



SOUTH END LANDMARK DISTRICT COMMISSION - APPLICATION FOR ADVISORY REVIEW

Project Name
52 Plympton St

Date Submitted
7.15.25

Address
52 Plympton St.
Boston, MA 02118

Submission By
52 Plympton MKJB, LLC



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1. Introduction

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Welcome & Project Overview

We are pleased to present this proposal for advisory review by the **South End Landmark District Commission**. The project is located at **52 Plympton Street**, within the **Protection Area** of the South End Landmark District.

The proposed development consists of a **7-story, 44-unit residential building**, including **8 affordable live-work units reserved for artists** at the ground level. The project also includes a **publicly accessible gallery space**, designed to activate the street edge and contribute to the creative and cultural fabric of the neighborhood. The proposed project is designed to comply with the dimensional requirements of zoning, including particularly maximum building height and floor area ratio.

The design seeks to balance contemporary performance goals with sensitivity to the South End’s architectural context—through thoughtful material selection, massing, and street-level engagement.

Purpose of Presentation

This presentation is intended to:

- Provide **project background** and explain the design approach
- Outline the rationale for the **proposed demolition** of the two existing structures on the site
- Describe the scope and intent of the **new construction**
- Demonstrate how the proposal seeks to **comply with the Protection Area Demolition Policy**, including structural condition, feasibility of reuse, and the project’s potential to contribute more meaningfully to the district

We welcome the Commission’s feedback as we work toward a project that meets both the letter and spirit of the South End Landmark District’s goals.

