

Eastie Farm Forward



**A Loeb Fellowship Day
of Service Initiative**



November 2025

Acknowledgments

Loeb Fellow Participants

- Pedro Amaral '26
- Kathleen Dorgan '02
- Jeremiah Ellison '26
- Barbara Epstein
- Washington Fajardo '19
- Andrea Filippone '08'
- Kathy Fox '02
- LaShawn Hoffman '15
- Tessa Huxley '87
- Maria-Mercedes Jaramillo '24
- Barbara Knecht '93
- Kenneth Kruckemeyer '82
- Rob Lane '09
- Pallavi Mande '17
- Matthew Mazzotta '18
- Virginia Prescott '02
- Lynn Richards '13
- Jacek Smoliicki '26
- Eli Spevak '14
- Rob Stein '94
- James Stockard '78
- Paloma Strelitz '20
- Andy Summers '26
- Julia Thayne '26
- Kannan Thiruvengadam '24
- Peter Vanderwarker '97
- Oliver Wainwright '26
- Joseph Zeal-Henry '24

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Eastie Farm partner Bono provided food using products from the Eastie Farm CSA.



**LOEB
FELLOWSHIP**

The mission of the Loeb Fellowship is to foster the world's capacity to address urgent social issues through the fellowship and education of mid-career practitioners who help shape the built and natural environment.

For more information please go to:
<https://loebfellowship.gsd.harvard.edu/>

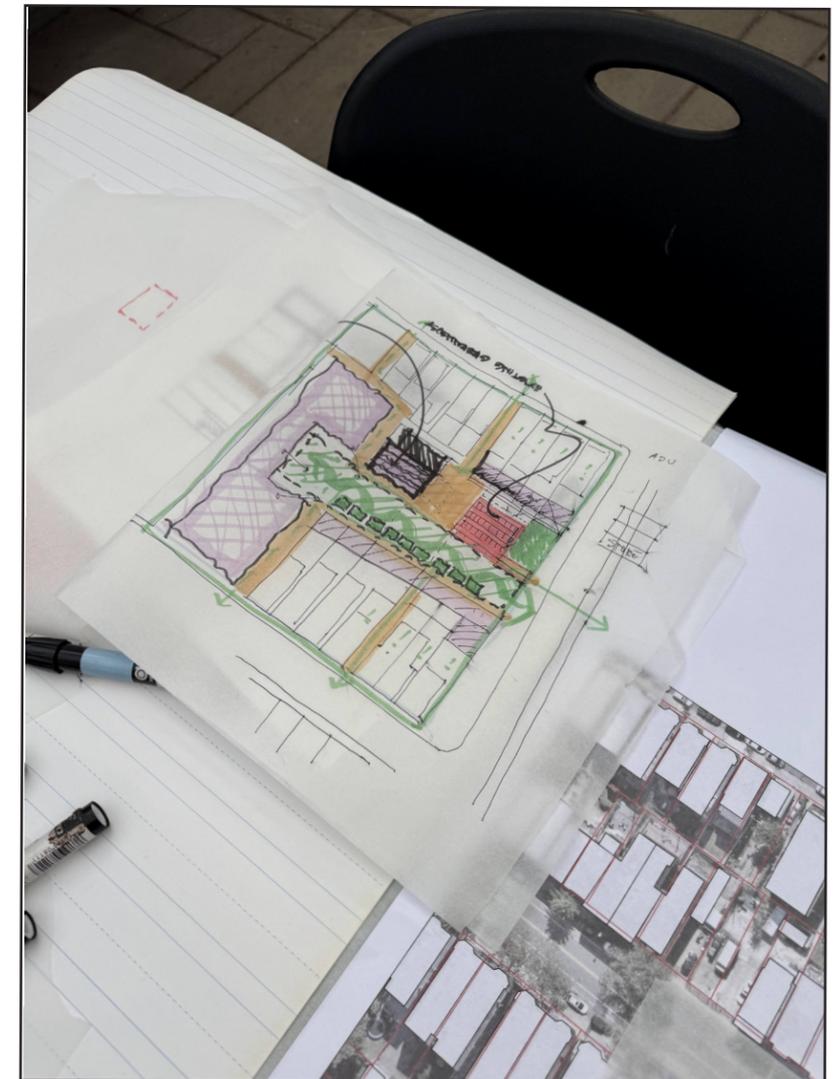
Introduction

For several years now, the fall gathering of the Loeb Fellowship has included a Day of Service. Loeb Fellows volunteer a day of their time to help a local partner advance some planning and design objective. This year, our local partner was Kannan Thiruvengadam LF 2024, the founder of Eastie Farm. In addition to Community Supportive Agriculture (CSA), Eastie Farm is, in the words of their website, “a grassroots effort to foster spaces for growing food, building community and caring for our natural world.”

