

# **Boynton Yards**

## Urban Design Framework

**Somerville Planning Board**  
Adopted July 16, 2020



## INTRODUCTION

An Urban Design Framework (UDF) is an officially adopted document that identifies the desired arrangement, appearance, and function of urbanism in a specific portion of Somerville. The Somerville Zoning Ordinance mandates that the Somerville Planning Board adopt a UDF for each sub-area of the Master Planned Development overlay district. A UDF must be adopted by the Board prior to the approval of any development within each sub-area.

The intent of a UDF is to ensure coordinated planning, development, architecture, and landscape design within the sub-area while also informing the Planning Board's discretionary permitting of master plan and contributing lot development proposals. Sub-areas may be built out by a single developer under one master plan, multiple developers under multiple master plans, individual developers of contributing lots, or some combination of the above.

## Terms & Abbreviations

UDF -	Urban Design Framework
MPD -	Master Planned Development
GFA -	Gross Floor Area
Net Zero -	a certifiable sustainable building with highly restricted on-site fossil fuel combustion
LEED Platinum -	the highest-level certification offered by the U.S. Green Building Council
Arts & Creative -	a term to collectively reference multiple use categories from the zoning ordinance.
Community Center -	a land use providing recreational, social, educational or cultural activities to the general public.
HR -	the 'High-Rise' zoning district
NACTO -	The National Association of City Transportation Officials
GLX -	Green Line Extension

## PURPOSE

This Boynton Yards UDF supplements the provisions of the Boynton Yards sub-area of the MPD overlay district. Development may occur via two permitting routes: multiple lots may be developed by first receiving a master plan special permit followed by site plan approval for each building, civic space, or thoroughfare identified in the master plan or an individual building may be developed by site plan approval with a 'contributing lot' special permit. Zoning requires that all development be consistent with the Union Square Neighborhood Plan and this UDF.

The following pages identify the vision for the sub-area along with the intended street network and character of new thoroughfares, the ideal locations and types of civic spaces, and advantageous sites for certain permitted building types. Additionally, urban design recommendations and master planning objectives that implement prior planning efforts for Boynton Yards are included.

## BY-SUB AREA STANDARDS

1. No building height limit
2. No residential density limit
3. 1,500 Parking Spaces (max)
  - 300 'Reserved' Spaces (max)

## MASTER PLAN CRITERIA

(Across multiple lots & buildings)

1. 20% Civic Space (min)
2. 75% Commercial GFA (max)
  - 10% Arts & Creative Space
  - 5% Community Center (20K max)
3. 25% Residential GFA (max)
4. Net Zero or LEED Platinum Buildings

## CONTRIBUTING LOT CRITERIA

(Specific to a single lot & building)

1. 75% Commercial GFA (min)
  - 10% Arts & Creative Space
2. 25% Residential GFA (max)
3. Net Zero or LEED Platinum Building





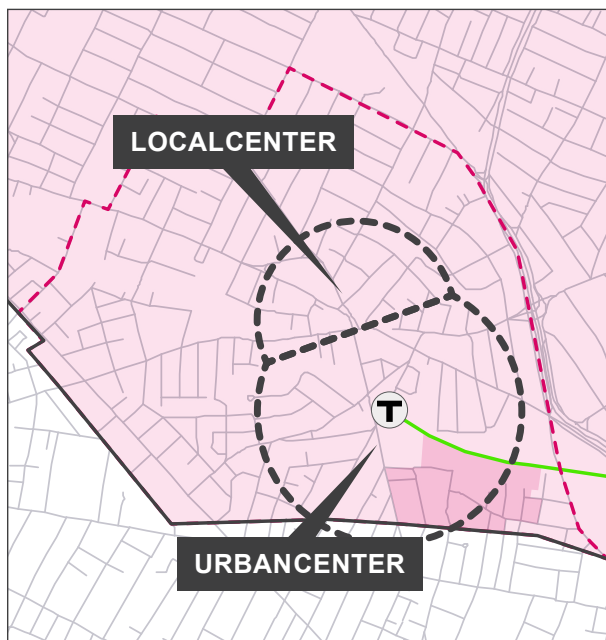
# VISION

The Union Square Neighborhood Plan proposes to transform the south-eastern corner of the neighborhood into an Urban Employment Center, an evolution of its existing Local Center urban character. Boynton Yards plays a critical role in this transformation due to its south-eastern location within the 1/4-mile transit area of the Union Square Green Line Station.

