread** public and private **investment**

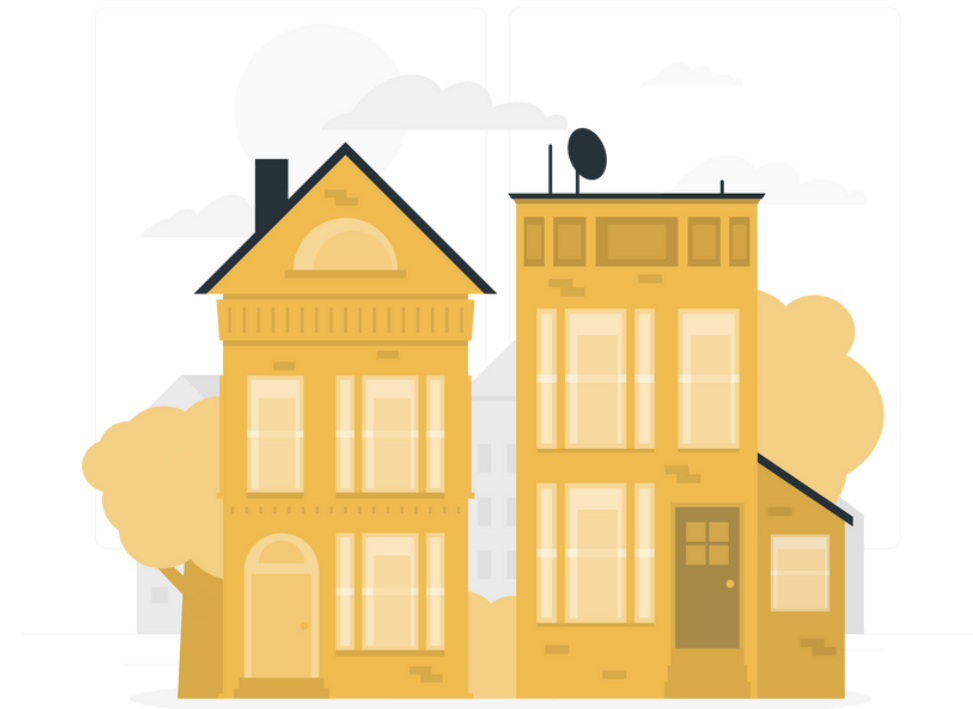
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## Zoning for Squares + Streets

# What is Zoning?

**Zoning** is a set of laws that's used to guide development by telling us **what** types of buildings can be built and **where** those different types can be built.



# Some of What Zoning Regulates:



## Land Uses

*the types of activities allowed within a given area*



## Physical Building Dimensions

*how much space a building takes up, its height, and open space around it*



## Parking Requirements

*the number of parking spaces needed for certain land uses*

# We Need Zoning Reform! But Why?

Current zoning regulations **don't match what's built, what exists, or the ways we want to grow**

Updated zoning sets **clear standards for what can be built AND reduces reliance on variances** and negotiated approvals

Provide **pathways for small-scale residential and commercial development** as well as larger ones

Make the Boston Zoning Code **easier to navigate and more predictable**



# Why do Squares + Streets areas need updated zoning?

- Modernize and diversify land uses
- Reduce regulatory obstacles
- Support more diverse housing options
- Ensure alignment with building code and safety standards
- Encourage sustainable design and green building standards
- Zoning that represents and codifies community visions for growth for the near future



# How do we approach updating zoning for Squares + Streets areas?

## Identify major needs for zoning reform:

- Citywide planning processes & district plans
- High # of zoning appeals
- Misalignment between what exists and what zoning allows

## Draft updated zoning regulations:

- Analysis of parcels, building trends, land use-related appeals, and citywide goals
- Public engagement throughout
- “Test-fitting” to further develop the zoning and see how it works

## BPDA Board + Zoning Commission approval:

- Public feedback + draft zoning presented to BPDA Board
- If approved, another public comment period before Zoning Commission

## Squares + Streets Plans:

- Public engagement on appropriate form for local squares and corridors
- Public engagement on zoning map amendment

Previous Planning + Analysis

Where We Are Now

Where We're Going Next

# (Draft!) Zoning for Squares + Streets

## Modernized Land Uses and New “Squares + Streets” Zoning Districts

### **Modernized Land Uses and Active Uses**

Allow for a mix of active uses and other modernized land uses in main streets and squares