2. Historic Context & Protection Area Overview.

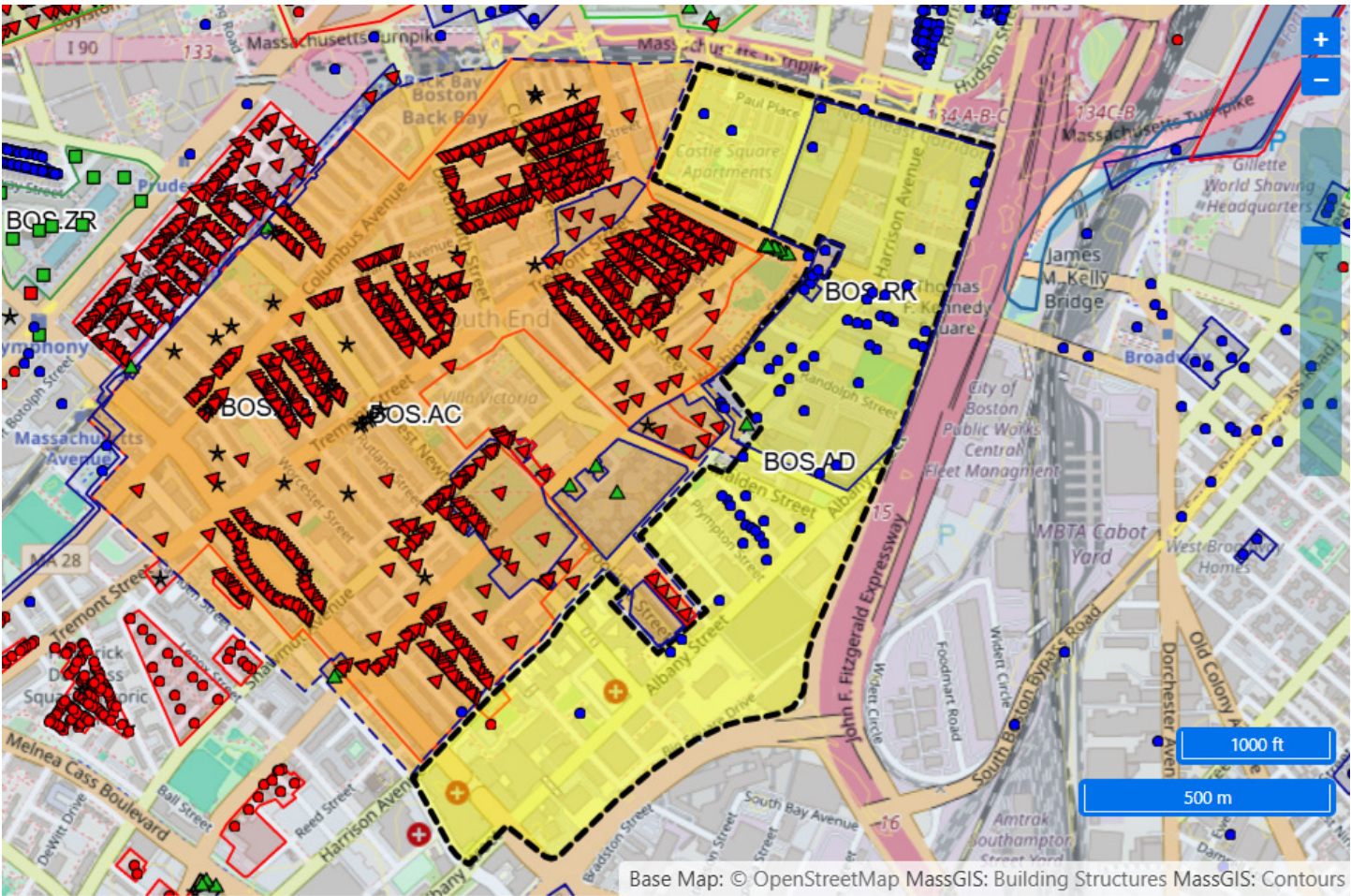
THE SOUTH END PROTECTION AREA

Protection Area Background

The site at 52 Plympton Street is located within the Protection Area of the South End Landmark District, which was established as part of the district's original designation. The Protection Area was specifically created to serve as a transitional buffer between the historically significant residential core of the South End and the larger-scale, infrastructure-heavy areas surrounding it, particularly the Southeast Expressway and adjacent commercial and institutional uses.

Unlike the South End proper, which is defined by its cohesive streetscapes of row houses, narrow lots, and architectural detail, the Protection Area contains a mix of utilitarian structures, light-industrial buildings, garages, and commercial infill, many of which were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to support warehousing, manufacturing, and transportation functions. This distinction in character is reflected in the area's building typologies, scale, and materials: brick-and-timber loft buildings, concrete block garages, wide curb cuts, and minimal ornamentation are typical.

The Landmark District's Standards and Criteria acknowledge this divergence, allowing for greater flexibility in the interpretation of design guidelines within the Protection Area. As such, proposed work in this context must still respect the broader historic and architectural values of the South End while responding appropriately to the area's industrial legacy and evolving urban conditions.