New development in Boynton Yards is envisioned to be primarily high-rise commercial buildings that will bring a mix of diverse, high-quality jobs to the area. The neighborhood is well positioned to serve as one of the primary economic engines of Somerville due to its proximity to local institutions, other commercial centers, and various transportation options, including high walkability, abundant bicycle infrastructure, rapid transit and highway access.

## KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Create a new walkable street network, including alleys, that minimizes pedestrian and vehicular conflicts.
2. Prioritize land platting of sites sized for efficient commercial building and parking facility floor plates.
3. Provide at least 2.5 acres of new civic spaces, including a centralized, multi-purpose public space.
4. Relocate South Street Farm.
5. Preserve or expand the amount of space provided to arts & creative enterprise uses across the neighborhood
6. Dedicate a minimum amount of space to new community center uses.
7. Provide enough residential density to create an 18-hour neighborhood with visible public life present through most of the day.









## CONNECTIONS

Submitted master plans must create a new street network for Boynton Yards that implements prior planning and analysis for the sub-area. Submitted master plans may include the entire new street network or only a portion of the larger system.

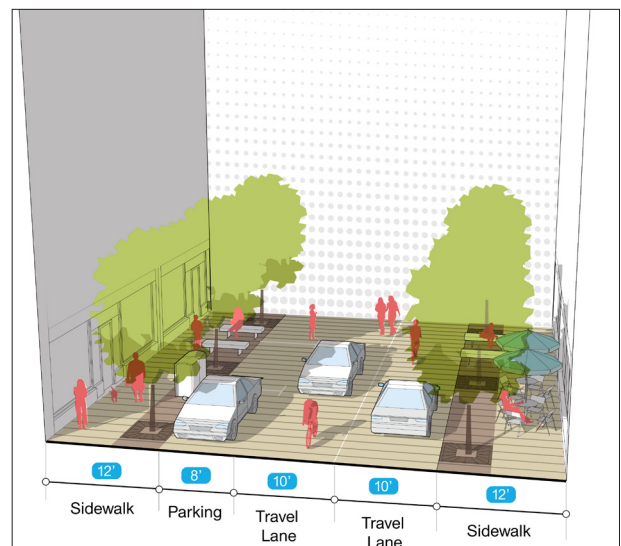
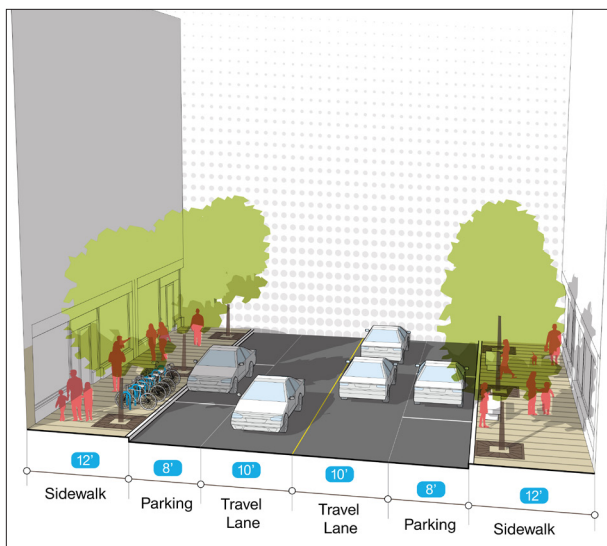
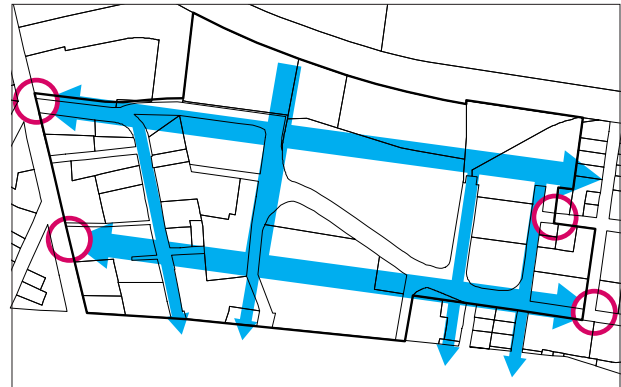
The new network is based on a pair of lateral streets that connect Webster Street, in the west, to Medford Street, in the east. South Street must be re-aligned and a “New Street” established from former portions of Columbia Street, Windsor Place, and an existing driveway connecting to Ward Street. Although the USNP proposed a vehicular connection between Boynton Yards and Union Square East, an underpass below the MBTA right-of-way is not feasible and not expected of submitted master plans or contributing lot proposals.

