

# CHINATOWN | LEATHER DISTRICT PARK EDGES STUDY A MASTER PLAN FOR THE SURFACE STREET CORRIDOR

Sponsored by the Artery Business Committee and participating abutters in cooperation with the Boston Redevelopment Authority | Boston Parks and Recreation Department | Boston Transportation Department | Massachusetts Turnpike Authority | Central Artery Tunnel Project

Artery Business Committee

utile Architecture | Planning



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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**Participating Public Partners**

- Boston Redevelopment Authority
- Boston Parks and Recreation Department
- Boston Transportation Department
- Central Artery Tunnel Project
- Massachusetts Turnpike Authority

**Participating Abutters**

- Intercontinental Real Estate Corporation
- Imperial Seafood (with Douglas Wohn)
- The Druker Company, Ltd.
- Kingston Realty Trust | United Curtain
- The Gale Company
- State Street Bank
- Teradyne, Inc.

**Participating Community Representatives**

- Chinatown | Leather District Central Artery Advisory Committee Co-Chairs >
- Stephanie Fan, Chinatown
- David Seeley, Leather District

The Artery Business Committee commissioned Utile, Inc., an architecture and planning firm, to analyze the open space, development parcels, and building edges that abut the future Chinatown Park (parcel 23D) and to recommend physical and programming enhancements to building and sidewalk edges that could activate this future park space. As a result of an iterative process that involved collaborative discussions with the local community, local property and business owners, city agencies, representatives of the Central Artery Tunnel Project, and the designers of the Chinatown Park, the study recommended improvements to both the public realm and to the private properties within the study area. This effort is intended to supplement the park design team's work in its coordination with the surrounding context and the new 17A6 Contract streetscape, specifically addressing potential opportunities for change within that context to better respond to the newly created public realm.

The Edge Study documents the park's abutting properties and their relationship to the surrounding 17A6 Contract streetscape, which will remain as baseline, and identifies locations for design and programming improvements of both indoor and outdoor, public and private ground floor spaces, including possible minor modifications to the 17A6 Contract design.

The goal of this study was to synthesize the varied interests of the many constituencies that engaged in this process into a single but flexible and realistic vision for the area. The intention of the study is to have these many fine-grained recommendations serve as a touchstone for future conversations between the community and potential agents of future improvements. These may include new projects proposed by private developers, public improvements proposed by city or state agencies, and improvements by the owners of buildings and businesses in the area.

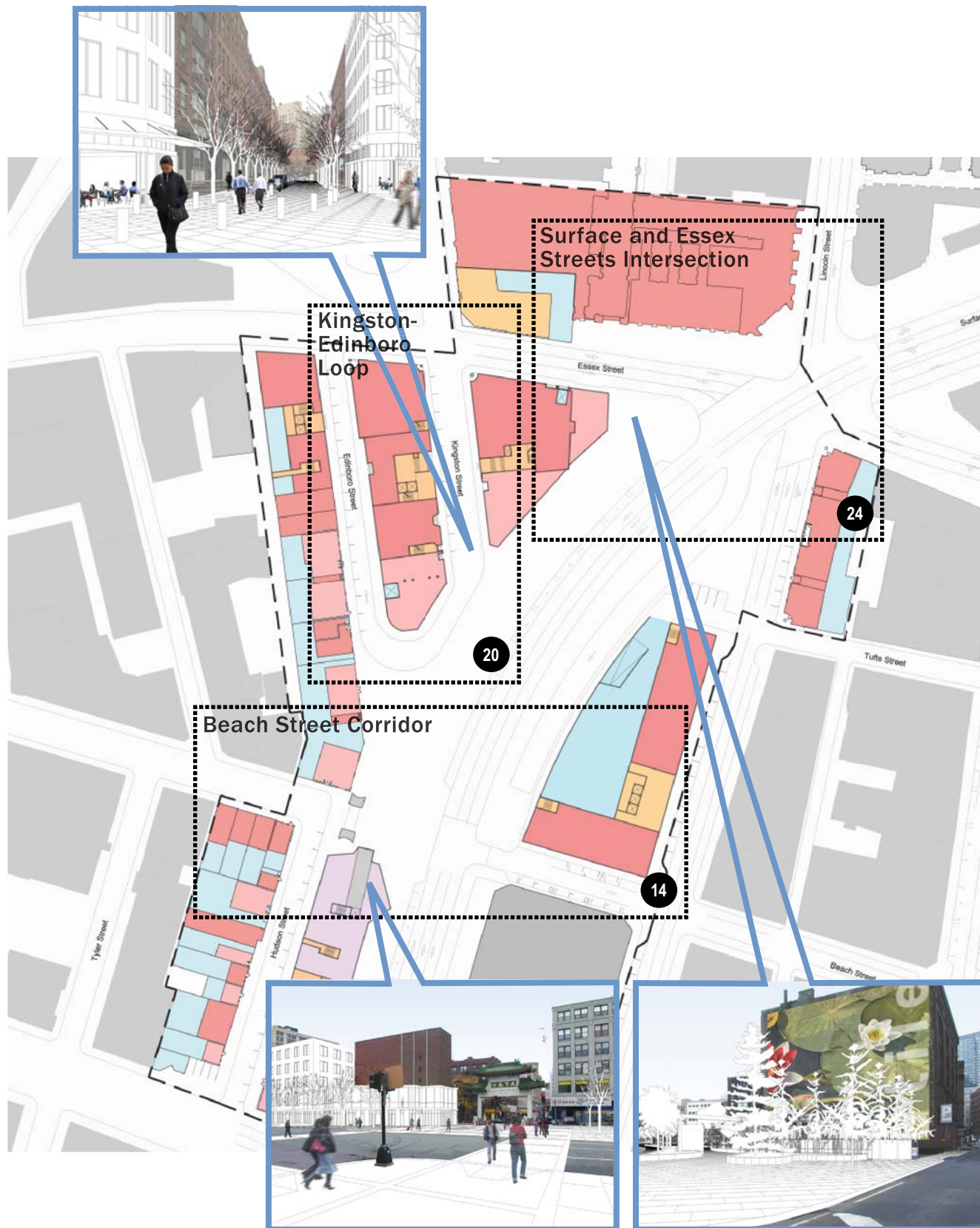
Broadly, the study recommendations fall into four areas. First, to improve the city streets and sidewalks where they connect with the park and with other Central Artery Tunnel surface improvements. One specific area of interest was the Kingston-Edinboro loop on the northern boundary of the park (see pages 18 through 21).

Second, to extend features of the park, including specific paving design and tree species, beyond the bounds of the park to increase the perceptual boundaries of the open space. One specific recommendation extends the art paving, proposed as part of the park design at the threshold to the Chinatown Gate, across Surface Street. Expanding the concept of the threshold to include the Surface Street crosswalk will both expand the boundaries of the park and reinforce the importance of the Beach Street corridor (see page 12).

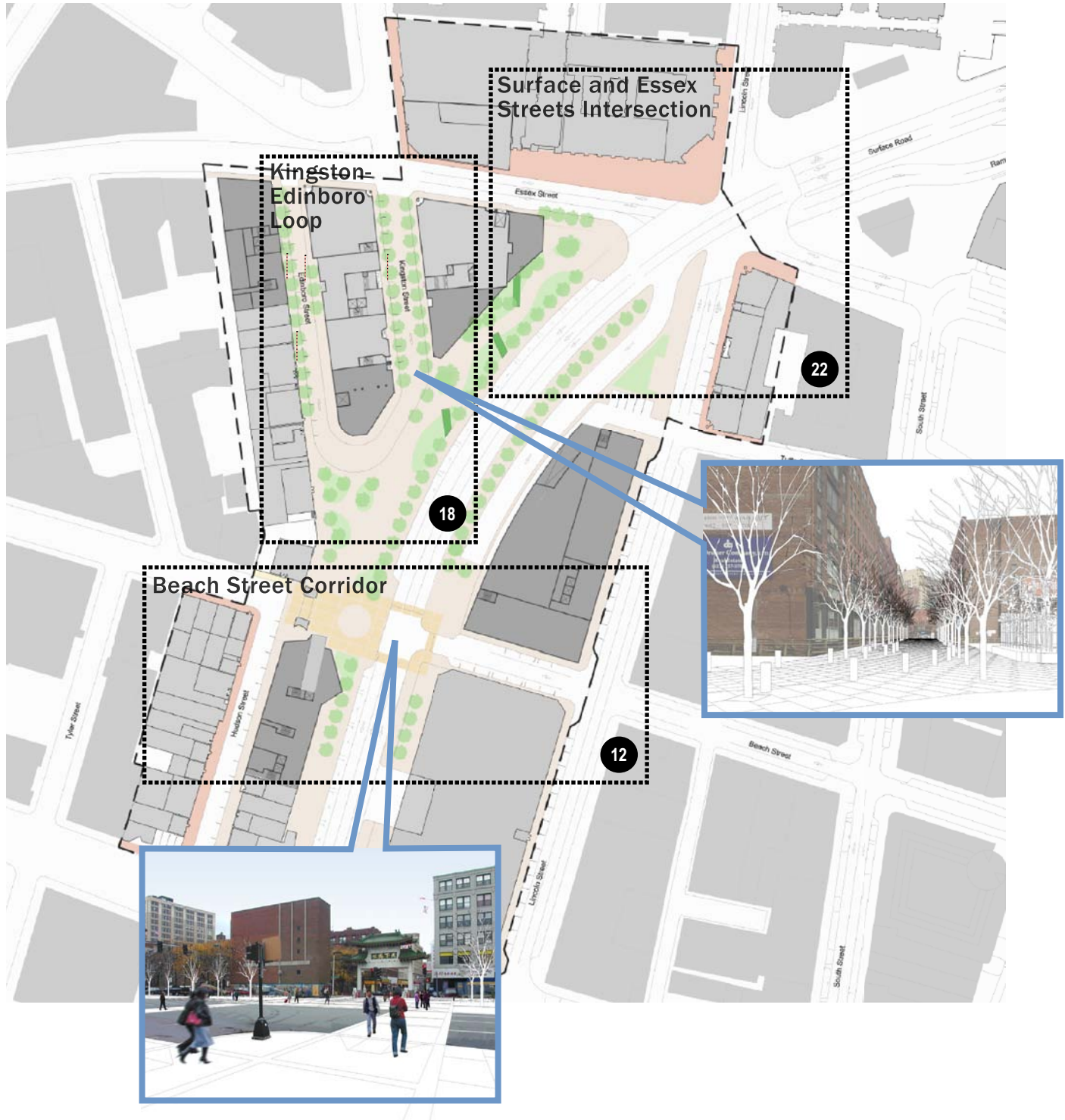
Third, to consider the block that runs south of the Chinatown Gate and the vent building (bounded by Hudson and Surface Streets) as a unified urban design vision. One of several recommendations proposes a new branch library or other community building, requiring a public-private partnership (see pages 15 through 17).