### **New Squares + Streets Zoning Districts**

Create a set of new zoning options for main streets and squares that promote housing, community and public spaces, businesses, and active streets



# Modernized Land Uses and Active Uses



**Modernize land uses** and definitions, consolidate uses, and simplify how to read them

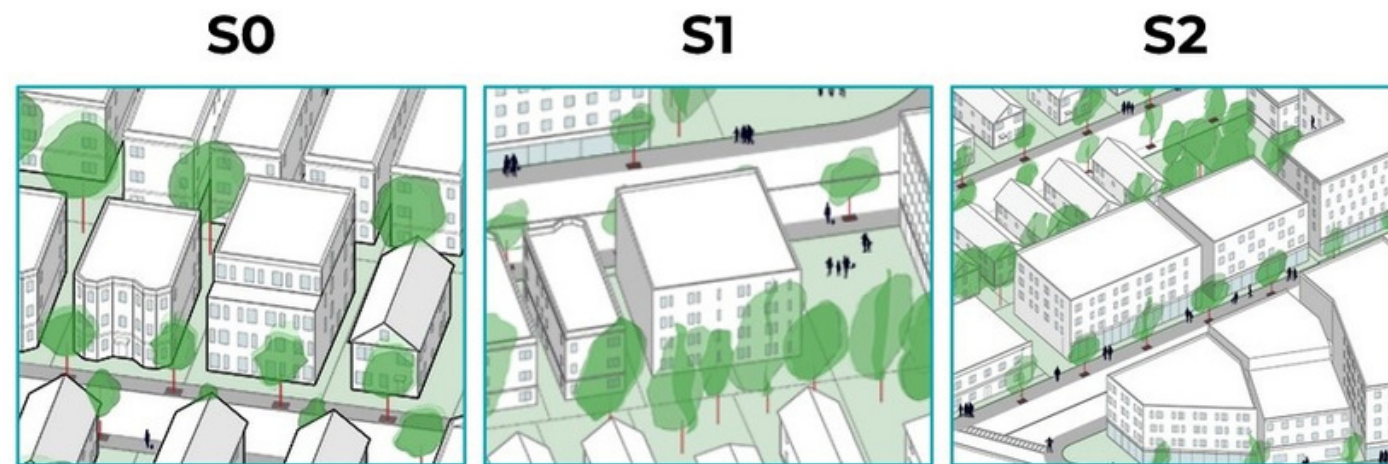
*From **250 uses** to **70 uses!***



Introduce and define "**Active Uses**" that promote community and commercial ground floor activity

# Squares + Streets Zoning Districts

## SQUARES + STREETS Zoning Districts



**Transition  
Residential**

**Main Street  
Living**

**Main Street  
Mixed Use**



**Active Main  
Street**

**Active Squares**

### S0 - Transition Residential

Housing only - no more than 14 units | Transition between low + high-activity streets | Smaller parcels | Front + side yard requirements for trees and open space

### S1 - Main Street Living

Mixed-use buildings with majority housing | Small ground floor storefronts + local services allowed | Small front + side yard requirements for buffers between areas

### S2 - Main Street Mixed Use

Mid-rise mixed use buildings that fill the front of the lot | Small-to-medium ground floor active uses required | Lower lot coverage to ensure yard space | Outdoor spaces required, like courtyards and balconies