This report summarizes that effort as well as conversations that have been convened in the weeks after the workshop. The report is organized around two major areas:

- The first part of the report, Design the Campus, addresses physical planning and design issues.
- The second part of the report, A Multi-Year Perspective, addresses institution-building.

Of course, there is no bright line between these two focus areas and they are offered here just as a way to organize this summary.



Workshop sketch



Working session in the greenhouse

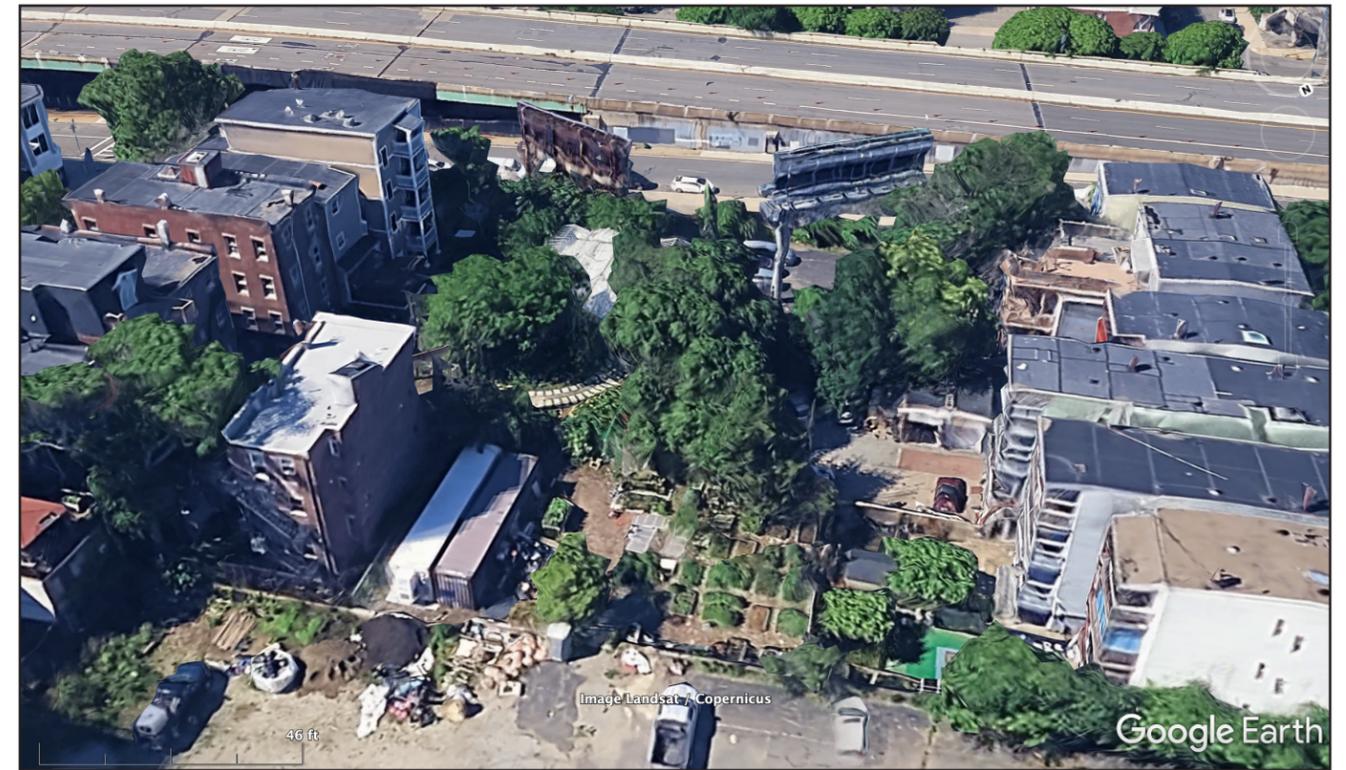


East Boston Context

In terms of the larger context, **PLAN East Boston (2023)** identifies three important trends that summarize change in East Boston.

- East Boston is uniquely vulnerable to threats of climate change - especially coastal and inland flooding.
- The neighborhood’s population is growing.
- Significant commercial growth will further East Boston’s position as a regional job center.

