

OFFERED BY COUNCILORS BRIAN WORRELL, MINIARD CULPEPPER, GABRIELA COLETTA ZAPATA, BREADON, LOUIJEUNE, MEJIA, MURPHY, PEPÉN, SANTANA, AND WEBER



CITY OF BOSTON

IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER REGARDING A TEXT AMENDMENT TO THE BOSTON ZONING CODE TO ESTABLISH BOSTON INVESTMENT ZONES: AN ANTI-DISPLACEMENT TOOL

WHEREAS, While Boston currently maintains one of the most expensive real estate markets in the United States, its residents have endured longtime risk and impacts of displacement because of a history of redlining, development deregulation, systemic racism and discrimination baked into city and private development, real estate, and lending practices; *and*

WHEREAS, A combination of low wages, exorbitant housing costs, and lack of social supports have caused an epidemic of housing instability and related roadblocks to economic mobility, while new development can drive even higher property values, taxes and rents, often resulting in increased displacement of residents; *and*

WHEREAS, From organizations like the Community Assembly for a United South End (CAUSE) in the 1960s to present-day neighborhood-led movements such as the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Community Action Coalition (AFFH CAC), Action For Equity, and the Boston Tenant Coalition, community leaders and advocates have expressed longtime concerns about the persistent lack of clear protections to proactively and preventatively guard communities from displacement, rather than retroactively once families have already been displaced; *and*

WHEREAS, A 2018 study of the Fairmount Indigo commuter rail line highlights “the fear of potential and actual displacement of long-time residents as a major concern” especially impacting neighborhoods of Dorchester, Mattapan, Roxbury, and areas with a majority population of low-income and historically disenfranchised Black and Brown residents; *and*

WHEREAS, The lack of access to quality, sustainable jobs with livable wages and upward mobility is a major contributor to increasing the risk of displacement, and the neighborhoods at the highest risk often see residents struggling to make ends meet while beholden to low-wage jobs with little room for growth; *and*

- WHEREAS,** In early 2025, the City of Boston released a report and a heat map reflecting displacement risk scores by neighborhoods, as determined by foreclosure and eviction rates, providing a foundation of data that presents the case for establishing districts with targeted policies for protection to prevent further displacement and promote economic mobility and sustainability for these areas and their residents; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The areas with higher displacement risk scores largely correlate with neighborhoods that have larger populations of residents and families with lower income levels, less access to quality jobs and economic mobility, and historical and current discrepancies in available housing choice and available units; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Per Goal 7.6 of the Official Assessment of Fair Housing, the City is mandated to explore ways that zoning can be used to mitigate the impact of transit improvements that could contribute to displacement of residents, and the Planning and Development Agency has relayed a goal of exploring “ways that zoning can be used when new development may contribute to displacement of protected classes and where there has been a history of exclusion”; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Precedent for specially designated protected districts already exists in certain neighborhoods and areas of Boston such as Jamaica Plain and Chinatown as tools to protect and promote responsible development, as well as in other in-State and out-of-State municipalities including Cambridge, MA, Brookline, MA, Providence, RI, and Seattle, WA; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Article 3 of Boston’s Zoning Code supports designating districts for a special purpose, stating “other special purpose overlay districts may be designated in downtown districts, neighborhood districts, and the Harborpark District, as provided in the articles governing such districts”; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Chapter 40Q of the Massachusetts General Laws allows municipalities to create District Improvement Financing (DIF), which is a tool that can be used to target funds and investments created by projects in a district for the economic growth and development of that district; *and*
- WHEREAS,** In 2011, the Somerville City Council voted and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Economic Assistance Coordinating Council approved the creation of a DIF for the Assembly Row district, the [tax revenues of which promoted at least \\$2 million in new growth revenue for Fiscal Year 2013](#); *and*
- WHEREAS,** A DIF can operate in tandem with other tools for a district’s growth and the upward economic mobility of its residents, and legislation governing creation of a DIF allows the flexibility of the appropriate bodies with the relevant expertise and

lived experience to determine and adjust a DIF's Development Program based on the needs of each designated district and its residents; *and*

WHEREAS, The City of Boston can establish DIF for each designated SPZ, so as to direct all tax revenue created from future development, projects, and other private investment in the SPZ, to be reinvested in the SPZ across the three main categories of (1) jobs access and upward economic mobility, (2) transportation access and environmental resiliency, and (3) access to housing and anti-displacement; *and*