Today, entrances into the neighborhood exist at Ward and South Streets in the east with only Columbia Street in the west. These points, along with the new

connection from the re-alignment of South Street, must serve as primary entrances into the neighborhood in any proposed master plan. However, these are not intended to facilitate through traffic, but rather provide routes into the core of the sub-area for all modes of transportation.

“New Street” is intended to serve as the primary pedestrian-oriented street connecting new civic spaces and commercial building sites via a short walk to Union Square Station. A realigned South Street is intended to serve as the primary means of vehicular access to Boynton Yards.

Master plans that prohibit interconnection of the desired street network will be denied by the Planning Board.



## MODAL HIERARCHY

The platting and ultimate design of thoroughfares included in any master plan must be consistent with the City's Complete Streets Ordinance, which prioritizes design considerations for pedestrians first, then transit, cyclists, and finally motorists.

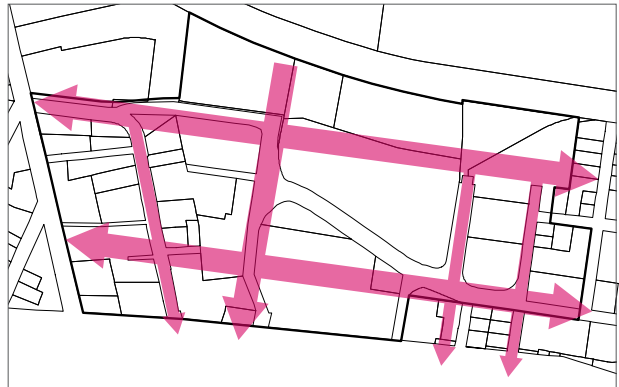
Thoroughfares abutting lots in the HR district should provide for 18 foot wide sidewalks and 12 foot sidewalks when abutting lots in the MR5 district. Zoning will force development to setback an additional distance to provide for such sidewalks if an insufficient width is provided by the thoroughfare. These sidewalk requirements establish a minimum standard of pedestrian infrastructure but accommodating these sidewalks in the thoroughfare right-of-way rather than on a buildable lot will prevent undue limitations on potential buildable lot area.

Master plans should strengthen connections to transit services including Union Square Station of the GLX and nearby bus stops. MBTA bus service may be routed through the neighborhood in the future but submitted plans should not depend upon the MBTA to adjust service when planning for access to bus services.

To improve conditions for cyclists, bike

facilities for all ages and abilities should be provided on "New Street," South Street, and Windsor Place. Cycle tracks or protected bike lanes and protected intersections should be prioritized. This will be challenging but still ideal for Windsor Place. Side streets should have bike facilities consistent with NACTO's *Contextual Guidance for Selecting All Ages & Abilities Bikeways*.

Where available, on-street parking should be metered for short-term, high turnover uses (pickup/dropoff, loading, <30 min parking). Longer duration parking should occur only in underground structured parking facilities. Parking must be treated as a managed resource that is made available to the public when not rented or leased by monthly pass holders.



1 Pedestrians



2 Transit



3 Bicycle



4 Motor Vehicle





## PUBLIC SPACE

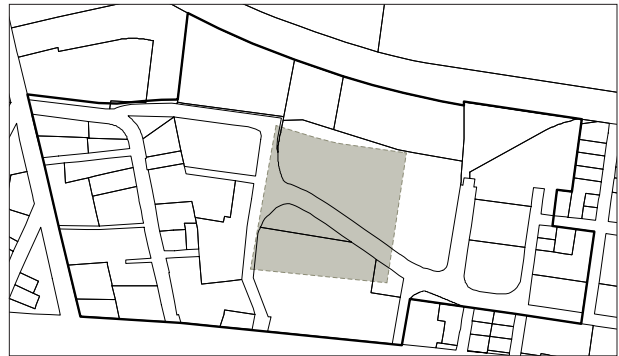
The Somerville Zoning Ordinance requires that all submitted master plans include at least 20% of their land area as one or more civic spaces. Long range planning for Boynton Yards called for a significant centralized civic space, the need for a Neighborhood Park and a Public Plaza specifically, and a desire for additional playgrounds.