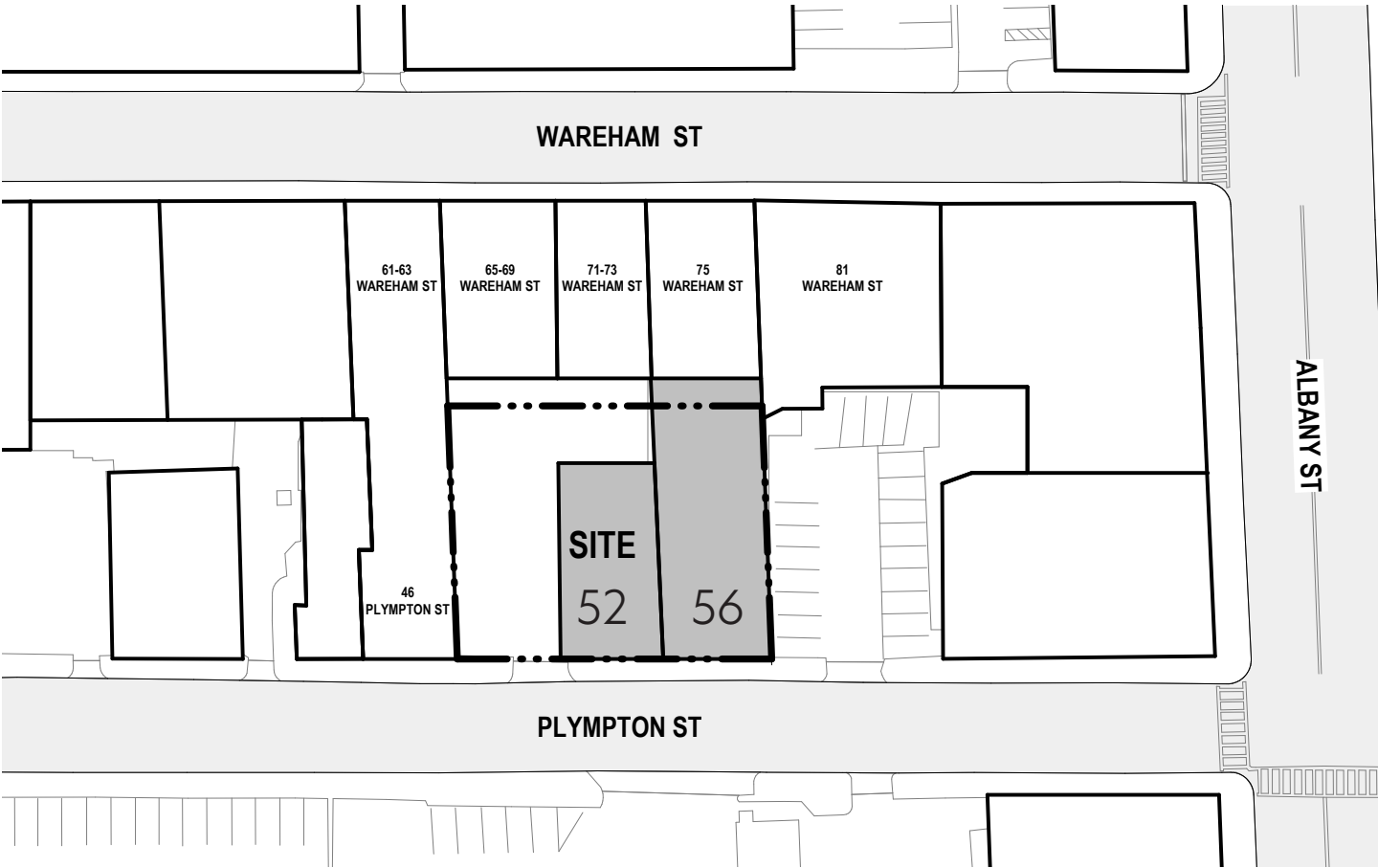
EXISTING STRUCTURES AND SITE BOUNDARIES

The project site is comprised of two adjacent parcels of land, identified as 52 Plympton Street (Parcel ID: 0801144000) and 56 Plympton Street (Parcel ID: 0801143001). Together, they form a single development site with a total area of 11,098 square feet and frontage along Plympton Street.

As previously documented, this combined lot is currently occupied by two structures:

- **3-story building at 52 Plympton Street:** Constructed of timber-and-brick circa 1895, according to the attached MACRIS Inventory Form.
- **1 story garage at 56 Plympton Street:** Of utilitarian design, built c. 1920 per the City Assessors records. It has no MACRIS form and is typical of light-industrial infill structures.


As will be detailed in the following section, both buildings show significant evidence of deterioration, and previous alterations have diminished their architectural integrity.



Existing Site Plan



Parcel ID: 0801144000
Address: 52 Plympton St
Classification Code: 0317 (Warehouse)
Property Type: Commercial
Living Area: 7,980 sf
Year Built: 1895 (MACRIS)



#1481BOS.1481

ADDRESS 52 Plympton COR. P1. SOUTH END

NAME present original

MAP No. 22-12 SUB AREA

DATE 1890s Building Permit source

ARCHITECT Nathan O. Hart Building Department source

BUILDER Benjamin F. Dewing Building Department source

OWNER original present

PHOTOGRAPHS SE-5-B-6-88

TYPE (residential) single double row 2-fam. 3-deck ten apt:

(non-residential)

NO. OF STORIES (1st to cornice) 3 plus

ROOF flat cupola dormers

MATERIALS (Frame) clapboards shingles stucco asphalt asbestos alum/vinyl

(Other) brick stone concrete iron/steel/alum.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION 1860s, three-story, red brick industrial structure with loading doors framed by cast iron columns and stone lintel. Structure is heavily altered, and is missing its cornice.

EXTERIOR ALTERATION minor moderate drastic

CONDITION good fair poor LOT AREA 3,074 sq. feet

NOTEWORTHY SITE CHARACTERISTICS

SIGNIFICANCE (cont'd on reverse)

The South End Industrial District is a largely intact grouping of late 19th to early 20th century brick industrial buildings with related tenements and worker housing. Many of the industries, attracted here by the proximity of rail and wharf facilities, were engaged in woodworking, stonecutting, shoe, piano and organ manufacturing and related industries. These buildings form a remarkably cohesive built environment, an industrial corollary to the adjacent South End residential district.

This building contributes to the streetscape fo the South End Industrial District and shares historical and architectural characteristics with other industrial structures in the district.

A



Parcel ID: 0801143001
Address: 56 Plympton St
Classification Code: 0332 (Service Garage)
Property Type: Commercial
Living Area: 4,128 sf
Year Built: 1920 (Assessors)

3. Demolition Evaluation (per SELDC Policy).

OVERVIEW OF DEMOLITION CRITERIA.

Standards and Criteria for the South End Harrison/Albany Protection Area:

1. **Physical Condition:** Evidence of current and on-going deterioration and/or that the building is in immediate danger of collapse must be provided.
2. **Cost of Reuse is Prohibitive:** The cost of restoration must be shown to be beyond the means of any reuse (not just the goals of the developer). The Commission would require that costs be quantified by a consultant.
3. **Demolition** of the building will allow for a project that will make a higher contribution to the Protection Area than currently possible.



