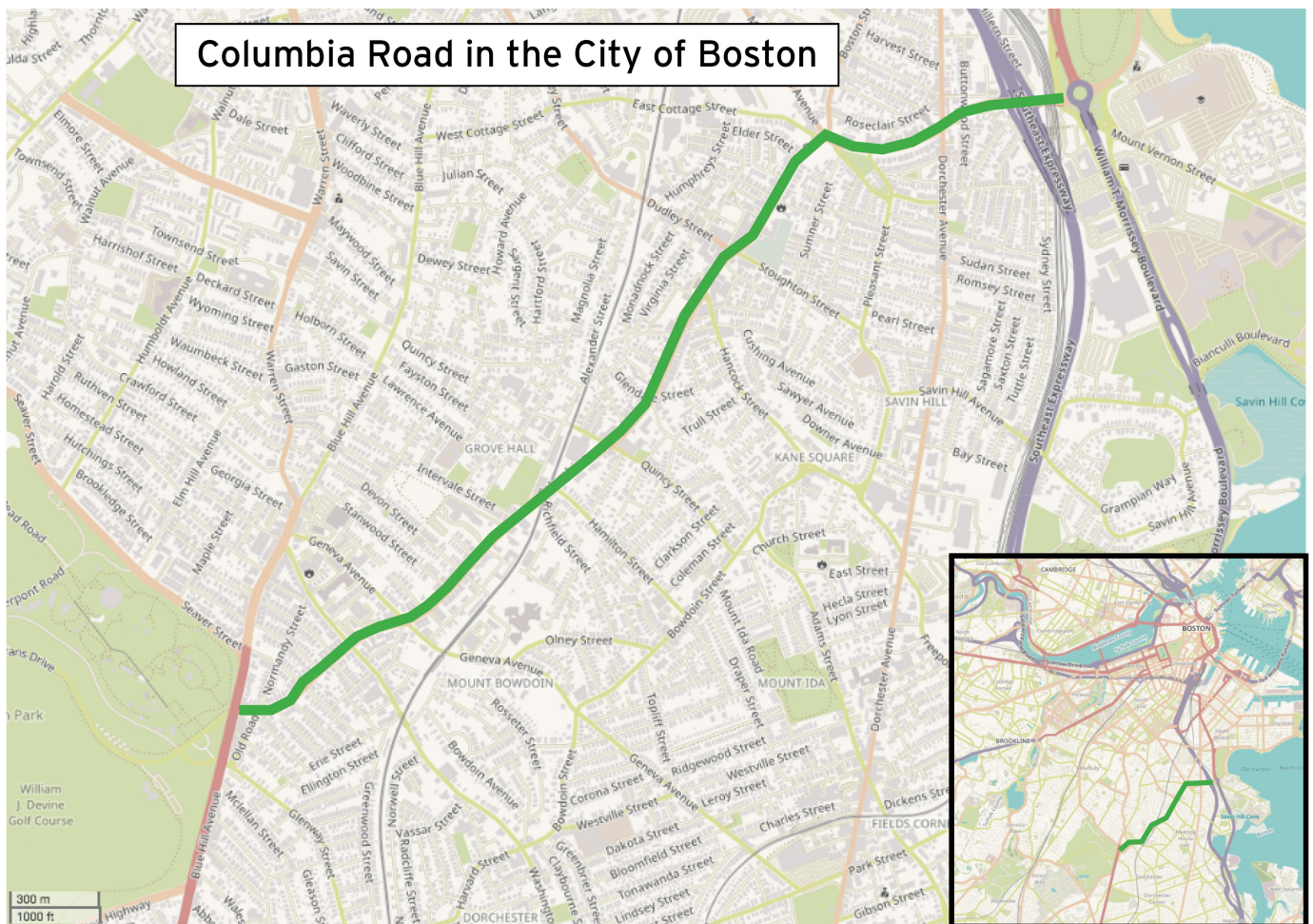


ACTIVATING COLUMBIA ROAD: REFRAMING A MISSING LINK



Columbia Road is a 2.4 mile arterial road with a large width, high traffic, and sparse landscaping. However, it is also home to several historic landmarks, including Boston's oldest house, bordered by several distinct neighborhoods, and bookended by two large parks, Franklin Park and Moakley Park. While originally envisioned as an extension of the Emerald Necklace, a series of parks designed in the 19th century, Columbia Road was widened in the 1950's to host a major streetcar route before becoming the four-lane road it is today.