Existing spaces such as Post Office Square in Boston's financial district, Channel Center Park (below), Pulaski Park in Northampton, and Central Square in East Boston should serve as inspiration for the central civic space. All have design features that appeal to workers, residents, and other visitors across the day.

To produce the central civic space, master plans that include any of the land in the required civic space area (at right) must include all or a portion of a minimum 52,000 square feet required for the central civic space. Master plans that propose

buildings or thoroughfares instead of civic space in the required civic space area are possible but will be required to provide impact mitigation. Master plans that would prohibit the provision of at least 52,000 square feet of civic space in this area will be denied by the Planning Board.

Master Plans involving the land area of South Street Farm must provide a civic space that accommodates urban farming, unless relocation of the existing farm is addressed by the City of Somerville.

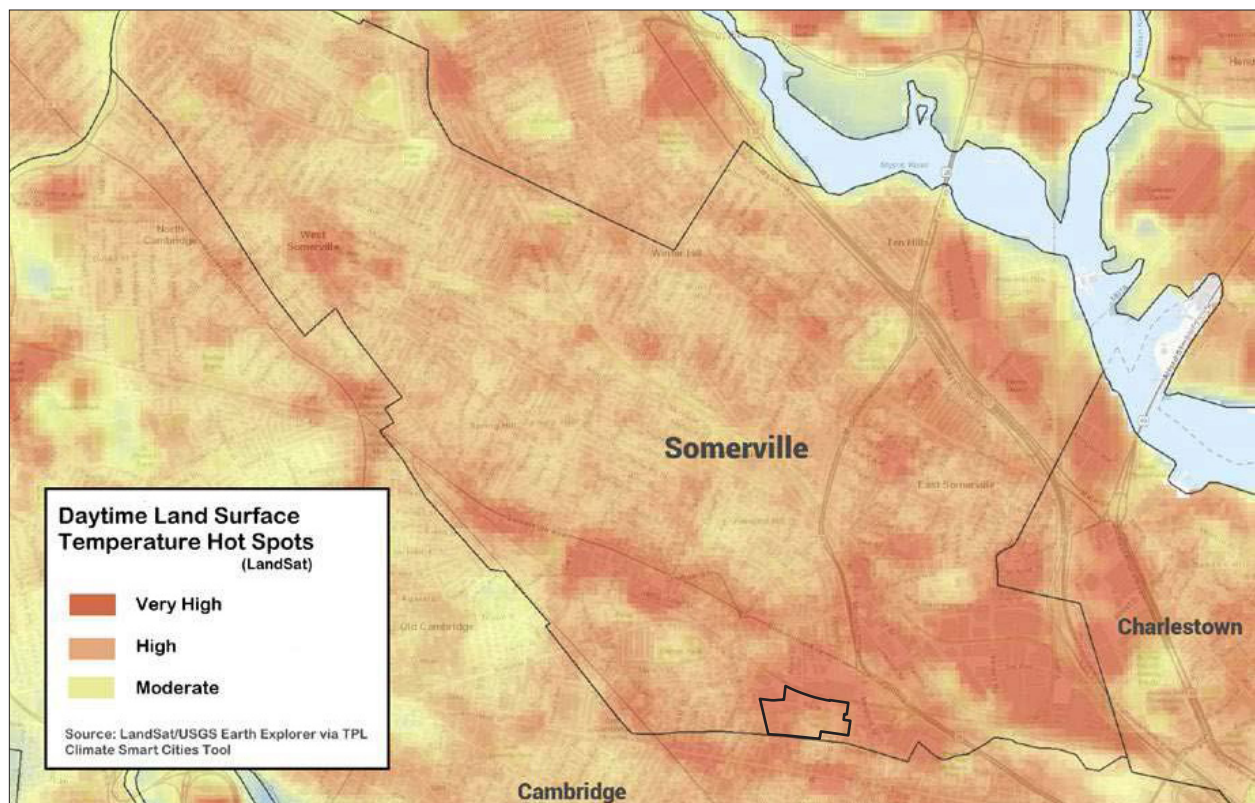


## SUSTAINABILITY

The Master Planned Development overlay district requires all lab buildings to be LEED Platinum certifiable and for all other building types to be Zero Carbon or higher from the International Living Institute or PHIUS+ from the Passive House Institute with no on-site combustion. Additionally, all roof areas unused for mechanical systems must be provide a green roof, photovoltaic (PV) devices, or both.