WHEREAS, Designating Special Protection Zones (SPZs) with targeted District Improvement Financing (DIF) that prioritizes these policy goals for the areas at highest risk of displacement may help to prevent further displacement, and fight gentrification and economic inequality by providing a pathway for revenue from new growth to be strategically reinvested back into these areas in ways that prioritize increasing access to affordable housing and quality jobs with upward mobility; *and*

WHEREAS, In addition to designating these areas as SPZs and establishing DIF for each SPZ, it would be beneficial to explore introducing an Overlay that prioritizes and helps promote the development of greater affordable housing, more homeownership opportunities to help more residents leave the rent-burdened cycle, and more housing with units suitable for families and responsive to the diverse needs of residents; **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

ORDERED, That as per Chapters 4, 6, and 8 of the City of Boston Municipal Code, the City of Boston establish the areas with higher displacement risk scores – which, at the time of writing this document, include parts of the neighborhoods of East Boston, Mission Hill, Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan – as Special Protection Zones, and establish a process for designating Special Protection Zones for the areas encompassed under the City of Boston's displacement risk heat map facing higher rates of resident displacement as a result of development, threats to neighborhood identity and environment, and areas with a history of higher foreclosure rates, predatory and racist lending, redlining, and other discriminatory practices; *and*, **BE IT**

ORDERED, That the Boston City Council, by and through Councilor Brian Worrell, submits a petition to amend the text of the Boston Zoning Code, as established under Chapter 665 of the Acts of 1965, as amended, to add Special Protection Zones as protected districts under Article 3 and Article 80; *and*, **BE IT**

ORDERED, That District Improvement Financing be established for Special Protection Zones to target tax revenue from projects created in Special Protection Zones to be reinvested into these areas so as to bolster the provision of and connection of

residents to sustainable jobs in areas with the highest risk of displacement, and to ensure a holistic response to communities suffering from the combination of rising costs of living and development, lack of access to housing, and economic mobility.

Section 1.

Filed on: March 11, 2026
Text Amendment Application No. ____
Boston City Council

TO THE BOSTON PLANNING DEPARTMENT AND ZONING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF BOSTON:

The Boston City Council through and by Boston City Councilor Brian Worrell petition to amend the text of the Boston Zoning Code as follows:

- 1. By amending Articles 2 (Definitions), 2A (Definitions applicable in neighborhood districts and in Article 80, Development Review and Approval), and Article 3 (Establishment of Zoning Districts) by:**
 - a. Adding the following terms and definitions in each of the aforementioned sections in alphabetical order:**
 - i. Development District.** Intended for establishment of District Improvement Financing (DIF) in Special Protection Zones (SPZ), as defined herein. Each Special Protection Zone shall be designated as a Development District and include all parcels within the same neighborhood with a displacement risk score of at least 3.9 or above regardless of whether the parcels are contiguous.
 - ii. Development Program.** Pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40 §Q and the creation of District Improvement Financing (DIF), a Development Program is a statement of means and objectives designed to increase or improve residential affordable and market rate housing, and to improve the quality of life, the physical facilities and structures and the quality of pedestrian and vehicular traffic control and transportation within a district. For purposes of this Article, a Development Program shall be created for each designated SPZ, as determined by the appropriate bodies pertaining to each SPZ. A **Development Program** must describe all of the following but if one or more of the activities are not expected, then the Development Program should clearly state that the activity will not be undertaken:
 1. a financial plan;

2. a complete list of public facilities to be constructed;
 3. the use of private property;
 4. plans for the relocation of persons displaced by the development activities;
 5. plans, if any, for the development of housing, both affordable and market rate;
 6. the proposed regulations and facilities to improve transportation;
 7. the proposed operation of the district after the planned capital improvements are completed; and
 8. the duration of the program which shall not exceed the longer of:
 - a. 30 years from the date of designation of the district; or
 - b. 30 years from project stabilization, as defined in the development program.
- iii. District Improvement Financing (or DIF).** Pursuant to Chapter 40Q of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, District Improvement Financing (DIF) is a mechanism that a municipality can use to designate districts as areas with opportunities for new growth, and to reinvest tax revenue created from new and future economic development, projects, and other investment in these areas for their economic improvement, the increase of affordable housing and housing choice in these areas, and pathways to quality jobs and upward economic mobility for their communities. A DIF shall not last more than 30 years, and the Development Program for the DIF shall be created by the bodies appropriate to each DIF and pursuant to Chapter 40Q of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- iv. First Source SPZ Site.** Chapter 24 Section 2 of the Boston Municipal Code outlines the City's First Source Hiring Agreements, which require any for-profit or not-for-profit employer (other than a covered building service vendor) who employs at least 25 Full-Time Employees and who has been awarded a service contract or service subcontract from the City, to sign a first source hiring agreement with one or more referral agencies or one or more Boston One Stop Career Centers to prioritize notifying and hiring residents first for any new job opportunities. For purposes of this Article, a First Source Site shall be a location established in each designated SPZ, tailored to helping connect SPZ residents first and foremost with quality jobs, promotions and sustainable careers, and upward economic mobility as new opportunities are created in SPZs.
- v. High Displacement-Risk Score.** Pursuant to the City of Boston's Displacement-Risk Score Heat Map, and for the purposes of this article, an area of the City with a high displacement-risk score will include those