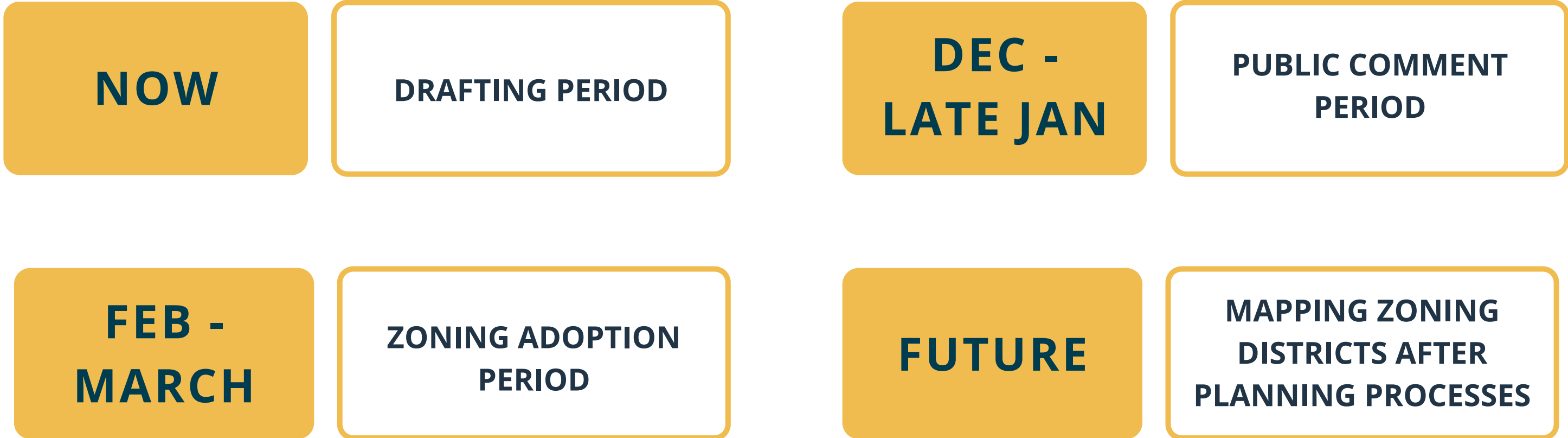
### S3 - Active Main Streets

Taller mid-rise buildings allowed that fill the front of the lot | Allows housing, hotels, and commercial uses on upper floors | Medium-scale ground floor active uses required | Lot coverage is responsive to parcel size

### S4 - Active Squares

Taller mid-rise buildings allowed that fill the front of the lot | Wider range of ground floor active uses allowed | Lot coverage is responsive to parcel size

# Creating Squares + Streets Zoning Districts - Timeline-



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## Squares + Streets Plans

# What is Comprehensive Planning?

Comprehensive Planning is **planning that works to achieve city wide goals in partnership with other city departments** i.e. mayor's office of housing, department of transportation, and parks and environment





# How do comprehensive planning processes and zoning reform work together?

Updated zoning options that align with **what already exists that we want to maintain and grow** as well **the goals we have for future generations** becomes a **helpful tool** to implement what we learn from comprehensive planning processes!