Finally, to encourage active ground floor uses along the park boundary. As part of the future redevelopment of the existing 19<sup>th</sup> century loft buildings, new building additions on the vacant parcels that abut the Chinatown Park to the north will create a new 'face' to the park and new activities that will contribute to a lively public realm. One parcel abuts directly on the park, creating potential future reciprocal benefits between public space and new ground floor uses (see pages 21 and 25).

# RECOMMENDED FUTURE GROUND FLOOR USES



# PLANNED AND RECOMMENDED PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENTS



# URBAN DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY THE BIG DIG

Utile, Inc. was retained by the Artery Business Committee in May 2003 to collaborate on an urban analysis of the Surface Street Corridor in downtown Boston. The Surface Street, which runs from South Station to Kneeland Street, is located between three distinct neighborhoods: Chinatown, the Leather District, and the Financial District. Surface Street is currently an edge between these neighborhoods, typical of the 'soft' boundaries between economically robust and characteristic districts that exist in American cities. These are the areas of cities where property values drop off and vacant lots proliferate. Like many cities, this edge is the result of an earlier transportation infrastructure project – the original Central Artery project of the late 1950s.

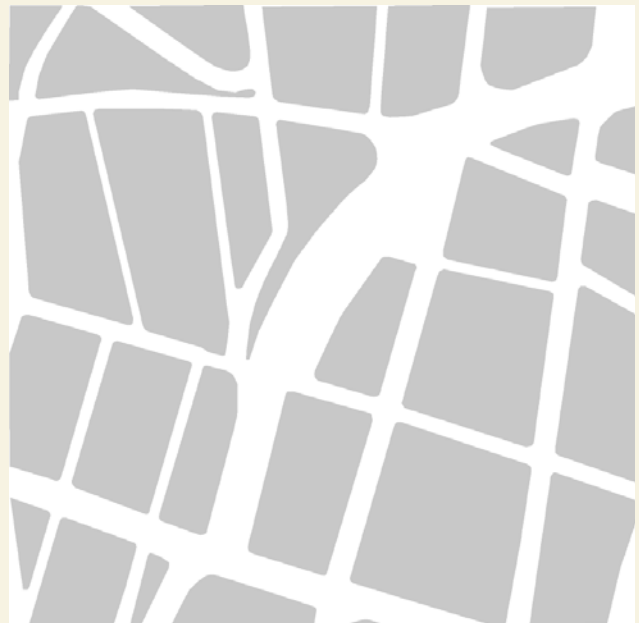
The Boston's new Artery Project (the 'Big Dig') presents an opportunity to repair much of the damage of the original highway project, which for much of the downtown district, snaked its way through the city as an elevated highway. At Surface Street, the original highway was in a tunnel, but the effect on the surrounding historical fabric was equally ruthless. The new Artery Project seeks to correct these conditions by replacing highways with parks or public buildings. The result from an economic, social, physical, and programmatic standpoint is radical. Buildings that once turned their back to the elevated highway or Surface Street, as boundaries between neighborhoods, will now be able to front new public amenities.

This new possibility for 'address' will encourage economic and cultural activity to aggregate around these new places, resulting in a new conception of 'neighborhood' in the central city. This evolving public realm can serve as a highly desirable common ground, breaking down the parochialism characteristic of Boston's downtown neighborhoods. In the long run, perhaps the Artery Project may be able to reverse the negative perception of large-scale public projects that has persisted since the 1960s.

**Surface Street** > Cut through the existing mostly 19<sup>th</sup> century fabric in the late 1950s when Boston's elevated Artery highway was first constructed, Surface Street follows the path of a highway tunnel below as well as functions as a feeder road to the Interstate system to points South and West of the City.



**Street Grid 1953:** city blocks continuous between Chinatown and the Leather District



**Street Grid 2004:** Chinatown and the Leather District divided by the introduction of Surface Street in the late 1950s

## NEW PUBLIC SPACES AS THE COMMON GROUND BETWEEN NEIGHBORHOODS

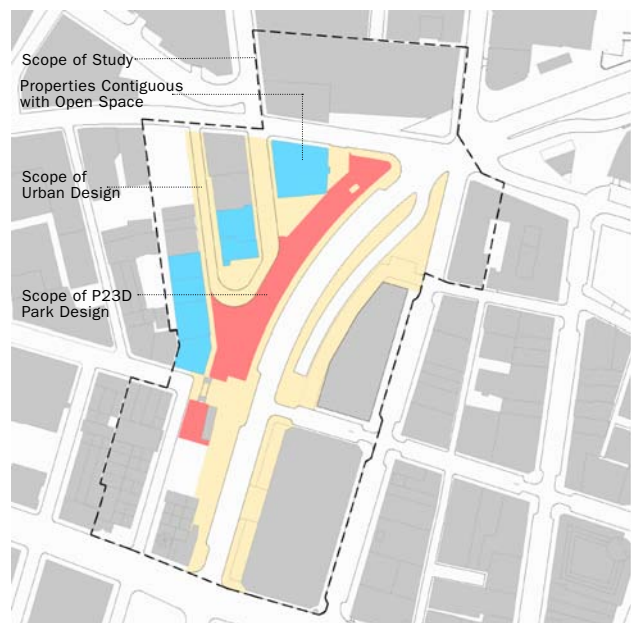
From its inception, this study acknowledged the advantages of a new ‘place’ at Surface Street that would better connect the abutting districts. The symbolic and functional center is the new Chinatown Park that the Artery Project will build on the west side of the Surface Street (at Beach Street). This study was timed to coincide with the park design so that reciprocities could be found between the specific programmatic content of the park and larger possibilities for city-building, whether in the public realm (with improved streets and squares) or in the private sector (with new real estate development and the resulting ground floor modifications and activation).

The study is as much about ‘visioning’ as it is about encouraging dialogue between interests. In general, strong communication between design of the public realm (in this case the Chinatown Park) and design of private development (in this case, abutting property owners) will lead to reciprocal decisions that benefit both the park and the new development – creating an active urban realm.

The goal of the study in regards to the park design was to expand the perceptual realm of the park beyond its specific contractual boundaries. Instead of the park functioning as a ‘place apart’ from the city around it, we consider the park an anchor to a new inclusive district that connects the Financial District, Dewey Square, the Leather District, Chinatown, and proposed new developments south of Kneeland Street. Future development on the vacant parcels surrounding the park will re-connect the urban fabric between the abutting districts if given an appropriate density and diversity of uses.