Boston Senior Planner Kristina Ricco observes that Eastie Farm sits squarely at the intersection of historic 19th and early 20th century neighborhoods and large scale 20th and 21st century infrastructures.



This workshop focused on Eastie Farm’s main campus at Chelsea Terrace. However, Eastie Farms has two other “main sites” : 294 Sumner Street and Our Garden at 293 Border Street. Eastie Farm has also worked at various schools in East Boston where students learn experientially. These are places for the students to get their hands dirty as well as “de-stress.”

Objectives

This workshop had three complementary objectives:

1) Site Planning for the Eastie Farm “campus”

As described below in more detail, there are several existing and proposed program activities that Eastie Farm would like to accommodate within their very constrained area. How can this “campus” be configured to enable flexible use and ambitions for expansion and new programs?

To accommodate new programs, Eastie Farm would like to consider how the open portion of the site can be used. Concepts can range from the modest to the very ambitious, including the possibility of a new 1- or 2- story building here for the workshop, collaborative space, bathroom and storage. Sight lines should be maintained to insure passive security.

Related to this challenge is the large adjacent vacant site owned by Boston Public Schools. Proposals include a new school building and an EV charging facility for their small buses. Regardless of how that site is ultimately developed, Eastie Farm would like to enable access to the back of their campus. Can we demonstrate how new buildings on that site could still accommodate an access route for small trucks to Eastie Farm?

2) “Making the Invisible Visible”

Eastie Farm is a demonstration site for sustainable energy innovation. In particular, the most critical piece of infrastructure, the geothermal well that is used for heating and cooling, is invisible. How can this be better explained and broadcast to a larger audience: 3D model, 2D sign, an animation, art installations?



Model demonstrating the depth of the geothermal heating system which is invisible

3) Support Eastie Farm’s grant application to Lead by Example

In support of aggressive clean energy and greenhouse gas emission reduction targets set by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Leading by Example Program (LBE) provides grant funding to state entities through various grant programs targeting a host of clean energy technologies. The grant application addresses how to minimize embodied carbon in the buildings, how to minimize fossil fuel consumption in the operations of the building (energy conservation,)

Who We Are



Our Beginning

East Boston, Massachusetts, is a majority-immigrant, Environmental Justice community on the frontlines of climate change. Eastie Farm was born in 2015, when a group of neighbors joined hands to fix up a long-abandoned lot on Sumner Street, reclaiming it as a place to gather and grow food. In the following years, Eastie Farm worked to preserve and revitalize more open spaces around the neighborhood as educational urban farms. We now operate 7 growing spaces including the first geothermal greenhouse in the Boston region. We teach children about climate science and the food system, and we work to alleviate food insecurity through free food distributions and our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.



Our Mission

Eastie Farm pursues climate justice, food security, and community resilience through urban agriculture, education, and the building of an equitable local food system.



Our Vision

Eastie Farm envisions a world where all people:

- have access to locally grown, nutritious food
- understand the role they can play in creating a regenerative and equitable food system
- feel connected to their neighbors and to the natural world
- see themselves as environmental stewards, working to sustain a healthy planet



Children pull greens from grow bags at 294 Sumner Street and are overjoyed to learn that carrots are attached (2016). Early eco-engagement is central to our Student Stewards program.



Our Values

- **Community:** Caring for each other makes us all stronger
- **Education:** Understanding our world empowers us to make it better
- **Stewardship:** To protect our environment is to protect our future
- **Resilience:** When the going gets tough, the tough get growing
- **Justice:** Food justice, climate justice, and economic justice are interdependent and can only be achieved through an approach that centers diversity, equity, and inclusion



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About Eastie Farm

What We Do

Food

Build a healthier and more equitable food system through our **Produce For People** program

- **Alleviate food insecurity** in East Boston
 - Support 100+ families by providing free or subsidized weekly CSA shares
 - Destigmatize food aid by offering the same CSA shares to residents regardless of payment tier (free, subsidized, or market rate)
 - Source from nearby farms, improving the local economy while reducing food miles
 - Employ East Boston community members to distribute food
 - Connect food-insecure residents to assistance programs beyond Eastie Farm's own, using a multilingual and multichannel approach that removes barriers to access



Farming

Rejuvenate abandoned lots as interactive growing spaces under our **Living Lands** program