scoring between 3.9-6.8 on the Displacement-Risk Score Heat Map scoring system.

- vi. **Quality Job.** For purposes of this Article, a Quality Job will be defined as one with a sustainable living wage; the opportunity for professional and career growth; access to upskilling and tangible skills training to keep up with the needs of in-demand industries; and overall upward economic mobility. Quality Jobs shall be located in an SPZ to help promote the economic growth and quality of life improvements to the SPZ, and an SPZ DIF should also prioritize the creation of pathways to Quality Jobs across the City for residents of SPZs.
- vii. **Special Protection Zone (or SPZ).** A Special Protection Zone is a zone encompassing an area or neighborhood particularly vulnerable to displacement, or with a history of displacement and redlining, for purposes related to protecting said area from further displacement brought on by development. As of the writing of this document, this includes all areas with a displacement risk score between 3.9-6.8, as established pursuant to [the City's displacement risk heat map scoring system](#). There shall be a First Source SPZ Site established in every SPZ.
- viii. **Tax Increment.** Refers to tax revenues generated by the incremental increases to the assessed value of real property that result from new projects or other private investment, such as building or renovation, in SPZs.

2. After Article 90, Newmarket 21st Century Industrial District, insert the following new Article 91-Boston Investment Zones:

91-1. - Purpose of this Article.

The purpose of this article is to help prevent displacement of Boston's historically marginalized communities, and low-moderate income and working-class people by establishing Special Protection Zones (SPZs) with targeted District Improvement Financing (DIF) in neighborhoods with a history and present-day risk of the highest rates of displacement to help offset gentrification, prevent further displacement, and target revenue from new growth in these areas toward the promotion of upward economic mobility for these areas and their residents. These changes would significantly advance the implementation of several important goals officially adopted by Boston in its Assessment of Fair Housing and "[An Executive Order Relative to Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing and the Implementation of the City of Boston's Assessment of Fair Housing](#)" (January 20, 2021), with the intent to implement the following objectives:

1. Create guidelines for the designation of Special Protection Zones for each of the neighborhoods with the highest displacement-risk score (based on the City of Boston's displacement risk heat map, and as reviewed and adjusted as needed on an ongoing basis as trends change), to help protect residents of historically disenfranchised areas from displacement caused by development, to preserve neighborhood identities at risk of unchecked development, and promote the preservation of affordable housing, homeownership, and economic sustainability and upward mobility for these areas and their residents.
2. Create guidelines for establishing District Improvement Financing for an SPZ and a Development Program to direct tax revenues from new projects, economic activity, and financing in an SPZ toward the economic improvement, growth and development, and resiliency of these areas and their residents.

91-2. Definitions.

Terms used throughout this Article shall have the meanings set forth in Article 2 of the Zoning Code except where otherwise specified in this Article.

91-3. - Applicability.

This article and the stipulations of its District Improvement Financing will apply to all Special Protection Zones, as designated in this article for the areas with a displacement-risk score of 3.9 or more, and as adjusted and determined in the future and approved by the Boston City Council, the Mayor, and the Boston Planning Department.

91-4. - Summary of Special Protection Zones.

This article establishes Special Protection Zones for the areas in the City with the highest displacement risk score (between 3.9-6.8), as designated via the City of Boston's Displacement Risk Heat Map, and as reviewed annually by the Boston Planning Department and the Boston City Council. As of the writing of this legislation, this would include **parts of the neighborhoods of East Boston, Roxbury, Mission Hill, Dorchester, and Mattapan, specifically where the displacement risk score is 3.9 or above**. As city trends change over time, however, designated SPZs may change as well to account for any changes in displacement risk score, and other factors as reviewed by the Planning Department.