Aerial View

PHYSICAL CONDITION

The two structures on the site have significantly deteriorated. The three-story timber-and-brick building at 52 Plympton shows evidence of deterioration and settlement, which has been partially disguised by facade repointing. Key architectural features of this building have been removed or inappropriately altered, including the original cornice and upper floor lintels. Furthermore, two of the building's storefront bays were converted into loading docks, compromising the original design and character of the ground floor. The adjacent one-story service garage is a utilitarian structure with no significant architectural merit.



Figure X: Front facade of 52 & 56 Plympton Street. Note the following critical conditions that diminish the building's architectural and structural integrity: The removal of the original historic cornice and the upper-floor window lintels. The conversion of two original storefront bays into loading docks, compromising the structure of the ground floor. Significant masonry deterioration and evidence of settlement across the facade, which has been partially disguised by repointing.



Figure Y: Rear facade of 52 Plympton Street. The rear facade exhibits significant structural issues consistent with the building's overall state of decline. This includes widespread masonry deterioration and evidence of structural settlement. These conditions, which will be further detailed in a forthcoming structural engineering report, contribute to the building's compromised integrity and the infeasibility of its restoration.

COST OF REUSE

The project’s viability depends on fully utilizing the allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 4.0, staying below 70 feet in height and providing ample bike and vehicle parking in a code compliant building. Several key factors render adaptive reuse of the existing buildings at 52 Plympton Street financially and functionally infeasible:

Code Compliance Issues – Floodplain Elevation and Egress

The site at 52 Plympton Street falls within Boston’s Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District (CFROD), which imposes specific elevation requirements to mitigate flood risk. To comply, the building’s ground floor must be elevated at least 4 feet above street level. The existing building’s ground floor currently sits only 3 feet above street level, 1 foot below the regulatory threshold. Raising the existing structure to meet CFROD requirements would require significant structural intervention and impose a substantial cost burden on the project, without resolving other fundamental site and building constraints.

In addition to elevation issues, the project is designed to utilize cross-laminated timber (CLT) construction, which supports a more efficient structural system, allows for 7 stories, and keeps the floor-to-floor height below 9’-6”, (a critical parameter to remain under the 70-foot high-rise building code height limit). The existing building, however, was not constructed with this constraint in mind. Its floor-to-floor heights are inconsistent with CLT standards, and any attempt to retrofit the structure would not only be cost-prohibitive, but would have misaligned floor heights and window apertures. In many locations, the proposed floor slab intersects or cuts across the existing window openings, making architectural reuse unfeasible.

Inefficient Parking and Circulation:

The project’s viability depends on achieving a minimum parking ratio of approximately 0.5 spaces per residential unit, as well as secure bicycle storage to meet zoning and livability expectations. At-grade parking would present urban design challenges and would consume valuable building volume needed to achieve the allowable 4.0 FAR.

The only feasible solution is to accommodate parking below grade. However, the original brick-and-timber structure sits on shallow foundations in the middle of the site that cannot span over or integrate with a functional basement parking layout. Excavating beneath or around the existing foundation would require underpinning or structural intervention so extensive that it would approach the cost of full reconstruction without resolving other code, access, and life-safety deficiencies inherent in the current structure.

Limited Development Capacity

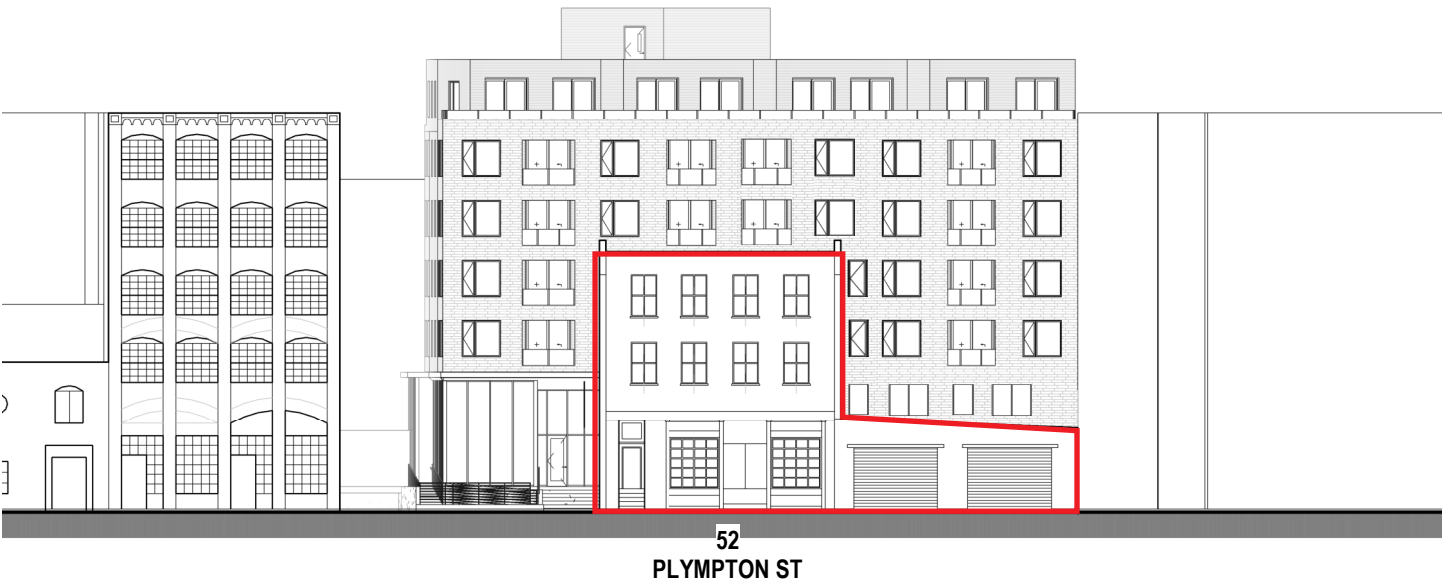
The allowable FAR of 4.0, which cannot be reached without new construction; the existing buildings on the site have an FAR of only approximately 1.1. Even if the existing 3-story building were to be retained and parking were to be eliminated or substantially reduced, the constraints imposed by the current structure’s location in the middle of the site, footprint, irregular layout, and required setbacks would significantly reduce the usable floor area, resulting in a total FAR well below what is needed for feasibility, in addition to the expense of upgrading the existing building to meet current life-safety, accessibility, energy, and structural codes.