In the Spring of 2019, LivableStreets Alliance and graduate students from Tufts University's department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning teamed up to consolidate previous studies, recommendations, and outreach to synthesize current information and analyze themes across existing planning processes. This study included a review of five primary planning documents concerning Columbia Road, semi-structured interviews with key contributors to each document, reviewing case studies of similar projects, and performing spatial analysis through GIS mapping.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Columbia Road Streetscape Types

Kosciuszko Circle



About .5 miles of two vehicular lanes with narrow-to-no median

Massachusetts Ave



About .9 miles of four vehicular lanes, with concrete planter median

Fairmount Commuter Rail Overpass



About .8 miles of four vehicular lanes, with tree-lined median

Blue Hill Ave

with substantial setbacks and wide spaces between houses; some blocks are uniform four-story brick residential structures right along the sidewalk; and some blocks are dominated by triple-deckers divided by driveways.

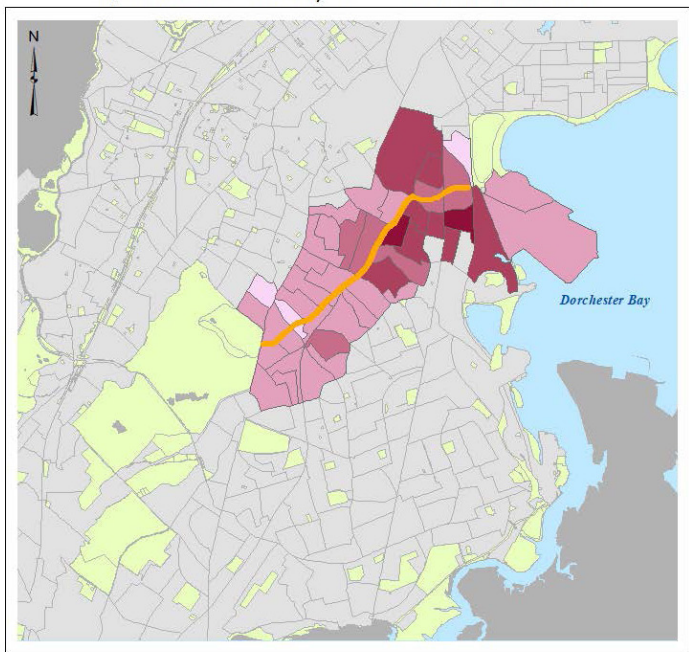
On either side of the roadway there is substantial diversity in land use. Land use is predominantly residential with clusters of commercial, retail, and institutional uses at primary intersections. Housing types range from single-family homes with sizeable lawns, to triple-deckers, to three or four story row houses and block-wide apartment complexes. The mix of uses results in an irregular facade plane.

The distribution of open space along the corridor shows a diversity of open space types and scales - from closely clustered small pocket parks to the city's largest park, Franklin Park. Franklin Park and Moakley Park, at opposite ends of the corridor, offer nearby residents a substantial opportunity to enjoy open space and recreation; however, the existing conditions do not make these parks easily accessible.

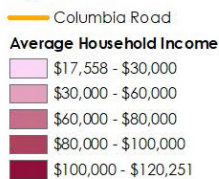
There are very few unbuilt parcels, exceptions being a few parking lots and one or two vacant lots. Some blocks are rows of single-family homes

PEOPLE ALONG COLUMBIA ROAD

2017 Average Household Income
1/4-Mile Proximity to Columbia Road

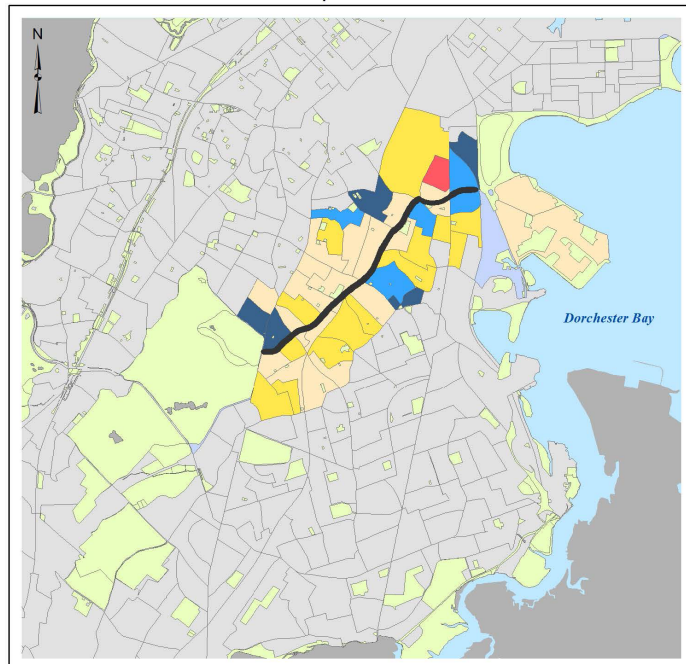


Legend

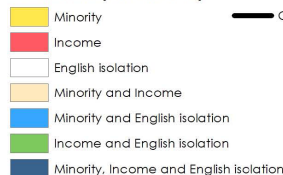


Data Source: MassGIS, ACS 2017 (5-year)

Environmental Justice Communities
1/4-Mile Proximity to Columbia Road



EJ Criteria, by Block Group



Data Source: MassGIS, Mass EOEEA

The team defined the Columbia Road study area as census block groups within 1/4-mile of the roadway, a designation that consists of 44 census block groups. The corridor has low average incomes compared with the City of Boston as a whole, is composed of majority African-American residents, and has several areas where 25% or more of residents are linguistically isolated, households where English speaking is limited.