- **Grow food** in our 7 interactive and joyful community spaces
 - Provide opportunities for all community members to collaborate in farming and harvesting fresh produce at reclaimed sites in our neighborhood
 - Farm communally, without dividing space into private plots
 - Share harvest with the community via harvest parties, CSA, and donations to partner organizations
 - Support community members in growing food at home
- **Build community**
 - Activate spaces for community events, education programs, and workshops
- **Demonstrate regenerative, sustainable approaches to land use**
 - Incorporate climate solutions like rainwater catchment and geothermal energy in site infrastructure



Education

Empower youth to build a healthier future via our **Student Stewards** program

- **Educate** students and the community on food systems, local economy, and climate
 - **Junior Farmers:** elementary school summer program in which students garden, identify edible plants, cook simple recipes, and enjoy local produce
 - **Climate NATURE:** school-term elementary and middle school program in which students learn about climate change, renewable energy, food systems, nutrients, natural ecosystems, pollinators, composting, and eco-sensitive farming
 - **Climate Corps:** earn-to-learn fellowship in which high school students train for green jobs by farming, assisting with CSA, caring for street trees, and working in our geothermal greenhouse to acquire practical knowledge about renewable energy



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Design the Campus

Eastie Farm as “campus”

Up to now - and under current and very real constraints - the Eastie Farm location has been developing in an incremental and necessarily opportunistic way: spaces and facilities get added and located as best they can as opportunities present themselves. What has been accomplished so far under this model is truly impressive.

But one of the themes that emerged from the workshop was the need for a more comprehensive long-term “campus” plan. Such a plan would organize the entire site – and future additions to the site as discussed below – around an armature of well-defined open spaces. Buildings would line the open spaces and animate them.

Each of the four breakout groups, working independently, recognized the underlying linear nature of the existing facility, and in particular, the NE-SW axis that already organizes Eastie Farm. The clarity of this formal structure is an opportunity that can be taken advantage of.