Preservation of the Façade Alone

While retaining the existing façade as a preservation strategy may be technically feasible, it is not practical or architecturally coherent within the context of the proposed building. As previously noted, the existing window apertures do not align with the floor-to-floor heights required for the new structure, particularly one using CLT construction to remain below the high-rise height limit. In multiple locations, the existing floor levels intersect proposed window openings, rendering the façade incompatible with the layout and function of a new building.

Modifying the internal structure to align with the preserved façade would require significant structural gymnastics and compromise the efficiency, usability, and feasibility of the project. The result would be an architecturally compromised hybrid that satisfies neither preservation goals nor modern building performance standards. For these reasons, we do not believe façade preservation alone is a viable strategy.

Comparative elevation showing the existing and proposed buildings.



IMPROVED CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROTECTED AREA

We believe our proposed redevelopment of 52 Plympton Street offers a more meaningful and enduring contribution to the Protection Area than is currently possible with the existing structures. The project has been carefully conceived to align with the goals of the South End Landmark District by addressing scale, urban character, and long-term public benefit.

Key aspects of the proposed design include:

Contextual architectural response: The new building draws from the South End's material and massing traditions, using a brick, limestone, and wood palette, while stepping back at the upper floor to align with neighboring cornices and reinforce the street wall. While the zoning limit of this area is 100', this proposed project sits just below 70' which is aligned with the maximum height in the SELDC Standard and Criteria.

Public realm improvements: A widened sidewalk, new plantings, and permeable paving enhance the pedestrian environment, while a transparent, double-height gallery and lobby create visual interest and active ground-floor frontage. Accessible building access is provided via a ramped entry wrapping the ground-floor art gallery and lobby.

Sustainable design and community benefit: The project will be constructed using mass timber and designed to meet Passive House standards, with 100% electric systems and future solar readiness. Eight income-restricted artist live-work units contribute directly to the cultural and economic diversity of the neighborhood.

Our intent is to demonstrate that the new construction offers a higher architectural, environmental, and civic value than the reuse of the deteriorated existing buildings. In accordance with the Protection Area Demolition Policy, we understand that if demolition is approved, the Commission may review the new construction using the same criteria that apply within the Landmark District. The design presented here is intended to meet that higher