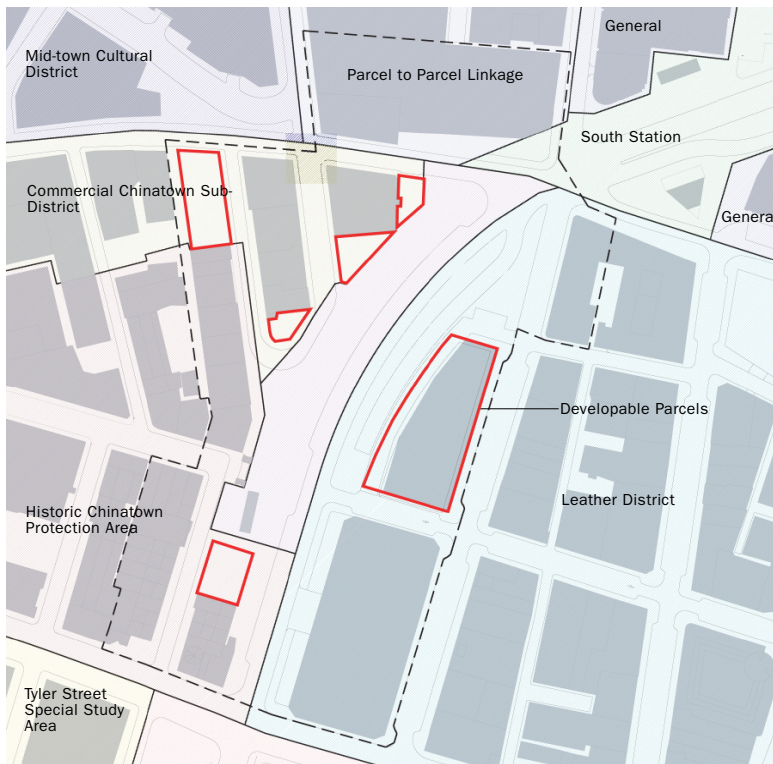


Scope of C17A6

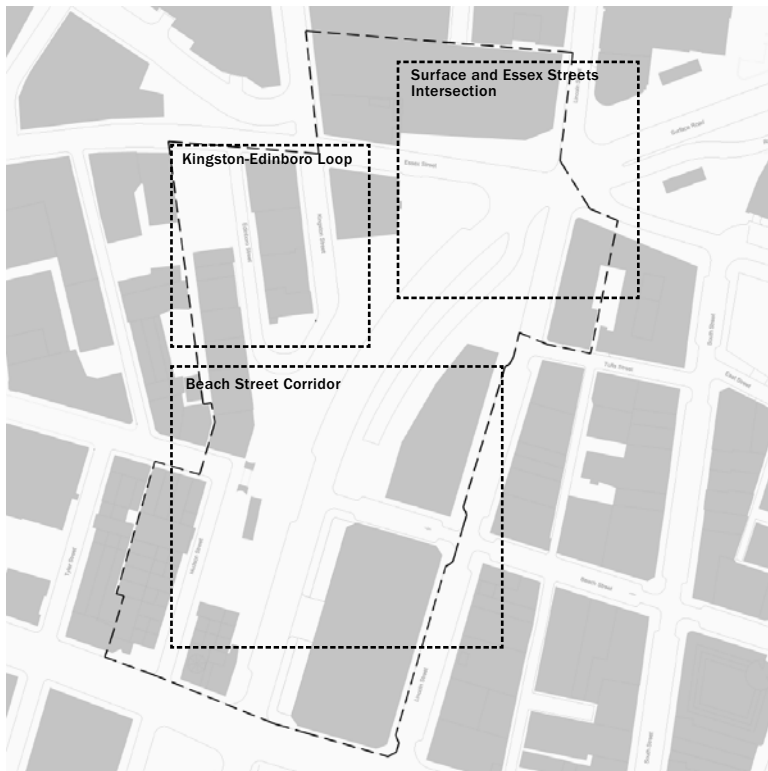


Scope of Study

## METHODOLOGY OF STUDY



Zoning and Buildable Parcels



Detailed Study Areas

**Future building edges were determined by an analysis of as-of-right zoning.** For the purposes of this study, as-of-right zoning was depicted as a 'what if' scenario, first to see if development was likely to be built out to parcel lines (it is) and secondly to better understand the future potential of an active building edge as it meets the public realm. The other advantage of depicting as-of-right development is that it provides a gauge of what is feasible.

**An overall plan was informed by a focus on detailed conditions.** The study looked at the planning, urban design, and architectural opportunities of specific interfaces between the Chinatown Park (parcel 23D) and the surrounding city. These areas included the Beach Street corridor, the Kingston-Edinboro loop, and the Surface and Essex Streets intersection.



## THE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT EMERGED FROM THIS STUDY WERE BASED ON SEVERAL PRINCIPLES:

**The whole should be greater than the sum of the parts.** The study recommendations aim at providing a mutual benefit to abutting neighborhoods, the general public, and the abutting property owners in a way that ‘the whole is greater than the sum of the parts’. New development that benefits from the park will enliven and diversify the user population of the park, add ‘eyes on the park’ and thus increase the sense of security, and will add to the pool of abutting property owners that can contribute to the park’s maintenance. At the same time, the park will be an important amenity to the adjacent properties, perhaps encouraging development to occur sooner, reducing the perceived risk in terms of financing options and leading to higher quality buildings.

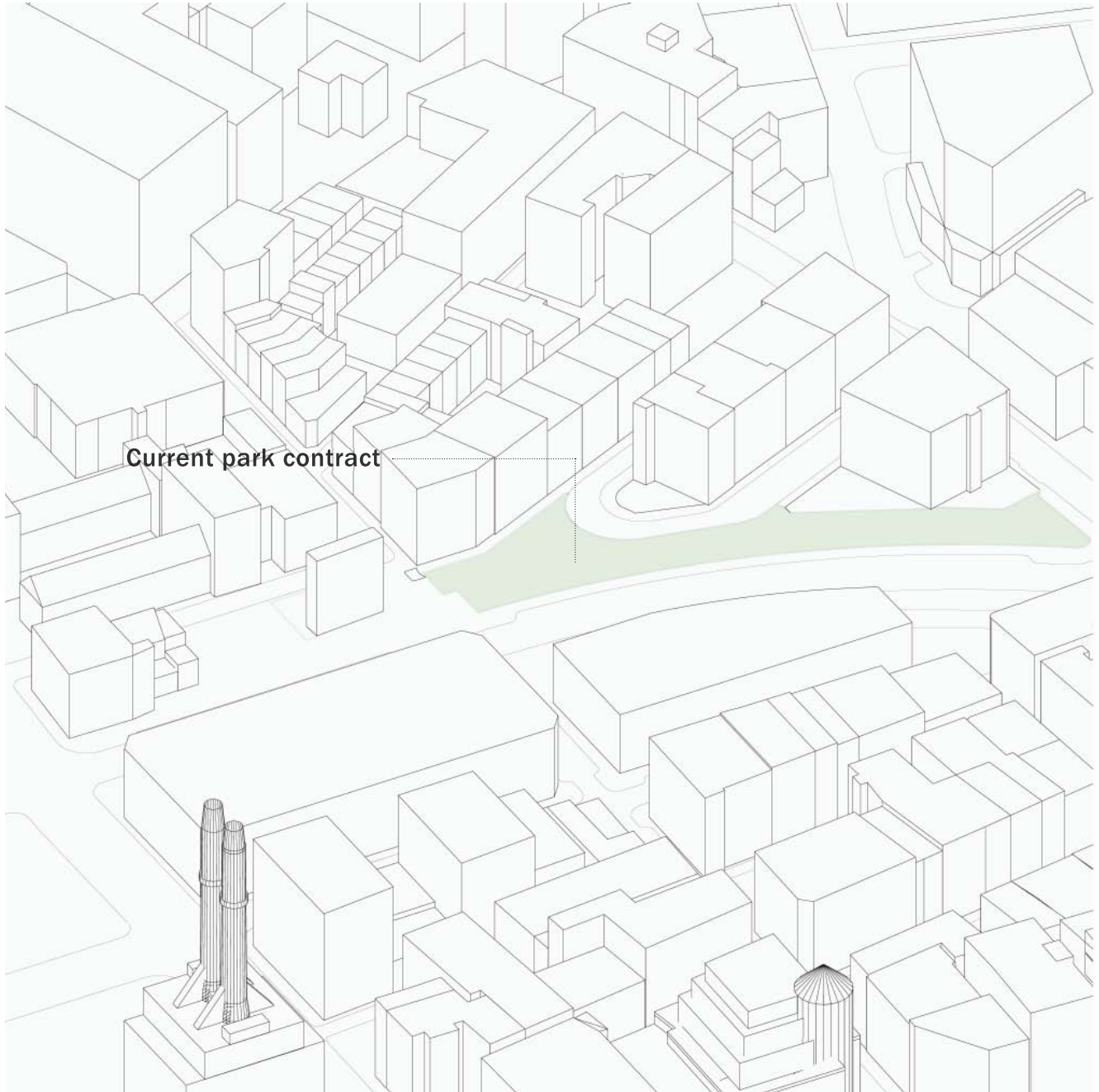
**Successful urban design looks for reciprocal benefits between public space and private property.** The careful coordination of public space and privately held but publicly accessible private property is one of the primary aims of urban design. The coordination of the design of publicly owned public space and privately accessible plazas, arcades, and retail spaces is critical for a diverse and culturally rich urban environment. This continuum of urban experience privileges the spatial, programmatic, and economic grain of the city over the specific location of property lines. The culture of cities not only in the West, but also in the East and Middle East is predicated on this larger mosaic of public and semi-public space as well as the ability of commerce to overlap boundaries into the public realm. The Italian outdoor café, the Middle Eastern souk, and Asian markets are all examples of the necessity of this overlap.

**Future improvements to the urban realm should increase the perceptual boundaries of the park.** The study recommendations attempt to expand the perceptual realm of the park and thereby position it as anchor not only of neighboring Chinatown but also of a broader area that includes the Leather District, the southern edges of the Financial District, and the emerging South Bay district. This would be done by adopting specific features of the park design such as lighting, paving, and trees in future open space contracts in the immediate vicinity.