Other socially vulnerable populations in the corridor include children under the age of 18 (24%), seniors over the age of 65 (9%), and residents with disabilities (16%). Disability metrics include those residents that have hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and/or independent living difficulties.

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) defines environmental justice populations as neighborhoods that one or more of the following criteria:

1. Block groups whose annual median household income is equal to or less than 65% of the statewide median (\$62,072 in 2010)
2. 25% or more of the residents identify as a race other than white
3. 25% or more of households have no one over the age of 14 who speaks English only or every well

PAST PLANNING INITIATIVES

"A lot of people say 'make the neighborhood better, but don't make it too good because we don't want people displacing us.' If we or the City do anything that displaces people, I will consider that a failure."

- David Queeley, Codman Square NDC

2014

Greenways Shaping Boston, BSA - **March**
 Greenway Links Charrette Final Presentation & Awards - **June**
Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative - **September**
 Boston 2024 Bid Book released - **December**

"It isn't all about walking and biking; that was our orientation but there are a lot of ways it can be improved."

- Amber Christofferson, organizer of
 "Reimagining Columbia Road Workshop"

2016

Imagine Boston 2030: Enhancing Neighborhoods and Completing the Emerald Neckalce - **December**

"Unless and until there is a more concrete way of thinking about what needs to happen with the corridor, there is really no concrete way for the communities to engage."

- Kishore Varanasi, CBT Architects
 & host of the BSA event "Fulfilling the Promise"

2018

Streetlife: Experiencing a Street, Boston's Columbia Road, Northeastern University - **Fall**
 LSA Online Survey - **December**

2013

May - Boston Complete Streets Guidelines
Fall - Boston Bike Network Plan
November - Mayor Walsh Elected

"A lot of people said, 'As the crow flies, Franklin Park is only 3/4 of a mile away...we never go there. Or if we did, we'd get in a car and drive there.'"

- Alan Mountjoy, NBBJ

2015

Boston Green Links

Winter - Go Boston 2030 initiative begins
May - Imagine Boston 2030 planning process begins
June - Olmsted's Legacy: Landscape + the City, BSA
October - Reimagining Columbia Road Workshop, LSA
November - LSA Streettalk: Connecting our Urban Greenways

"Upham's Corner became the center of a lot of planning efforts. Everyone kept coming there. People had ideas. In terms of continuing to think of it as a greenway, that was still largely happening outside of the neighborhood."

- Alice Brown, former Project
 Manager of Go Boston 2030

2017

March - **GoBoston 2030**
March - May - **Fulfilling the Promise: Community Building and the Emerald Necklace**
June - Imagine Boston 2030 community meeting
July - **Imagine Boston 2030**

"Columbia Road tends to be a throughway for residents of the City of Boston. So people are just driving through. They're not stopping, and they're not engaging with these neighborhoods. "

- Natalia Urtubey, former Director of
 Engagement Imagine Boston 2030

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. REFRAME

- Historically this project has been referred to as “Completing the Emerald Necklace”, a vision that was not developed in coordination with the community
- Move away from this narrative and use community wants and needs to drive decision-making
- Through a robust community engagement process, residents’ thoughts could provide a compelling, and more relevant, narrative for Columbia Road

2. ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

- As part of community engagement, ask all partners and stakeholders a series of questions about motives for this project before the redesign process
 - Who are these improvements for?
 - Why do you care about moving this project forward?
 - Should this project be framed as a “greenway”, as a “complete street”, as a “vision zero” priority? - all of which come with different assumptions, benefits, and effects
 - What are the unintended consequences of completing this project?

3. LINK TO ONGOING PLANNING

- Enhance communication between planning projects, and integrate the community engagement process for Columbia Road into other planning initiatives
 - These include ongoing processes in Franklin Park, Moakley Park, developments all along the corridor, enhancements to the Fairmount Line, and the MBTA Better Buses Project

4. MULTILINGUAL OUTREACH MATERIALS

- Create and use multilingual outreach materials for all community engagement activities, building relationships with trusted community stakeholders, and collaborating with key entities along the corridor to ensure that the project will meet the needs of people who currently live or work on or around the corridor

5. FURTHER RESEARCH

- A thorough transportation analysis
- A framework for gathering and analyzing public input for directing project development
- An analysis of potential consequences for gentrification and displacement, and a framework for alleviating those consequences