52 Plympton Existing Conditions



Proposed Project

4. New Construction Compliance

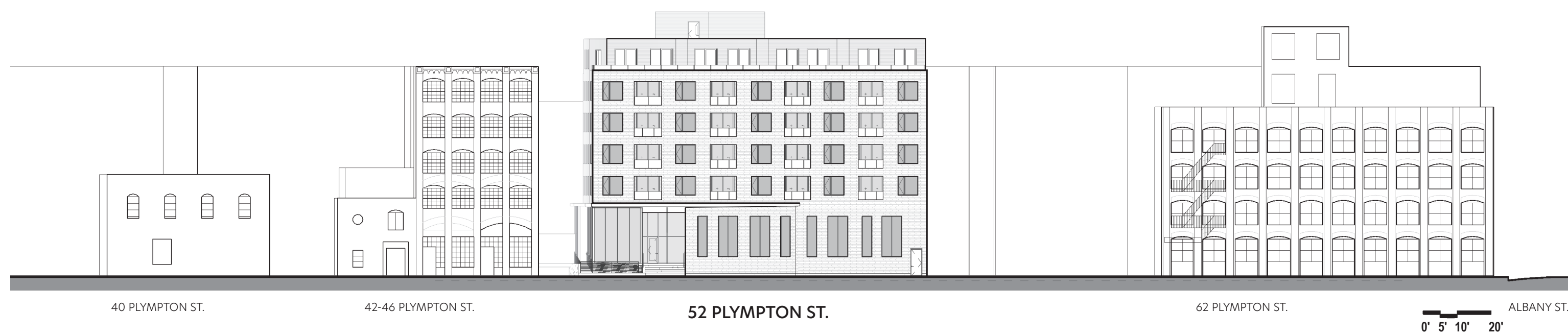
In preparing this proposal, we have taken the approach of aligning the project with the **South End Landmark District Standards and Criteria** relating to new construction visible from public ways. While the site is located within the **Protection Area**, we understand that, consistent with the **Demolition Policy**, if demolition is approved, the Commission may choose to review the new construction using the same criteria applied within the Landmark District proper. Our design intent is to meet that higher standard through a respectful and context-sensitive proposal.

COMPATIBLE HEIGHT

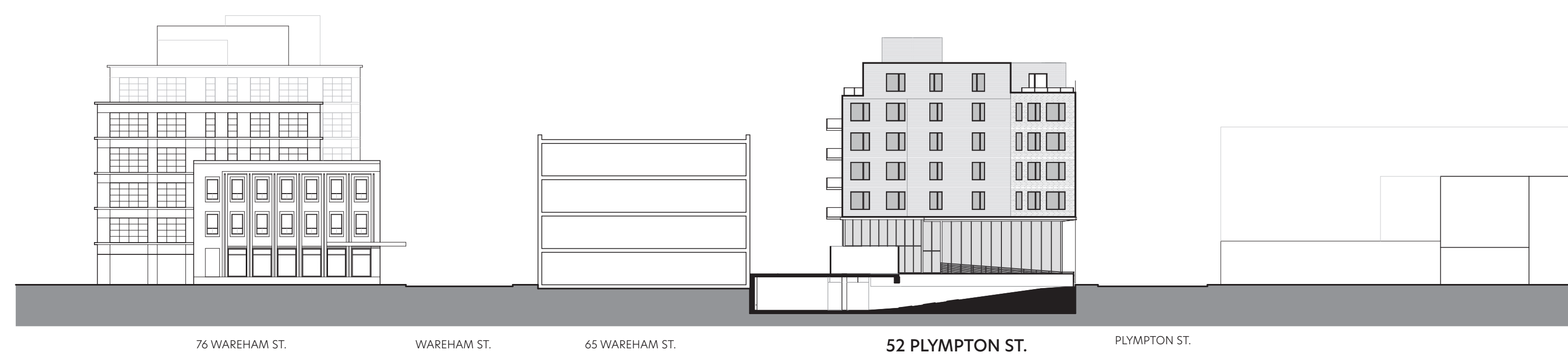
The proposed building is **seven stories tall** and remains **below the 70-foot height maximum** identified for the district. We have designed the uppermost floor to step back from the street, in order to reduce the perceived height and **align the primary cornice with that of the adjacent 46 Plympton Street**, which we believe helps maintain a coherent visual rhythm and relationship with neighboring buildings.