Master plan and contributing lot proposals must account for development site climate change vulnerabilities identified in the City's Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment. Boynton Yards has particular risk for precipitation-based flooding and high heat exposure due to rising temperatures. The map below from Somerville Climate Forward, the City's Community Climate Change Plan, identifies areas of the city that would most benefit from green infrastructure improvements.

Master plans are required to include a stormwater management & green infrastructure plan to ensure essential ecosystem services are restored in the sub-area. Large trees help to reduce ground level temperatures, filter air pollution, sequester carbon dioxide, capture and filter storm water, provide food and shelter for living organisms, and improve human well-being. Master plans must include a comprehensive strategy for tree planting across the proposed thoroughfares, civic spaces, and buildings with a goal to bring tree canopy cover to at least 15% following 10 years of growth after full build out. Additionally, this planting strategy should commit to species diversity by avoiding tree species that are overplanted in Somerville. Tree selection and planting should be guided by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 and ANSI Z60.1 Standards.





## BUILDINGS

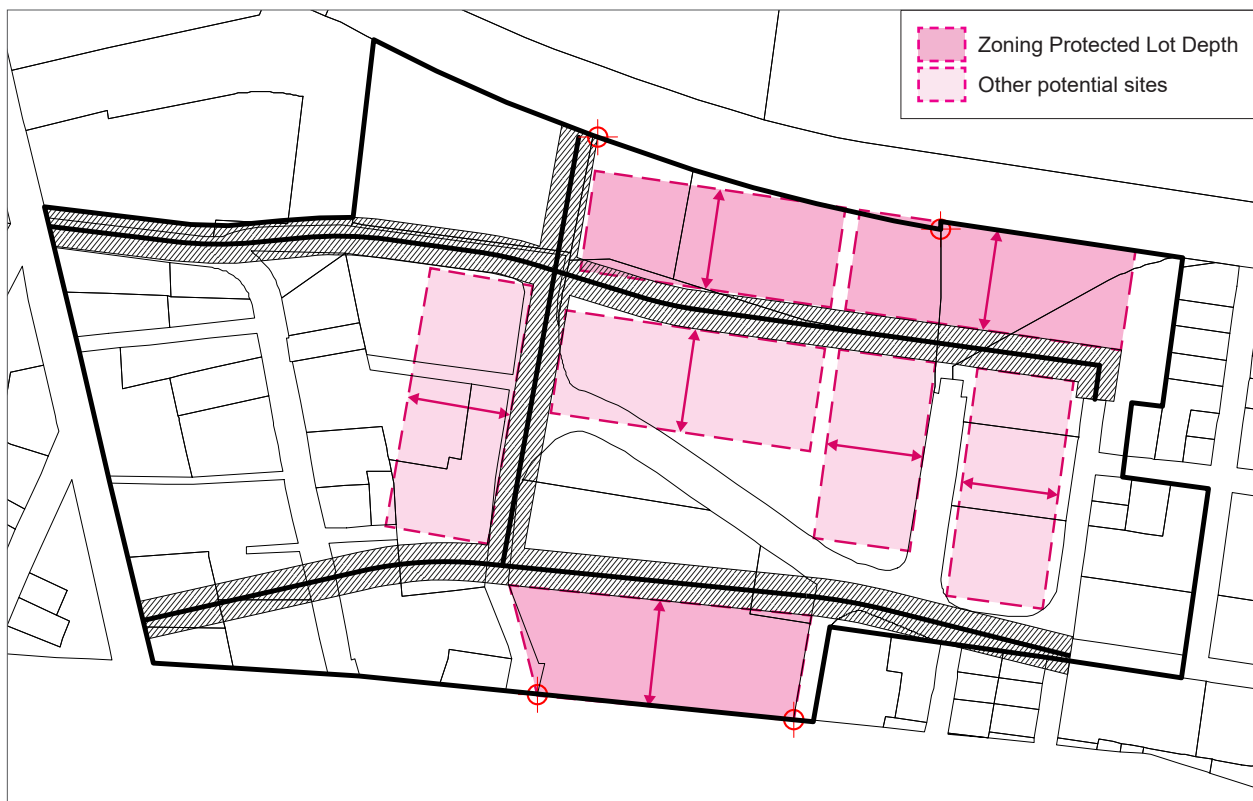
Establishing a new urban employment center in Boynton Yards requires land platting of lots that are properly sized for certain building types and the commercial parking facilities that will support employees, residents, and visitors to the area. The Boynton Yards sub-area preserves at least three potential sites by requiring new thoroughfares to be offset a certain distance from the MBTA railway and the municipal border with the City of Cambridge. Many others that allow for efficient floor plates and parking facilities are possible.