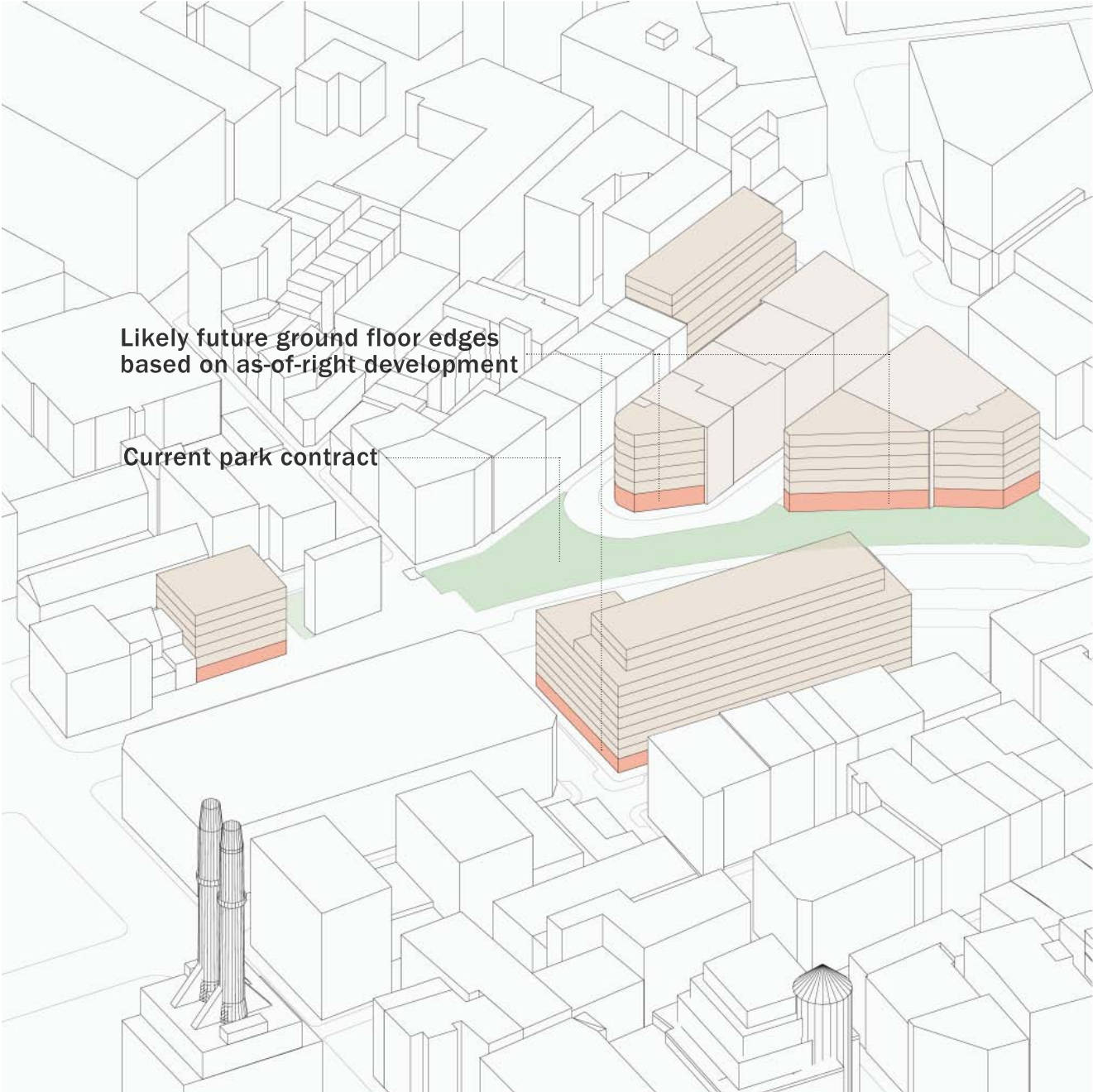
**The vacant private parcels should be built out.** Preferably, new development will include a variety of uses such as office, residential, retail, and hotels. All new development should maximize ground level retail. Diverse uses encourage an active public realm. If the vacant lots of the area are filled in, then the current ‘no-mans-land’ between Chinatown, the Leather District, and the Financial District will disappear. Instead, the park will be read as a beautiful open space in the continuous urban grain of Boston, much the way that Post Office Square is understood within its neighborhood.

**Future improvements should be realistic.** The study recommendations are based on a short to medium term - a 1 to 10 year time frame - and realistic vision for the area. They are intended to be economically, politically, legally, and technically feasible to implement given the economic conditions of the current real estate market, the regulatory and approvals process, the larger development pressures of the neighborhood, and an understanding of the needs and desires of the community.

# EXISTING



# LIKELY FUTURE GROUND FLOOR EDGES



# BEACH STREET CORRIDOR Public Improvements

The study of the Beach Street corridor looked at several important issues:

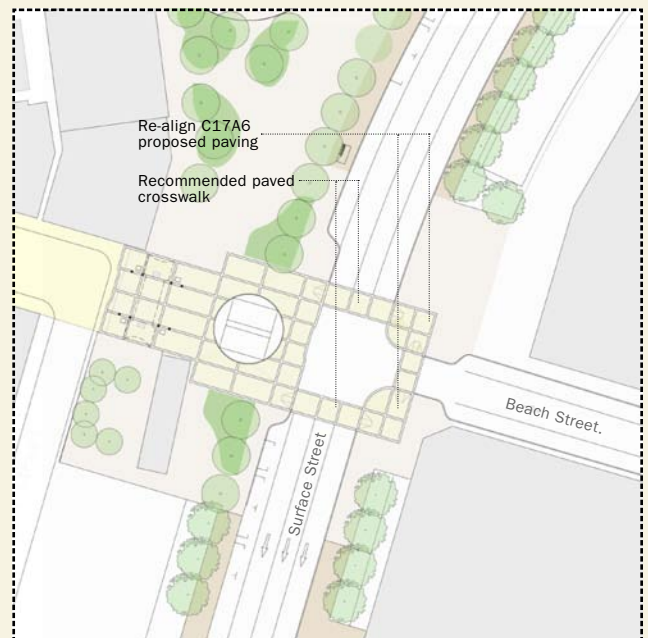
- 1> The expansion of the perceptual realm of the park across Surface Street.
- 2> The mitigation of the presence of the Artery vent building.
- 3> The addition of appropriately scale publicly accessible ground-level program to the south end of the park, a space otherwise difficult to program.
- 4> Reinforcement of the symbolic importance of the Chinatown Gate.



**Extend specialty paving** > A separate Central Artery Project surface restoration contract exists for specialty art paving on both the west and east sides of Surface Street in the Beach Street corridor. Our recommendation is to treat both components of the paving as a single composition. The segment of the design that crosses Surface Street can function as the designated crosswalk zone.

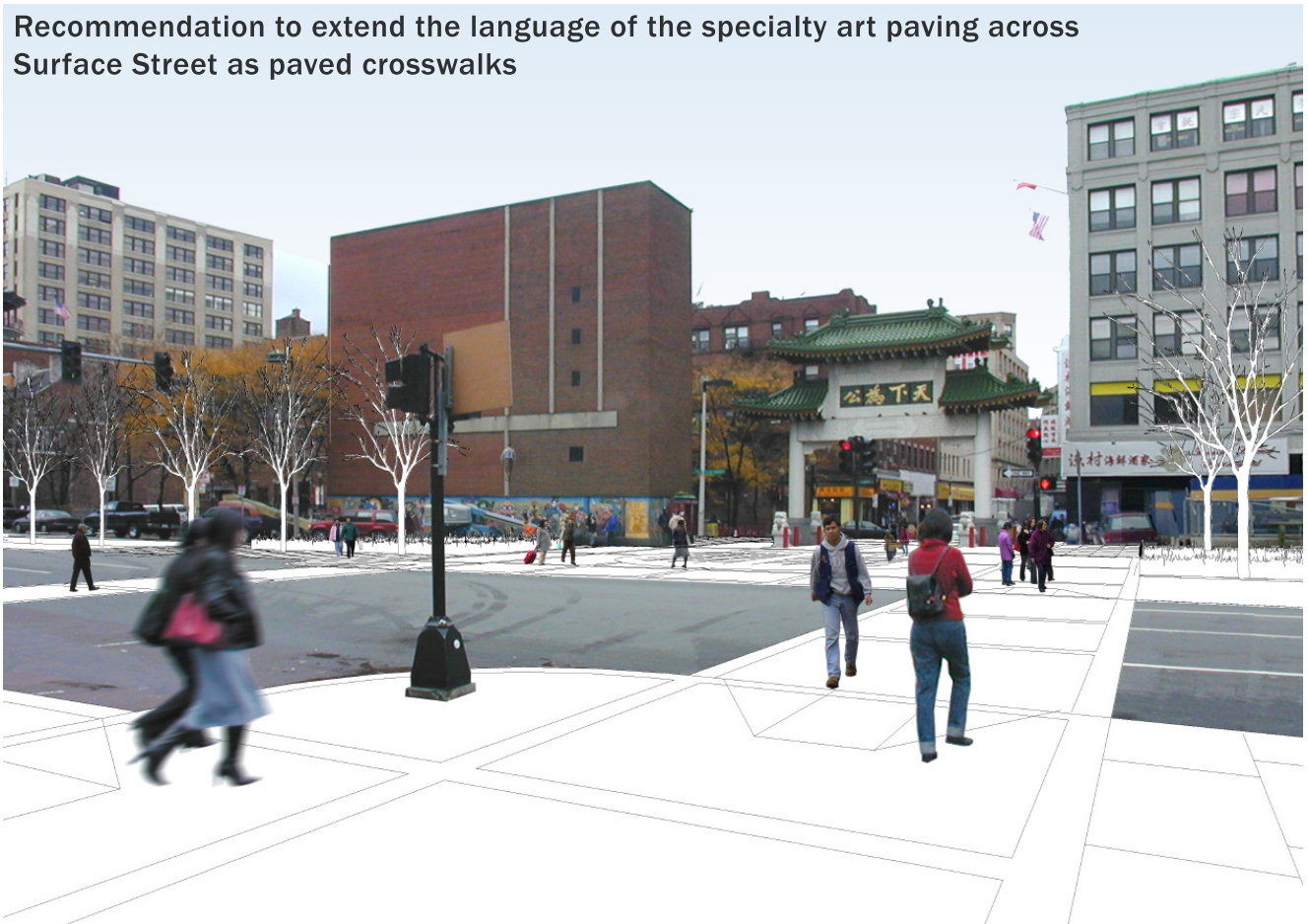


Key Plan

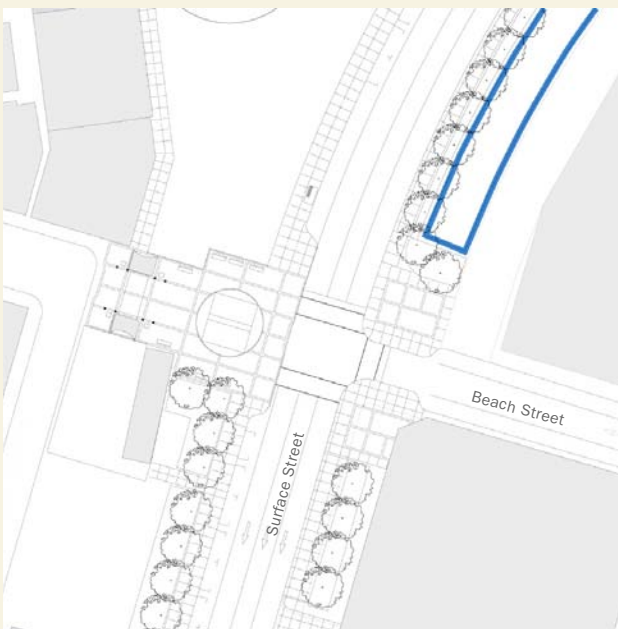


**Recommendation:** Realign proposed C17A6 art paving and extend the language of the specialty art paving across Surface Street as paved crosswalks