COMPATIBLE HEIGHT



Plympton St. Streetwall Elevation



Wareham & Plympton St. Streetwall Section/Elevation

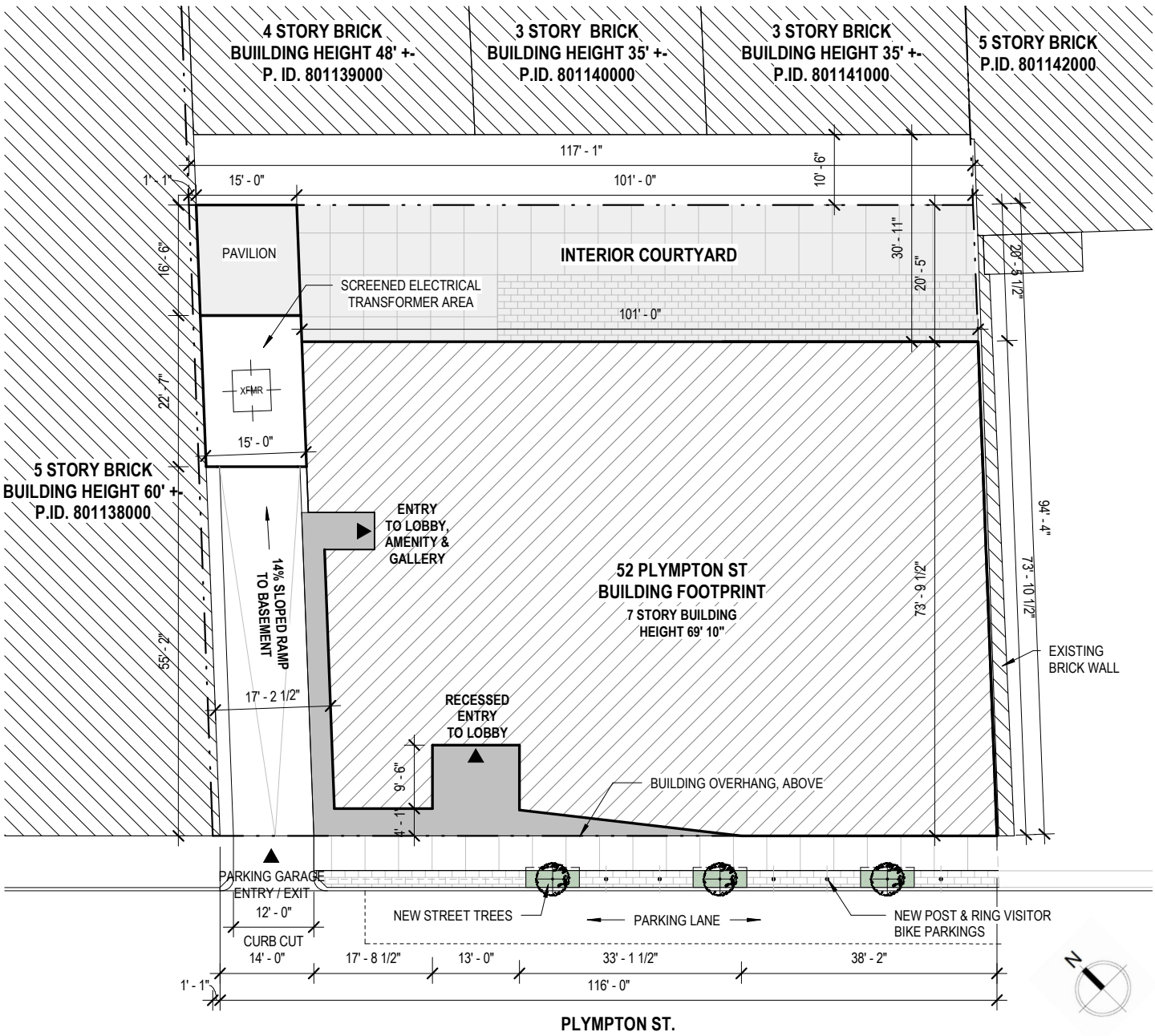
SETBACK & LOT COVERAGE

We have aimed to reinforce the existing urban street wall by bringing the building frontage to the property line for approximately **85% of the lot's width**. At the eastern edge, we have introduced a **17-foot side yard** to preserve light and air access for 46 Plympton Street, which includes multiple side-facing windows.

The ground-floor frontage also pulls back modestly at the gallery and entryway to create a **welcoming, civic-scaled entry sequence**, which we believe will enhance the pedestrian experience.



PROJECT SITE PLAN



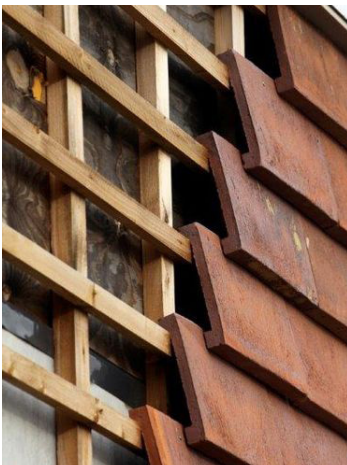
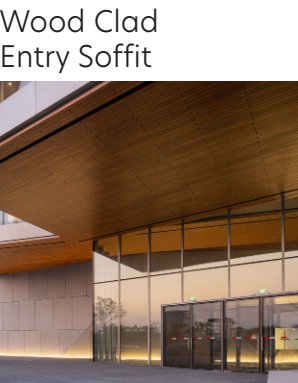
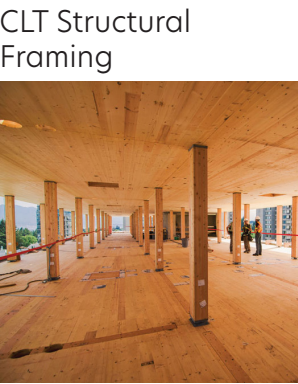
BUILDING MATERIALS

We have selected a materials palette intended to reference the South End’s architectural tradition in a contemporary idiom while remaining appropriate to the industrial character of the Protection Area:

- **Primary cladding** consists of Petersen Tegl cover brick in two muted tones
- **Accents** include limestone, wood, and dark-finished metal elements
- All materials are matte-finished and chosen for durability, tonal compatibility, and a weathered elegance that we believe will age gracefully over time

The cover brick cladding is paired with an insulated rainscreen system, providing durability, and energy efficiency.