# Squares + Streets Planning Process



**SMALL AND SPECIFIC  
AREAS**



**FOCUSED 6-9 MONTH  
PROCESS**



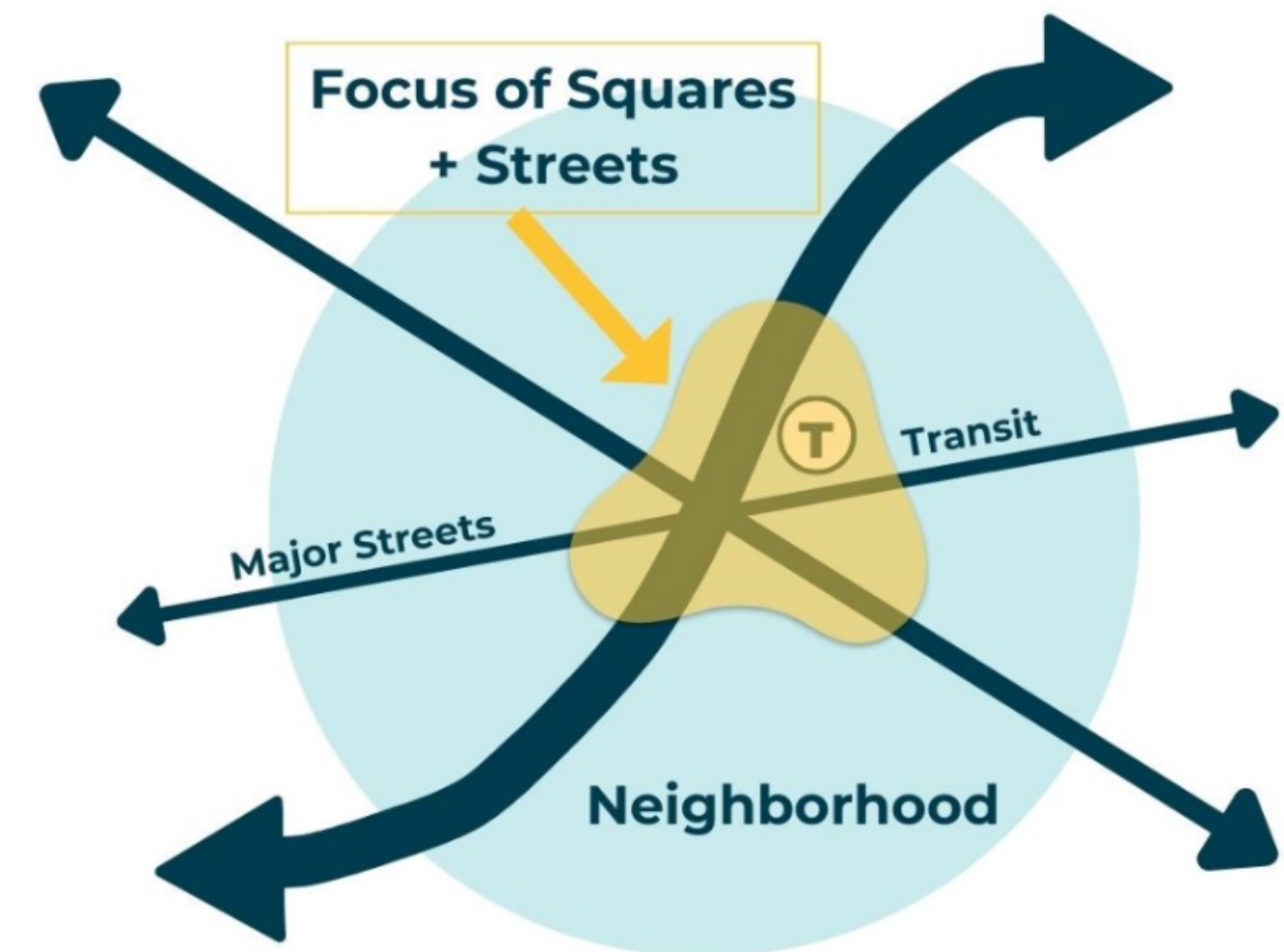
**ACTION-ORIENTED  
PLANS**

# Small and Specific Areas



## Boston's Neighborhood Commercial Centers

- Areas within 5-10 min walk of major transportation assets
- Existing activity hubs
  - Main Streets districts
  - Major civic anchors
  - Streets with clusters of existing commercial uses



# Focused 6-9 Month Process



# Action Oriented Plans



- **Partnerships** with other **City of Boston departments** to align planning with implementation pathways **that are achievable within 10 years:**
  - Programs and funding to promote and preserve small businesses, affordable housing, and arts and culture
  - Public space projects to address transportation, climate change, etc.
  - Plans for city-owned parcels
- **Updated zoning** to support housing, healthy business districts, and access to community resources



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## Design Vision

# Boston Design Vision



# Next Steps

1. Share your thoughts on the draft Squares + Streets zoning updates on our **Public Comment Form** at [bostonplans.org/squares!](https://bostonplans.org/squares)
2. Attend Upcoming [Zoning Reform Office Hours/Public Meetings](#)
3. Ask Us About Attending Your Neighborhood Association Meeting
4. Email to Contact if Questions: [squaresandstreets@boston.gov](mailto:squaresandstreets@boston.gov)
5. Sign-up for Our [Newsletter](#) to Stay Up to Date!



# Squares + Streets Glossary

## Comprehensive Planning

### **1. Urban Planning (Planning)**

*When a city government works with local residents to recommend improvements to different aspects of city life such as transportation, housing, parks, and environment based on the needs and goals outlined by local residents*

### **2. Comprehensive Planning**

*A type of planning that works to achieve city wide goals in partnership with other city departments that might have a specific focus (for example the mayor's office of housing, department of transportation, and parks and environment)*

### **3. Active Street**

*A busy street that has a lot people walking around, traveling to work, shopping, and doing other activities*

### **4. Main Street**

*A long street with many local businesses and services that connects one side of the neighborhood to another (for example Dorchester Avenue or Washington Street)*

#### **\*Square**

*The intersection of multiple main streets that is generally the center of a commercial or retail area*

### **5. Square + Streets (Geography)**

*A new program focused on the area in and around a bustling main street or square*

### **6. Transit Hub**

*An area with a number of public transportation services including trains, buses, and BlueBikes close together*

**7. Transit Oriented Development**

*To build buildings near public transportation so that people can easily access jobs, shops, and services*

**8. Retail / Commercial Hub**

*Part of a square or main street that has a concentration of different businesses, services, restaurants etc.*

**9. Built Environment**

*Anything that is physically constructed in a city (for example buildings, parks, roads, sidewalks, benches, signage)*