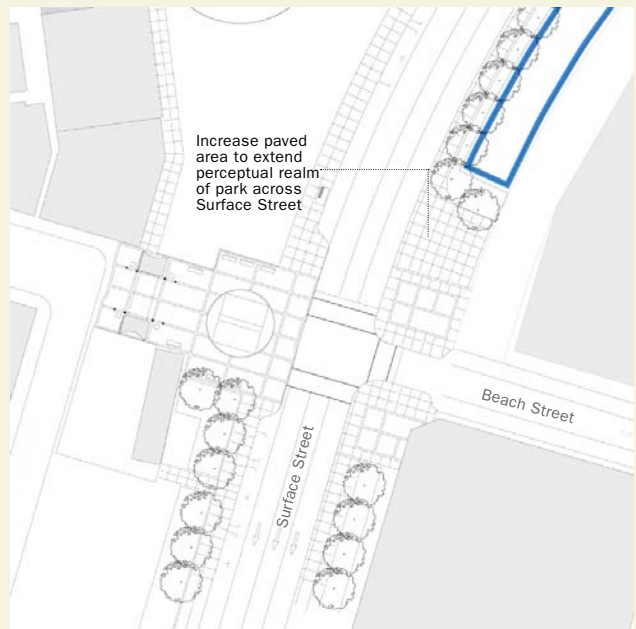
**Recommendation to extend the language of the specialty art paving across Surface Street as paved crosswalks**



**Reclaim space above ramp** > Initial analysis suggests that the southbound ramp opening is longer than it needs to be. More paved pedestrian area can be claimed at the Beach Street-Surface Street intersection. This will encourage more west-facing ground-level retail on the redeveloped garage parcel. The potential addition of this pedestrian space will most likely be implemented as part of the scope of a future redevelopment of the garage site.



Existing



**Recommendation:** Add additional pedestrian space over the ramp opening

# BEACH STREET CORRIDOR

## Private Development

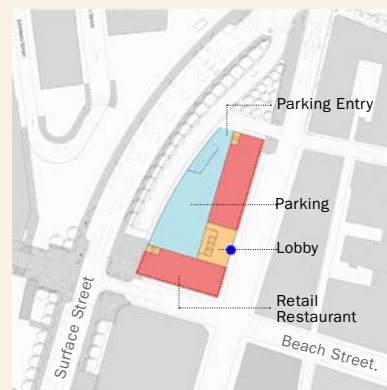
**Future development on Lincoln Street** > This study examined the potential improvements to the ground-level sidewalk edge if the garage site on Lincoln Street was redeveloped. An as-of-right development housing/hotel scenario was modeled to analyze options for the location of building lobbies, retail, and service/parking access. In conjunction with the recommended expansion to the paved pedestrian area over the ramp, the study recommends ground-floor retail at the Beach Street/Surface Street corner.



**Recommendation:** Active ground floor uses along street edge with parking along ramp edge



**Plan Option 1:** Lobby at Beach Street



**Plan Option 2:** Lobby at Lincoln Street



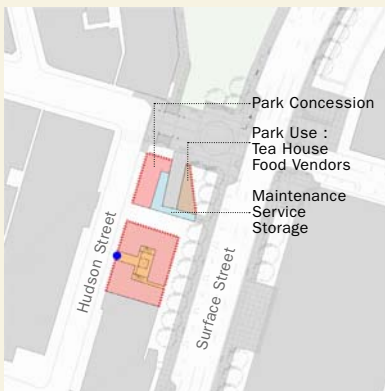
**Key Plan**



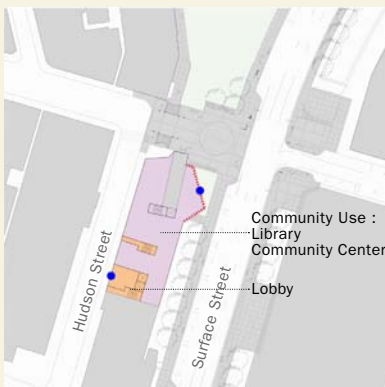
**Analysis:** Continue park



**Analysis:** As-of-right development at Hudson Street



**Recommendation Option 1:** Tea pavilion and/or park concession as park amenities on either or both sides of the vent building



**Recommendation Option 2:** Community use at vent building



## Future development on Hudson Street >

The study looked at several options for the privately owned development parcels at the south end of the park. One option examined the possible continuation of the park, which would require a public purchase of these four privately owned parcels.

The study also considers the likely as-of-right development on the four contiguous development parcels on Hudson Street. While the Chinatown Park could continue up to the boundary of these new buildings, a one-story structure on either or both sides of the vent building would help mitigate the negative impact of the existing Artery vent structure on the park. Options for this structure include a park concession building and/or tea house.

Another concept that emerged was to think of the privately-held development parcels and the public space around the base of the vent building as a single building site for a combination of public and private functions. This concept envisions a community-based use or uses on the first two floors and housing above. The community use could be a branch of the Boston Public Library with a second story 'tea balcony'.

View of proposed crosswalk configuration, Hudson Street as-of-right development, and recommended one story tea pavilion or newsstand abutting the vent building





Alternative recommendation for a **community building | branch library with housing above**. The second floor of the community building could be a 'tea balcony' or a community reading room



# KINGSTON-EDINBORO LOOP Public Improvements

The study of the Kingston-Edinboro loop looked at several important issues:

- 1> Consideration of the loop street that connects Kingston Street to Edinboro Street as an opportunity rather than a liability.
- 2> The extension of the perceptual realm of the park to Essex Street via improvements to the streetscape of Kingston and Edinboro Streets.
- 3> A vision for the future build-out of the abutting development parcels as a contribution to the public realm.
- 4> A vision for an interim solution for the blank party walls that face the park.

View from the site of the future park looking north along Kingston Street



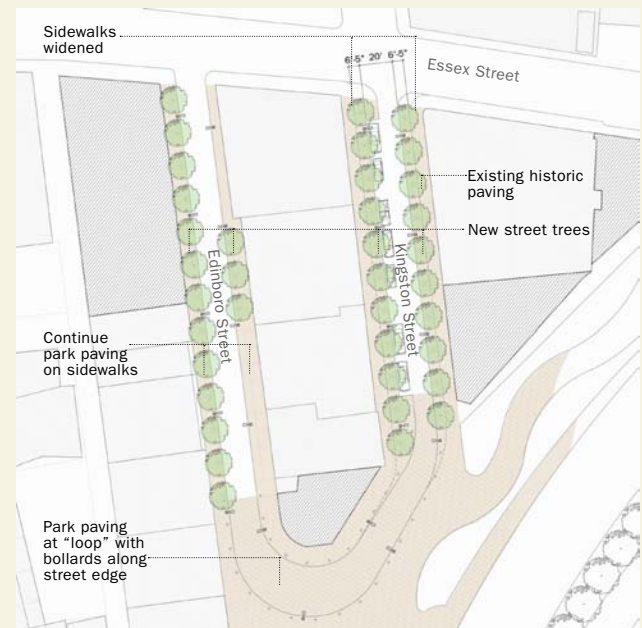
View with the proposed bollards at the loop and an extension of the park paving along Kingston Street



**Extend park paving and add street trees along Kingston and Essex Streets** > Currently, the park boundary ends at the loop road. Widening the sidewalk by 6.5 feet on each side of the street would allow for street trees along Kingston and Edinboro Streets, extending the experience of the park beyond its current boundary. This extension of the park would be reinforced by continuing the park paving along the sidewalks and possibly along the streets. While all



Key Plan



**Recommendation Option 1:** Widen sidewalks to allow for street trees (avoiding basements under sidewalk). Extend park paving along sidewalks and "loop"

**Recommendation to extend the trees and park paving along Kingston Street from the park to Essex Street**



three options recommend expanding the park's perceptual boundaries and enhancing the pedestrian experience in the Kingston-Edinboro loop by extending the park paving along the sidewalks and partially or fully along the streets, the intent is that both streets will remain open to managed/regulated vehicular traffic to allow on-street parking, service vehicles, pick-up and drop-off, and residential car access to the adjacent redeveloped buildings.