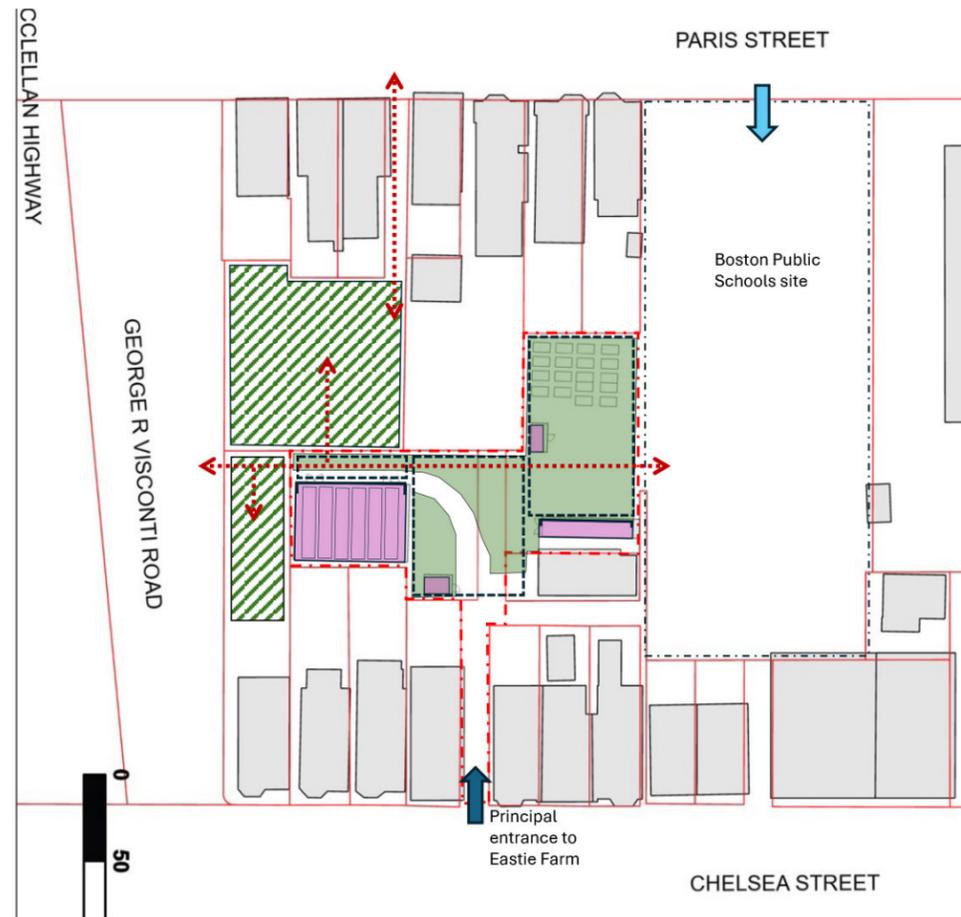


Greenhouse entry

Initially, this can be a relatively modest effort built around some strategic landscape interventions that will make the underlying, existing axial structure of the campus more apparent: some plantings, some pathways, etc. This can happen within the current boundaries of Eastie Farm. In the longer term, new buildings and new spaces would define the central space of the campus even more clearly, and the open spaces would be designed more ambitiously. One participant suggested that some of these operations can be “guerrilla” interventions: ask – and keep asking – for temporary use of the immediately adjacent portions of the school property; planting in the edges of the adjacent properties.

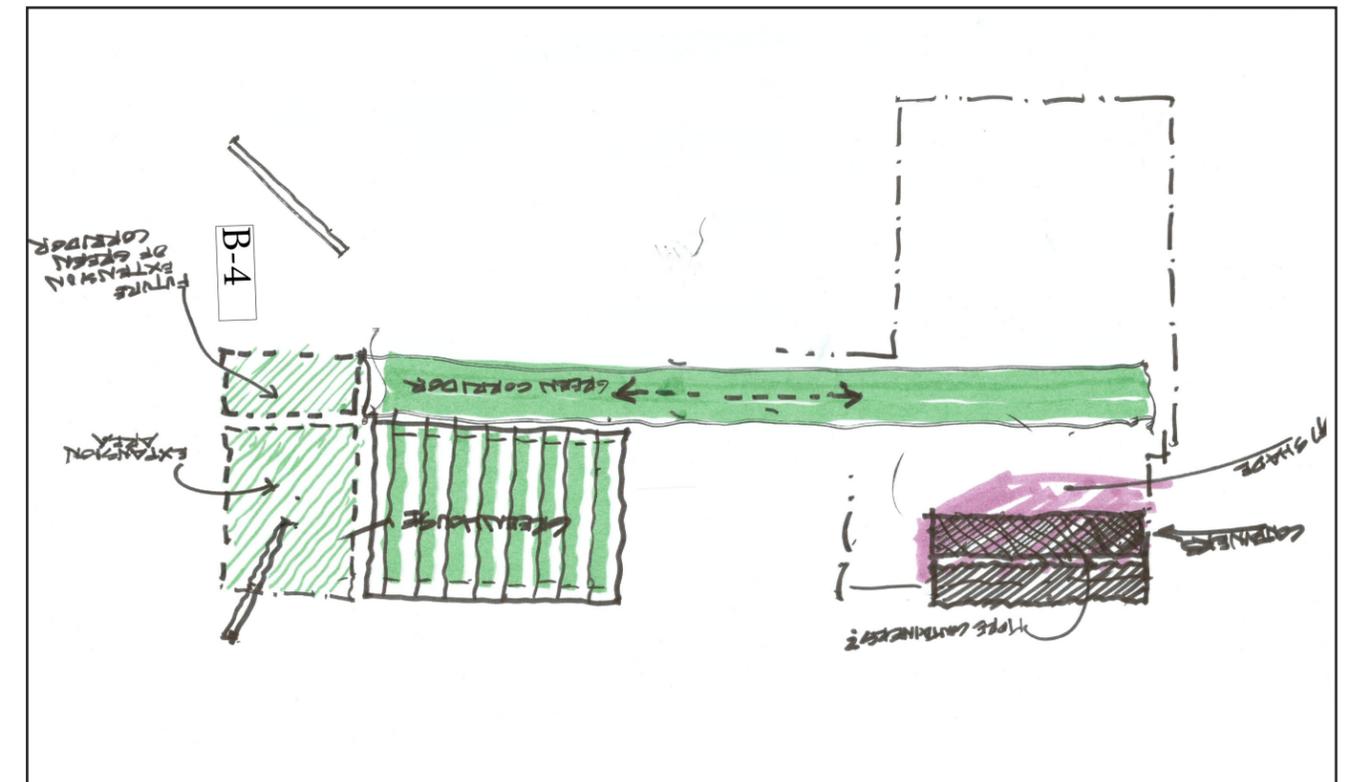


Loeb Fellows discuss early sketches in the greenhouse.



This diagram shows the Eastie Farm properties organized naturally around an east-west axis

One of several sketches foregrounding the basic organization of the site around an east-west axis.