**10. Public Realm**

*Any space that is accessible to and serves everyone in a neighborhood (for example a park, a sidewalk, a library, or a community center)*

**11. Streetscape**

*The street, sidewalk, and anything on it (for example the road and street trees)*

**12. Facade/ Street Wall**

*The outside or front of a building / side of the buildings that face the street*

**13. Affordable Housing**

*Housing is considered "affordable" when the tenant or homeowner pays no more than 30% of their income for housing costs*

**14. Urban Design**

*Considering the size, shape, and layout of buildings, landscapes and the public realm in relationship with each other*

**15. "Third Spaces"**

*Any gathering space, public or private, that's used for people to meet each other or come together formally or informally (for example a park, vacant lot, coffee shop, bookstore or community center)*

## **16. Displacement**

*When the price to live in an area increases beyond the what people are able to pay so they have to move out of the area*

## **17. Disparity**

*Certain groups of people having less access to resources than others do in their neighborhood (for example access to money, health services, or open spaces*

## **18. Climate Resilience**

*Changes to the built environment that protects communities from flooding, heat island effect, or other natural inhibitors (for example when we build seawalls near the coast)*

## **19. Community Engagement**

*The process of a local government in partnership or through local organizations sharing information, identifying needs, and gathering feedback, from local residents about changes happening to their neighborhood*

## **20. Stakeholders / Constituents**

*Someone who is directly impacted by and/or has a special interest in what is happening in their community*

## Zoning

### **1. Zoning**

*A set of laws that's used to guide development by telling us where and what types of buildings can be built in different parts of the City*

*\*Our zoning laws are in a document called the **Boston Zoning Code**.*

### **2. Development**

*The construction of new buildings and renovation of existing buildings*

### **3. Zoning Commission**

*A group of local residents who applied to join this commission and who meet monthly to maintain and update the Boston Zoning Code based on proposals made to them for zoning changes*

### **4. Zoning Board of Appeals**

*A group of local residents who were appointed by the Mayor of Boston to this board and who meet regularly to review building projects that don't follow one or more of the zoning rules and decide if those buildings have permission to be built or not*

### **5. Land Use**

*The types of activities that are allowed within specific areas, **i.e.** residential uses like housing and commercial uses like stores and business*

### **6. Allowed, Forbidden, and Conditional Uses**

***Allowed Uses** – if a land use is allowed in an area, then someone can construct a building with that land use*

***Forbidden Uses** – if a land use is forbidden in an area, then someone cannot construct a building with that land use*

***Conditional Uses** – if a land use is conditional in an area, then someone can construct a building with that land use **only** if that land use meets specific standards and **only** after getting permission from the Zoning Board of Appeals*

### **7. Mixed-Use Zoning**

*Zoning that allows for and encourages a blend of multiple land uses in the same building or area, **like** having a building with stores and arts space on the first floor and housing on upper floors*

### **8. District**

*A specific set of zoning rules that can be mapped onto an area or multiple areas in the City, which means buildings in that area have to follow that set of rules*

## 9. Building Typology

A system of categorizing buildings based on how they look, how they are built and/or what activities they are used for

## 10. Dimensional Regulations

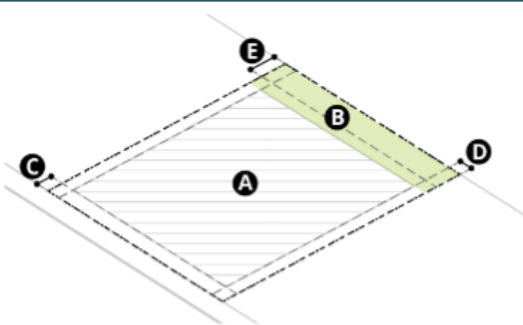
**Parcel or Lot** – a piece of land with defined boundaries

**Building Lot Coverage** – the maximum amount of the lot area that is allowed to be covered by a building

**Permeable Area of Lot** – the amount of space of the lot area that needs to have natural ground cover or a material that lets water pass through it, **like** lawns, rain gardens, and porous asphalt

**Setbacks and Yards** – the required distance between the buildings and the lot line boundaries in the front, side and rear that ends up creating front yards, side yards, and backyards

### A. Lot Regulations

Illustrated Lot Standards		
	A	Building Lot Coverage
	B	Permeable Area of Lot
	C	Front Yard
	D	Side Yard
	E	Rear Yard