**Recommendation Option 2:** Widen sidewalks to allow for street trees. Extend park paving along sidewalks and streets to Essex Street



**Recommendation Option 3:** Widen sidewalks to allow for street trees. Extend park paving along sidewalks and "loop". Modify "loop" configuration

# KINGSTON-EDINBORO LOOP

## Private Development



Likely future as-of-right development

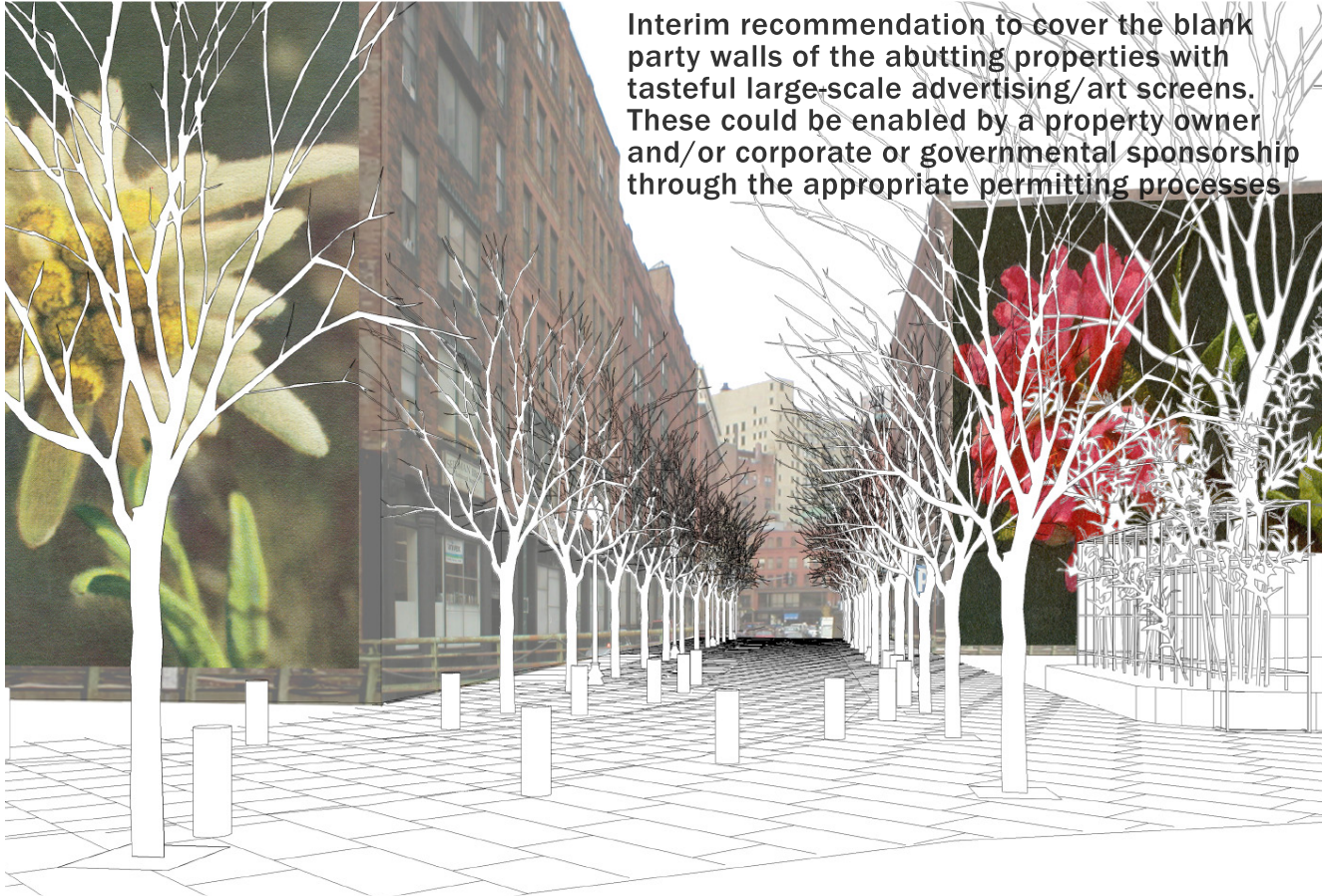
### Encourage active ground floor uses along park edges >



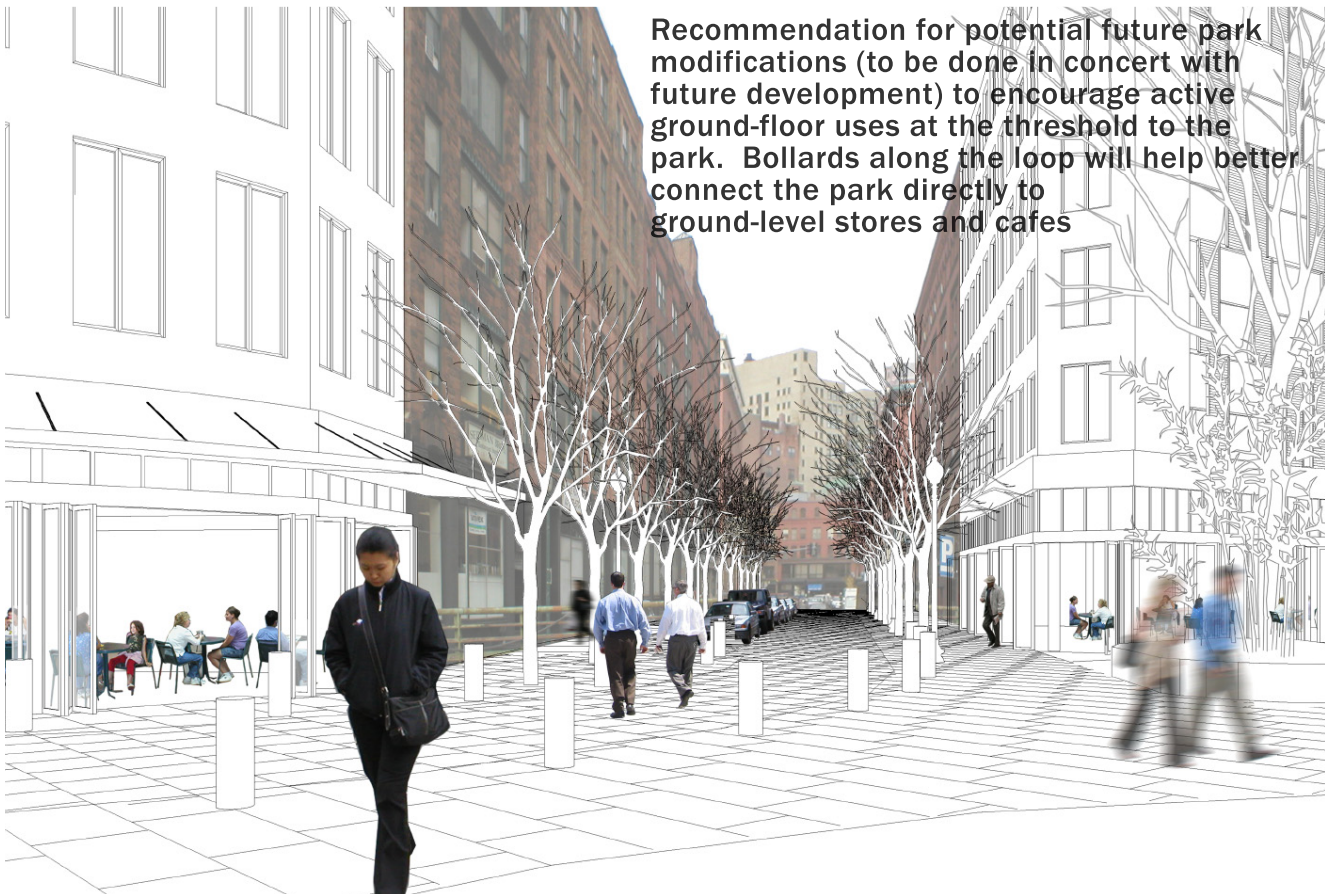
Key Plan

There is potential for development along the edges of the park that will change both the character and spatial definition of the park boundaries. In the short-term, design solutions are required to screen the surface parking lots that currently occupy these development parcels. As a result, the designers of the park have proposed a wall and heavily planted edge along the northern boundary of the park between Kingston Street and Essex Street. Once an appropriate redevelopment plan emerges, modifications to that edge of the park may be warranted to encourage more accessible ground-level retail or public uses.

At the same time, we recommend creative short-term solutions for the blank party walls that face the park. A large-scale tasteful advertising /art image can temporarily transform the walls. Corporate or government agency sponsorship may be required to fund these improvements.



**Interim recommendation to cover the blank party walls of the abutting properties with tasteful large-scale advertising/art screens. These could be enabled by a property owner and/or corporate or governmental sponsorship through the appropriate permitting processes**



**Recommendation for potential future park modifications (to be done in concert with future development) to encourage active ground-floor uses at the threshold to the park. Bollards along the loop will help better connect the park directly to ground-level stores and cafes**

# SURFACE AND ESSEX STREETS INTERSECTION Public Improvements

The study of the Surface-Essex Streets intersection looked at three important issues:

- 1> Consideration of the paving of the adjacent sidewalks and plazas as a way to extend the perceptual realm of the park.
- 2> A vision of the future build-out of the abutting development parcel as a contribution to the public realm.
- 3> A vision for an interim solution for the blank party walls that face the park.



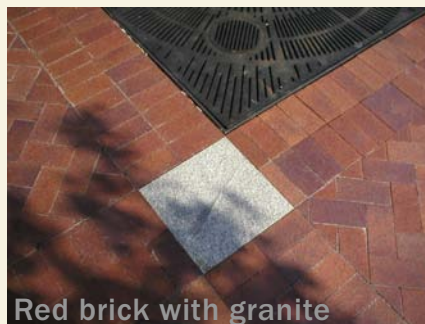
Key Plan



Granite



Concrete



Red brick with granite



Black brick

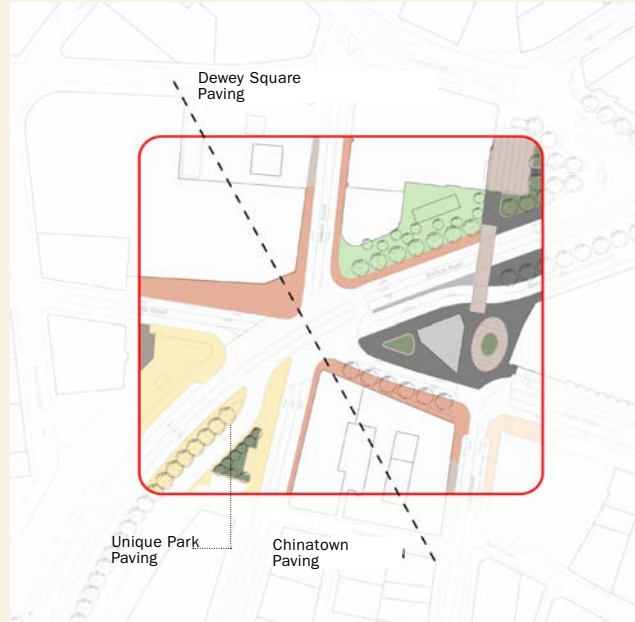


Red Brick

**Create paved threshold between Chinatown and Dewey Square** > The study looked at several options for the interface between the park paving and the paving of the surrounding district. Our recommendations examine either extending the park paving beyond the realm of the park or extending the surrounding brick paving to frame the park. Either would require a modification to the current C17A6 contract.