Although 25% of the GFA proposed in each master plan may be residential, each plan will need to set aside most of the lots included as sites for commercial and laboratory buildings. Planning for priority buildings types is an important urban design consideration for Boynton Yards, following the establishment of the new street network and setting aside land to

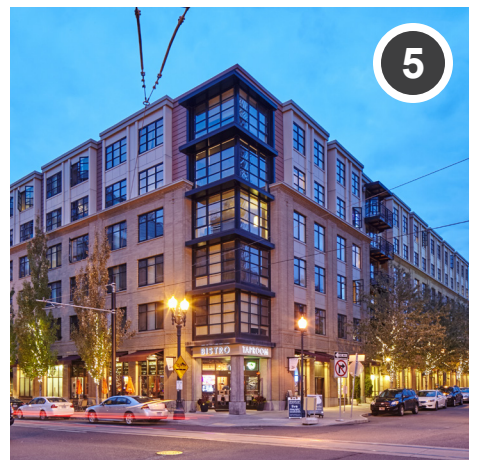
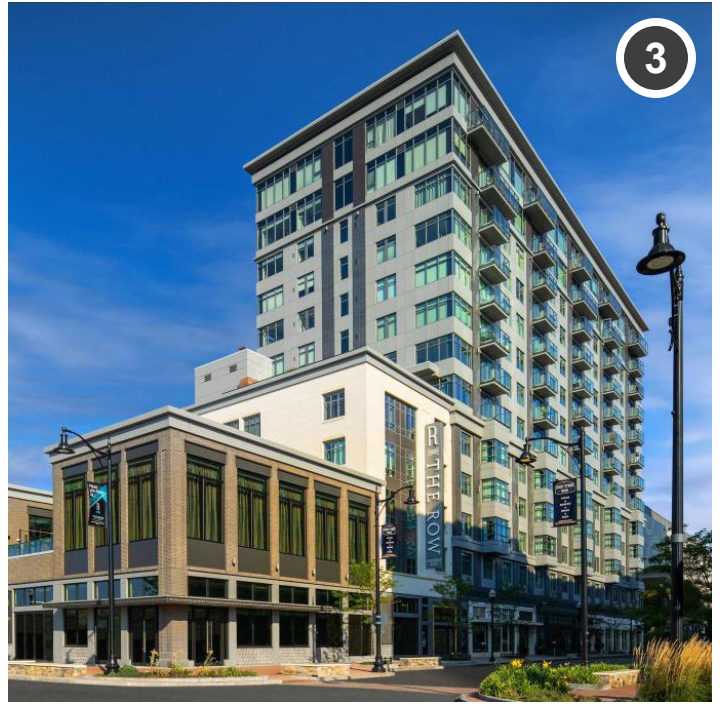
meet the 20% civic space requirement. Building types permitted by the overlay district map are shown on the facing page according to their overall priority (from the bottom left clockwise):

1. Lab Building
2. Commercial Building
3. Block Building
4. Mid-Rise Podium Tower
5. Mid-Rise General Building

Master plans must establish Windsor Street as a pedestrian street, with active uses occupying ground floor commercial spaces. Plans including land abutting the MR5 areas of the sub-area map must sensitively transition the massing of any high-rise development from nearby mid-rise buildings. Lastly, master plans must identify locations worthy of architectural distinction at terminated pedestrian vistas.









# CONCEPTUAL BUILDOUT

This spread illustrates one of many possible build outs of Boynton Yards that achieves the various objectives of this UDF. Master Plan proposals with alternative, but compliant build out scenarios are expected.

- |                               |                         |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Community Center           | 6. Lab Building         |
| 2. Arts & Creative Space      | 7. Neighborhood Park    |
| 3. Pedestrian-Oriented Street | 8. Green Roofs          |
| 4. Primary Vehicular Street   | 9. Public Square        |
| 5. Commercial Building        | 10. Underground Parking |