91-5. - District Improvement Financing from New Revenue in any Designated SPZ.

91-5.1. - Summary of Purpose and Execution.

This Article establishes District Improvement Financing (DIF) for each SPZ as a mechanism to target tax revenue from new development, projects, and investment toward the economic improvement and improvements to overall quality of life, affordability, and accessibility of those

SPZs and their residents. Pursuant to the stipulations of Chapter 40Q, all tax revenues generated by the Tax Increment are eligible for capture through the use of DIF, and the City of Boston is allowed to identify how much of the revenue will be captured and how it will be used.

In order to enable the establishment of a DIF, Chapter 40Q of the Massachusetts General Laws requires that municipalities first establish a Development District, in addition to adopting three additional components either simultaneously or at later dates (through the same legislative process), which together enable the activities and benefits of DIF as an economic development tool:

1. Invested Revenue District
2. Development Program
3. Invested Revenue Development Program

For purposes of this Article, an SPZ will be considered a Development District in order to establish a DIF targeted for that SPZ. A DIF Development Program shall be established for each SPZ as a statement of means and objectives designed to meet the following wider goals:

1. **Housing:** Increase and improve access to residential affordable and market rate housing for the SPZ and its residents
2. **Upward Economic Mobility:** Increase and improve access to quality, sustainable jobs for SPZs and residents of SPZs, career growth and upskilling , and overall pathways to upward economic mobility for residents of SPZs; and fund the establishment of a First Source Site in each SPZ dedicated to provision of these services for residents of SPZs
3. **Environmental Resiliency and Transportation Access:** Improve the environmental resiliency of SPZs, the physical facilities and structures, and the quality of pedestrian and vehicular traffic control and transportation for SPZs and their residents

This Article focuses solely on outlining guidance for designating where SPZs will be located, and provides general guidance for the eventual creation of a Development Program with means and objectives for economic improvement specific to each SPZ, to be developed, reviewed and approved by the appropriate bodies pertaining to each SPZ. It is important to remember that for the purposes of this Article, an SPZ and a Development District are synonymous.

This Article does not include guidance for the components of Investment Revenue District, or Invested Revenue Development Program, which shall be decided later on by the appropriate bodies pertaining to each SPZ.

91-5.2. - Guidance for Creating a Development Program Targeted for a Specific SPZ.

A Development Program for District Improvement Financing for an SPZ should aim to prioritize the following objectives, as reviewed, approved, and adjusted as needed, by the Boston City Council, the Mayor, the Planning Department, and the appropriate review bodies pertaining to each SPZ:

1. **25% of incremental tax revenue** from new growth in these areas shall be invested in the creation of policies, programs and pathways that: increase access to quality, sustainable jobs and financial stability for residents of SPZs; center upskilling in jobs training, career growth, and skill development for in-demand industries; fund the operations and services of a First Source Site tailored to the needs of specific SPZs; and generally, promote upward economic mobility for SPZs and SPZ residents.
2. **50% of incremental tax revenue** from new growth in these areas shall be invested in the preservation and creation of housing and subsidies in SPZs and for SPZ residents.
3. **25% of incremental tax revenue** from new growth in these areas shall be invested in programs and initiatives that prioritize environmental justice and resiliency, including but not limited to: access to clean air, water, and healthy food options; the preservation of open and green spaces; greater tree canopy coverage and the prevention of heat island effects for SPZs; and environmentally responsible and resilient construction and building materials for buildings, facilities, and developments in SPZs.

The means of achieving these objectives can and should be adjusted and updated as needed and as trends change across the city, and as decided by the appropriate bodies, and City officials. Similarly, the objectives specific to each SPZ, along with the means and policy and programmatic components of achieving those objectives shall be developed by the appropriate body once the designation of SPZs is approved, and as informed by representatives and residents of the SPZs.

91-6. - Enforcement Authority.

The Planning Department, the Boston City Council, and the Mayor shall remain the administrative bodies that ultimately have approval power over the determination and designation of SPZs, as well as the means and objectives for the establishment of DIF to reinvest revenue from new growth back into an SPZ.

Section 2.

The provisions of this ordinance are severable and if any provision, or portion thereof, should be held to be unconstitutional or otherwise invalid by any court of competent jurisdiction, such unconstitutionality or invalidity shall not affect the remaining provisions, which remain in full force and effect.

Section 3.

The provisions of this ordinance shall be effective immediately upon passage.

Filed on: March 11, 2026

Petitioner: Boston City Council

By: Councilor Brian Worrell

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