**Analysis:** Future paving per current contracts



**Recommendation Option 1:** Unify sidewalk and park paving as unique district south and west of Surface Street – Essex Street intersection. This change will require modifications to C17A6 contract that will necessitate an additional funding source



**Recommendation Option 2:** Deploy red brick as a 'base' sidewalk material and treat area within sidewalk boundaries as a special park paving. This change will require modifications to C17A6 that will necessitate an additional funding source



**Recommendation Option 3:** Same as Option 2, but carry red brick paving to threshold gate at egress stair structure. Also make changes to Dewey Square design by replacing grey brick with red brick west of the vent structure at Essex Street. This change will require modifications to C17A6 that will necessitate an additional funding source

# SURFACE AND ESSEX STREETS INTERSECTION

## Private Development

**Encourage active ground floor uses along park edges** > There is potential for development along the edges of the park that will change both the character and spatial definition of the park boundaries. In the short-term, design solutions are required to screen the surface parking lots that currently occupy these development parcels. As a result, the designers of the park have proposed a wall and heavily planted edge along the northern boundary of the park between Kingston Street and Essex Streets. Once an appropriate redevelopment plan emerges, modifications to that edge of the park may be warranted to encourage more accessible ground-level retail or public uses.

At the same time, the study recommends a creative short-term solution for the blank party wall that faces this area of the park. A large-scale tasteful advertising /art image can temporarily transform the wall. Corporate or government agency sponsorship may be required to fund this improvement through an appropriate permitting process.



Key Plan

View from the corner of Essex Street and Surface Street looking south and west



View of the proposed park

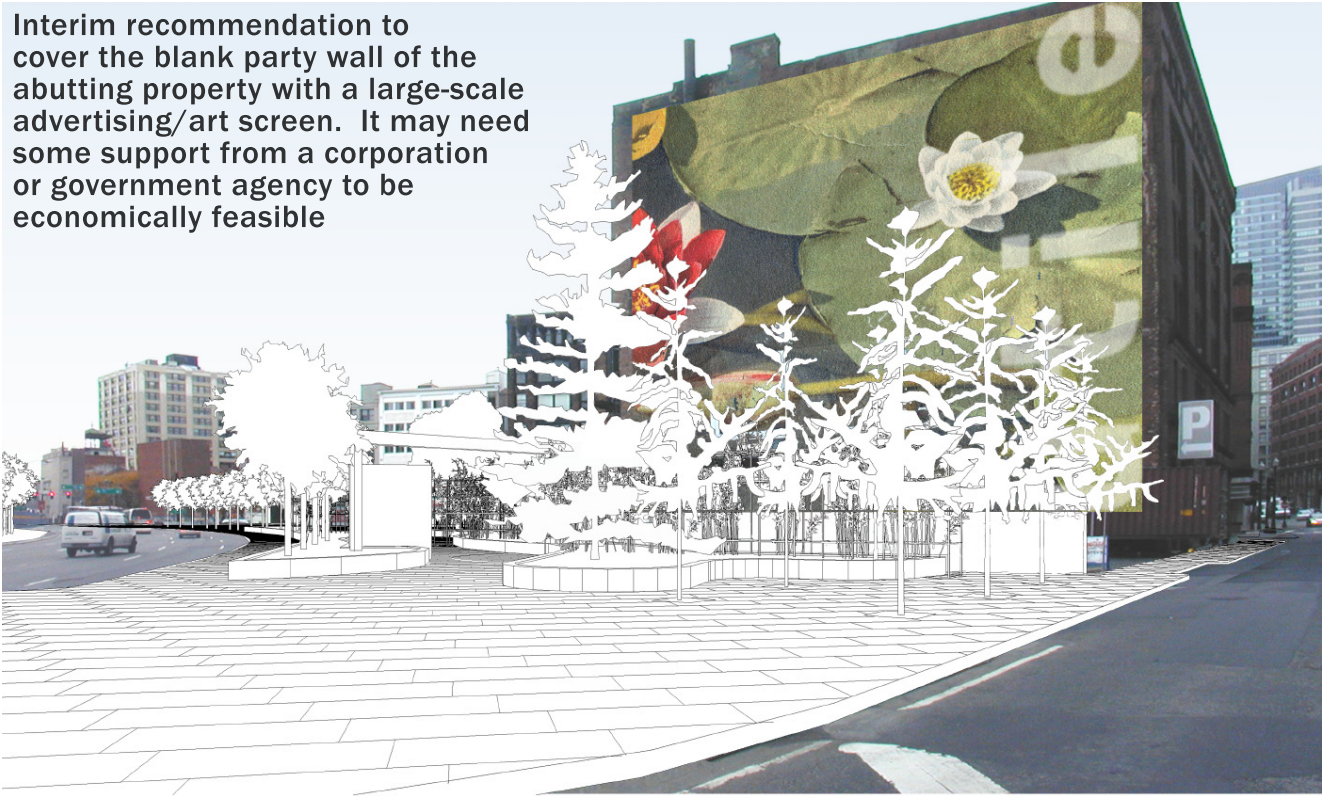


View of proposed park and likely future as-of-right development along the park edge

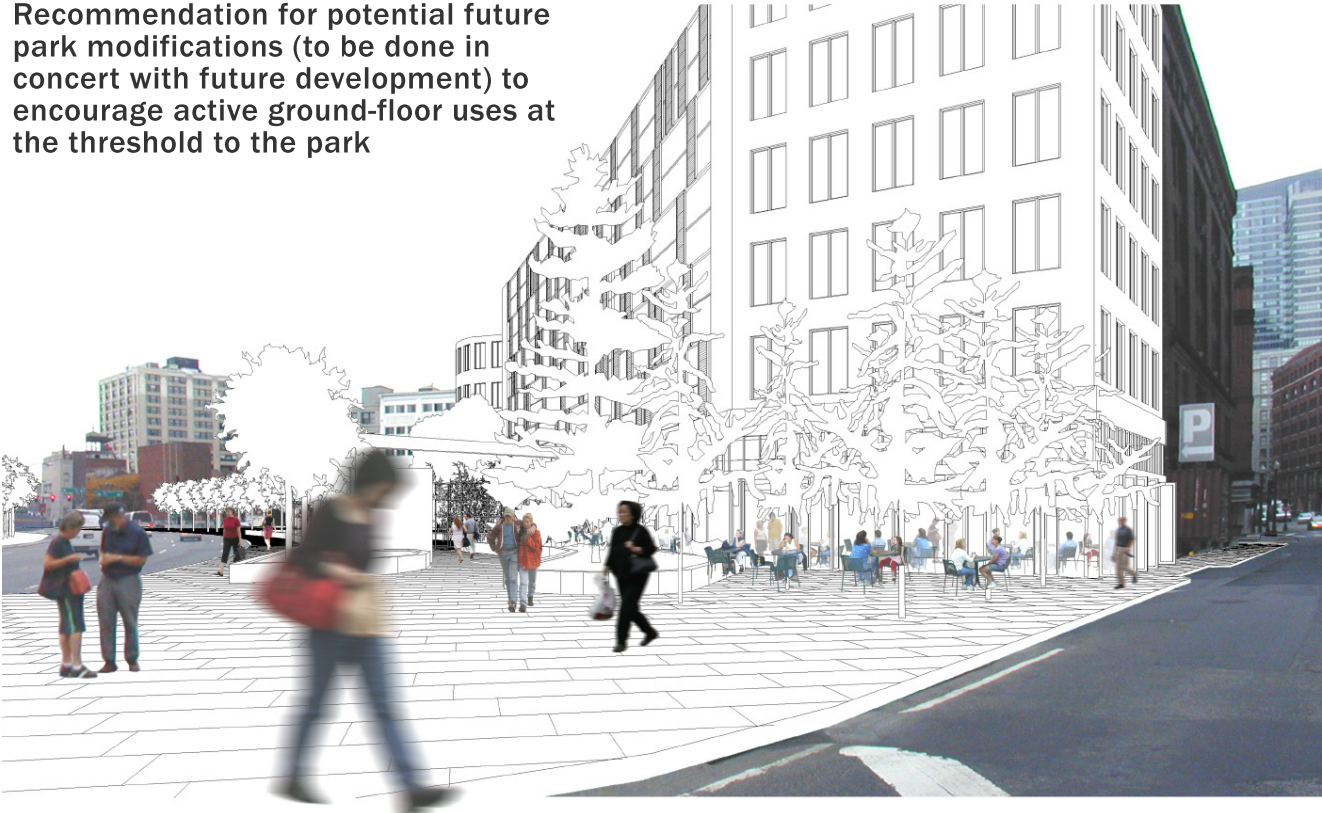




**Interim recommendation to cover the blank party wall of the abutting property with a large-scale advertising/art screen. It may need some support from a corporation or government agency to be economically feasible**



**Recommendation for potential future park modifications (to be done in concert with future development) to encourage active ground-floor uses at the threshold to the park**



