



City of Boston, Massachusetts

Office of the Mayor

MICHELLE WU

February 28, 2022

TO THE CITY COUNCIL

Dear Councilors,

I hereby transmit for your approval an Order for a short term extension of nine (9) of the fourteen (14) remaining urban renewal plans in Boston. Since its inception, urban renewal has played a significant role in shaping growth and affecting the community in Boston. The destructive use of urban renewal powers in past decades caused significant harm and displacement of thousands of families in certain communities in Boston. With this action, The City will begin the process of winding down the Boston Redevelopment Authority's ("BRA" d/b/a the Boston Planning & Development Agency "BPDA") powers of urban renewal as part of a broader effort to move past the tool's legacy of displacement and neighborhood destruction, and build transparency and accountability to community members. My administration is committed to putting equity at the forefront of planning and development decisions and the sunseting of urban renewal in Boston should be viewed through this lens. We are asking for an extension of the remaining plans through the end of this calendar year, in order to have time for accelerated planning on how the Agency can formulate sunseting of this program. We intend to return to the Council later this year with that plan, which may include a further extension of some plans at that point to wrap up ongoing community-centered efforts.

In April 2016, the City Council granted approval of a six (6) year extension of Boston's fourteen (14) urban renewal plan areas, which was subsequently approved by the Department of Housing and Community Development in August 2016. It is time now to review the ongoing use of the urban renewal tools within the existing plan areas and determine the future necessity of the urban renewal plans. We are acting decisively to immediately sunset five (5) of the fourteen (14) urban renewal plans on April 22, 2022, and proposing an eight (8) month extension for the remaining nine (9) plans to solidify the big picture transition.

As it currently stands, the BPDA has identified over 1,300 parcels with existing Land Disposition Agreements tied to urban renewal powers, some of which provide protections for

affordable housing, open space, and other land use provisions. This additional time will give the City and the BPDA the time to set a plan for potential state legislation to transfer or protect the appropriate provisions.

Additionally, we are hiring for a Chief of Planning whose leadership will be critical to setting the direction for urban renewal sunsetting and larger structural reforms.

I urge your Honorable Body to adopt this Order expeditiously to provide time for discussions with the City Council and community stakeholders as it relates to the timeline for the sunsetting of the remaining plans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle Wu', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michelle Wu
Mayor of Boston

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**AN ORDER BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF SUNSETTING URBAN
RENEWAL IN THE CITY OF BOSTON UNTIL DECEMBER 31, 2022.**

- WHEREAS: Urban renewal was created as a set of tools for municipalities to address so-called blighted areas by acquiring private property, relocating residents, and clearing away the old buildings to make room for new development and uses; and
- WHEREAS: In practice, low-income communities were targeted for demolition, then replaced with development of new residential and commercial uses benefiting wealthier residents; and
- WHEREAS: Prior uses of urban renewal powers by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (“BRA”) have caused harmful and unnecessary destruction of homes and neighborhoods resulting in unjust social equity outcomes within the City of Boston, most notably in the West End where thousands of immigrant and low-income and working-class residents were unjustly evicted; and
- WHEREAS: The City of Boston is working tirelessly to promote the sound growth and development of its neighborhoods and to provide places for Boston's residents to live, work, and recreate; and
- WHEREAS: The results of this activity have been the creation and preservation of homes and businesses, as well as parks, schools, libraries and other public facilities, leading to Boston's reputation as one of the world's most vibrant and livable cities; and
- WHEREAS: The City’s application of the urban renewal tools in recent decades has created and preserved nearly ten thousand (10,000) units of affordable housing, creating and protecting open space, providing new opportunities for many of Boston's residents, enabling public-private partnerships, and bolstering planning efforts; and
- WHEREAS: The City of Boston maintains fourteen (14) active urban renewal plans originally approved by the BRA, the Boston City Council, the

Mayor of Boston and the Department of Housing and Community Development, which plans were most recently extended for six (6) years in August 2016; and

WHEREAS: Since the 2016 extension, the BRA has facilitated a community engagement process that has garnered input on the future of urban renewal, and has made relevant urban renewal documents accessible to the public through the zoning viewer; and

WHEREAS: The BRA has identified nine (9) plan areas that could benefit from a temporary extension of the use of the urban renewal tools and protections, and opportunities exist to advance positive community-oriented outcomes, in partnership with the City and community stakeholders; and

WHEREAS: By their provisions and previous extensions granted, the plans, the protections established from responsible use of the urban renewal tools, and the powers conferred therein will terminate on April 22, 2022 unless so extended; and

WHEREAS: An expiration of nine (9) of the fourteen (14) active urban renewal plans on April 22, 2022 without further discussion could have unintended negative consequences for some community members in the larger plan areas with a high prevalence of Land Disposition Agreements; and

WHEREAS: The expiration of five (5) urban renewal plans on April 22, 2022 is appropriate, as the original intent and purpose of these plans has been fulfilled; and

WHEREAS: The BRA seeks an eight (8) month extension for nine (9) of the active urban renewal plans that are set to expire on April 22, 2022; and

WHEREAS: Each plan includes within its provisions the ability to modify said termination date and extend said plan.

ORDERED: That the City Council does hereby approve the extension of the term of the urban renewal plans listed below, to December 31, 2022:

1. Central Business District South Station Urban Renewal Plan,
2. Fenway Urban Renewal Plan,
3. Campus High School Urban Renewal Plan,
4. South Cove Urban Renewal Plan,

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5. Charlestown Urban Renewal Plan,
6. Downtown Waterfront-Faneuil Hall Urban Renewal Plan,
7. Government Center Urban Renewal Plan,
8. South End Urban Renewal Plan; and
9. Washington Park Urban Renewal Plan.

**I HEREBY CERTIFY
THE FORGOING, IF PASSED IN
THE ABOVE FORM, WILL BE IN
ACCORDANCE WITH LAW.**

BY



**ADAM CEDERBAUM
CORPORATION COUNSEL**