The cover bricks lightweight design allows for a masonry product to be utilized while remaining compatible with the proposed mass timber structure, blending traditional character with sustainable construction.



DESIGN FEATURES

Rather than replicating historic residential typologies, we have taken the approach of interpreting key characteristics of the South End's architectural rhythm and grain through contemporary means.

The design incorporates:

- **Vertical window groupings**, recessed balconies, and a repeating cadence intended to echo the fine-grain modulation of the district
- A **projecting canopy and articulated entry** that provide civic presence and mark the building's threshold
- A **textured and visually layered base** to engage pedestrians and relate to the building's historic surroundings

These features are supported by detailed **elevations and 3D views**, which we look forward to presenting for the Commission's feedback.

Note on Section F(4) of the Standards and Criteria

Section F(4) outlines recommended design features for new construction, particularly in the row house areas of the district. While these features, such as bay windows, cornices, and dormers are critical to the fabric of the South End proper, we believe they are less applicable in the Protection Area, which reflects a simpler, more industrial architectural vocabulary. Our design seeks to interpret the district's essential character, its verticality, massing rhythm, and material expression in a modern idiom, rather than through direct replication. We believe this approach aligns with the intent of the guidelines and allows the new building to contribute to the district in a manner that is both respectful and contemporary.



5. Public Realm & Community Enhancements

Streetscape Improvements

As part of the project, we have taken the approach of redesigning the public realm along Plympton Street to support a more active, walkable, and resilient streetscape. The proposed improvements include:

- A **continuous new sidewalk** to re-establish a safe and accessible pedestrian route
- **Tree pits and planting areas** that introduce greenery and shade
- **Permeable paving and curb extensions** designed to calm traffic, enhance pedestrian safety, and support stormwater management in alignment with current sustainability goals

These interventions are intended to reinforce the South End's historic pedestrian scale and create a more welcoming and visually engaging street edge.

BUILDING ACTIVATION

We have also placed emphasis on activating the building at the ground level. The design includes an **elevated, double-height gallery space** and a **transparent lobby frontage**, both of which are intended to bring light, activity, and a sense of openness to Plympton Street. By engaging the sidewalk with visible, community-oriented uses, the project seeks to contribute to the **cultural vibrancy and street-level continuity** that define the South End's character.



6. Community & Environmental Benefits

The proposed development has been shaped by a commitment to long-term sustainability, housing affordability, and equitable access priorities that reflect both the goals of the South End community and the evolving standards for responsible urban development.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The project includes **eight income-restricted live-work units reserved for artists**, designed to support cultural production, economic diversity, and creative place-making within the district.

TRANSIT-ORIENTED LOCATION

The site is **within walking distance of public transportation** offering convenient access to bus routes and bicycle corridors, reducing reliance on private vehicles and reinforcing the project's compatibility with citywide mobility goals.

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN APPROACH

We have taken the approach of pursuing high-performance, low-carbon building strategies throughout the project, including:

- **100% electric building systems**, eliminating fossil fuel reliance
- **Mass timber structural system**, supporting lower embodied carbon and lighter environmental impact
- **Passive House targeting**, with enhanced energy performance and indoor environmental quality
- **Solar-ready roof infrastructure**, designed for future on-site renewable energy generation

STORMWATER & FLOOD RESILIENCE

In response to the site's location within the **Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District (CFROD)** and the **Groundwater Conservation Overlay District (GCOD)**, the project has been designed with **enhanced drainage systems, permeable surfaces, and flood-resilient ground floor elevations**, supporting both regulatory compliance and long-term climate adaptation.

7. Approval Path & Next Steps

SUMMARY

We are respectfully requesting **Advisory Review** under the **South End Landmark District Commission's Demolition Policy** as the first step in the review process.

Following this meeting, our next steps will include:

- **Formal submission for demolition review**, with supporting documentation addressing structural condition, cost of reuse, and proposed new construction
- **Design review of all façades visible from the public realm**, in accordance with the Standards and Criteria applicable within the Landmark District
- **Coordination with the Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA)** under **Article 80**, as well as with the **Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA)** and other city agencies as required for permitting and compliance

We look forward to receiving the Commission's feedback and to continuing a collaborative process that will help shape a project that **respects the South End's architectural legacy** while contributing meaningfully to its evolving future.