# IMPLEMENTATION

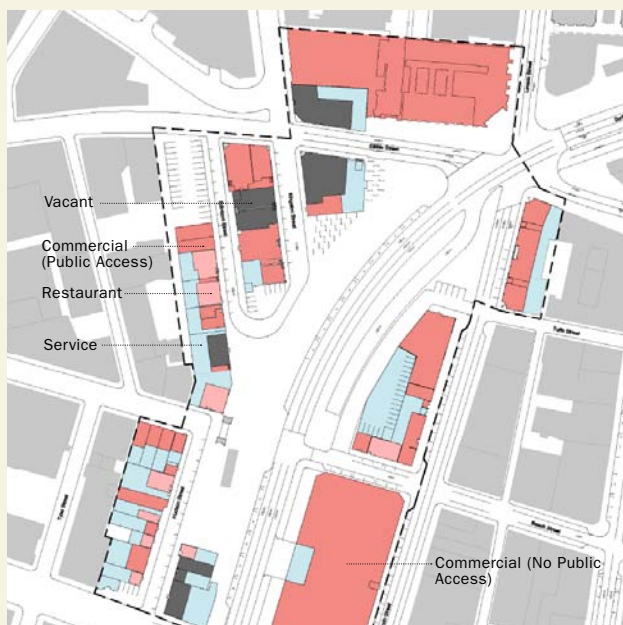
Given regulatory and economic conditions in Boston, the framework for implementation must be somewhat open-ended. For example, how will the recommended improvements to Kingston Street be funded? It is likely that a private developer will pay for the improvements to neighboring streets and sidewalks as part of project mitigation. The study recommendations are intended to provide a vision that can advise the development process when developers, the community, and city agencies get together to plan and to approve upcoming development in the area. The following are two examples of how these recommended improvements could be implemented:

**A library at vent building adjacent to Chinatown Park** > The implementation of a library adjacent to the vent building, while possible, will require both consensus building within the Chinatown community and with the city of Boston and Boston Public Library. With suitable support, a well-coordinated strategy should be put into place to leverage the opportunities afforded by the mitigation that will result from large-scale real estate development in the Chinatown area. For a project of this complexity to happen, one or several members of the community will need to adopt the project and champion its cause with the city and within the context of the community approvals process for neighboring development projects. Most importantly, a case will need to be made to the private property owners on the block that there can be both economic and community benefits to working together to develop a single and more ambitious scheme for the site.

**Widen sidewalks and add street trees along Kingston and Edinboro Streets** > The implementation of our recommended improvements to the Kingston-Edinboro loop will require several steps. Like any of the study recommendations, the concept will need to be embraced by the community and then championed by neighborhood leaders as opportunities arise. For the proposal to have more chances of implementation, a more thorough study should be done. This study would include a more detailed assessment of the location and condition of subterranean sidewalk vaults and utilities so that future tree and street light locations can be more accurately coordinated.

There are two general implementation scenarios for this project. The first is a project that is paid for by public monies, coordinated by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), the Boston Transportation Department (BTD), and the

## Existing and recommended future ground floor uses >



Existing: Current Ground Floor Uses



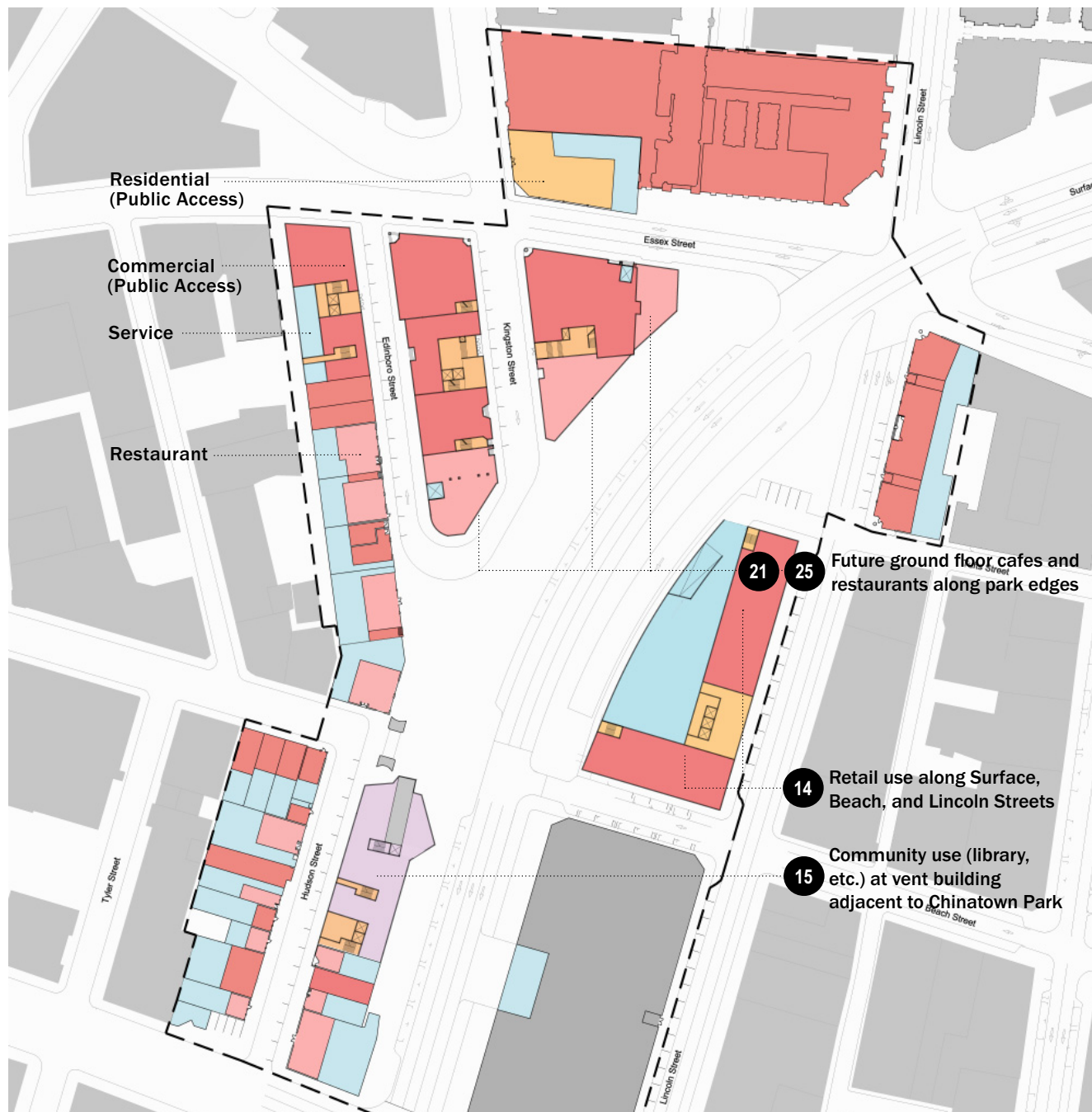
Recommendation: Future Added Ground Floor Uses

Department of Public Works (DPW), and then implemented by the DPW. The second option is that the improvements are completed as part of the redevelopment of the abutting parcels. In this case, all of the same city departments will be closely involved in the design development, approval, and implementation of the public realm improvements. A combination of both scenarios is also possible when the improvements are implemented through various models of a public-private partnership.

Improvements	Implementation	Timeframe	Page
<b>Beach Street Corridor &gt;</b>			
Re-align proposed C17A6 art paving	C17A6 contract	1 year	12
Extend specialty art paving at Chinatown Gate across Surface Street as paved crosswalks	Public or private funding source	1 year	12
Reclaim paved space over southbound ramp opening on Surface Street	Private development mitigation and public contract	10 years	13
Retail use along Surface, Beach, and Lincoln Streets	Private development	10 years	14
Tea pavilion and/or concession space at existing vent building adjacent to Chinatown Park	Publicly funded and/or mitigation	5-10 years	15
Community use (library, etc.) at vent building adjacent to Chinatown Park	Publicly funded and/or mitigation	5-10 years	15
<b>Kingston-Edinboro Loop &gt;</b>			
Widen sidewalks along Kingston and Edinboro Streets	Public contract and/or private development	5-10 years	18
Plant street trees along Kingston and Edinboro Streets	Public contract and/or private development	5-10 years	18
Extend Chinatown Park paving along Kingston and Edinboro sidewalks and streets partially or fully	C17A6 and another public contract and/or private development	1 year	18
Possible modification of loop road configuration	C17A6 and/or another public contract	1 year	19
Provide interim advertising/art screens on building facades facing park	Property owner and/or corporate sponsorship or funded art project	1 year	21
Future ground floor restaurants along park edges	Private development	5-10 years	20
Modifications to park planters to allow future ground floor restaurants to open onto park	Private development	5-10 years	21
<b>Surface and Essex Streets Intersection &gt;</b>			
Provide interim advertising/art screen on building facade facing park	Corporate sponsorship or funded art project	1 year	25
Future ground floor cafes/restaurants	Private development	5-10 years	24
Potential modification to park planters to allow future ground floor cafes/restaurants to open onto park	Private development	5-10 years	25

# FUTURE VISION FOR PARK EDGES

## Existing and Recommended Ground Floor Uses



# FUTURE VISION FOR PARK EDGES

## Planned and Recommended Public Space Improvements



**18** Widen sidewalks along Kingston and Edinboro Streets

**18** Plant street trees along Kingston and Edinboro Streets

**18** Extend Chinatown Park Paving along Kingston and Edinboro sidewalks and streets

**19** Possible modification to loop road configuration

**23** Paving along sidewalks adjacent to park

**21** **25** Potential modifications to park planters to allow future ground floor restaurants to open onto park

**13** Reclaim paved space over southbound ramp opening on Surface Street

**12** Extend specialty art paving at Chinatown Gate across Surface Street as paved crosswalks



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Artery Business Committee  
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