Design the Campus

Eastie Farm Campus 2.0

The Eastie Farm campus is surrounded by several underutilized properties under private ownership. This presents an opportunity for Eastie Farm to engage the property owners in what may be mutually beneficial initiatives. It is recommended that Eastie Farm initiate some of these exploratory discussions.

The most immediate and proximate opportunity is the overgrown rear yard of the property at the corner of Chelsea Terrace and George Visconti Road. (see map) This abuts the Eastie Farm greenhouse and theoretically it could be accessed from the existing corridor of space along the front of the greenhouse. At the moment this space is just an overgrown lot that actually obscures the visibility of the greenhouse from Visconti Road. The only structure in that location is a large billboard at the height of the elevated East Boston Expressway. Initially, a mutually beneficial project could be to clear the space under the billboard and

replant it in accordance with the Eastie Farm urban agriculture program.

This would increase the visibility of Eastie Farm to the neighborhood, effectively giving it a real frontage on a public street, something that it currently lacks. Access to this space would also facilitate deliveries from small trucks, alleviating that issue. In the short term, the current owner will have a better looking



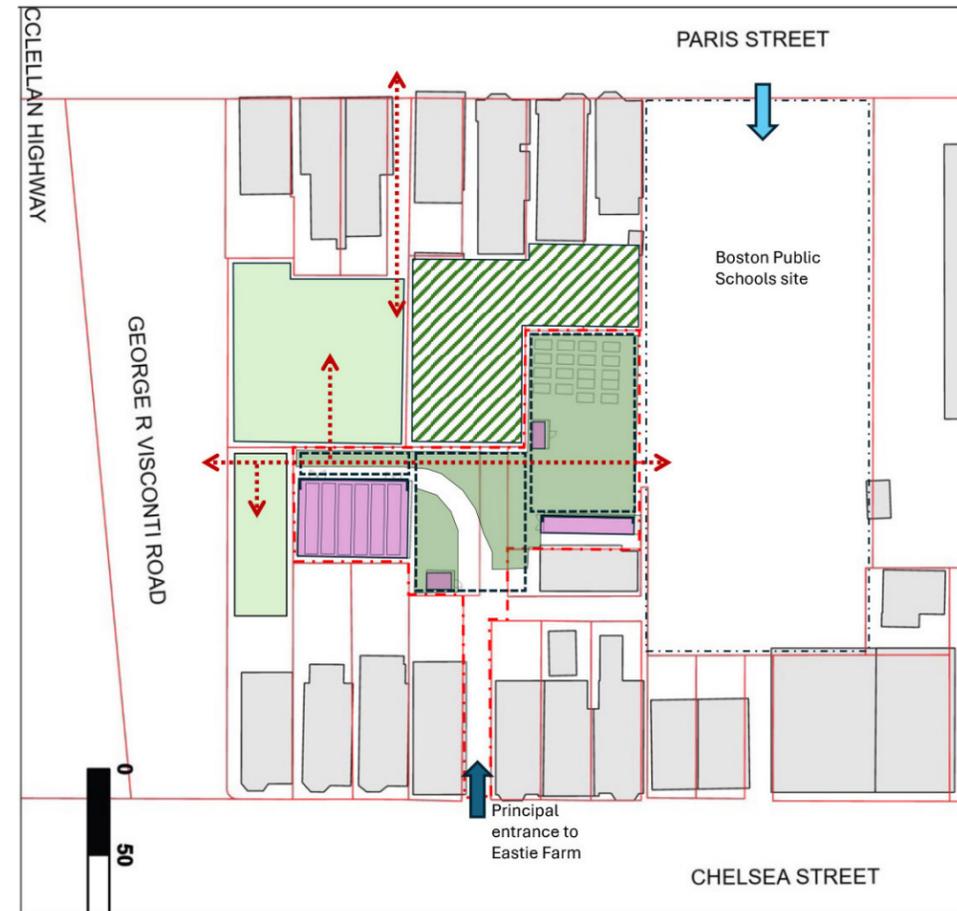
Eastie Farm Campus 3.0

The next and most ambitious opportunity is to invite all of the property owners that abut Eastie Farm to collectively rethink the entire mid-block. As shown in this sketch from the workshop (Figure XX), this would add value to all of these properties by having them participate in an improved mid-block space. In this vision, the abutting property owners would be able to increase development on their properties. These new developments could participate in Eastie Farm programming or be independent, such as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). (California, in an effort to address the housing shortage which also afflicts Boston, has made ADUs legal in all zoning districts).

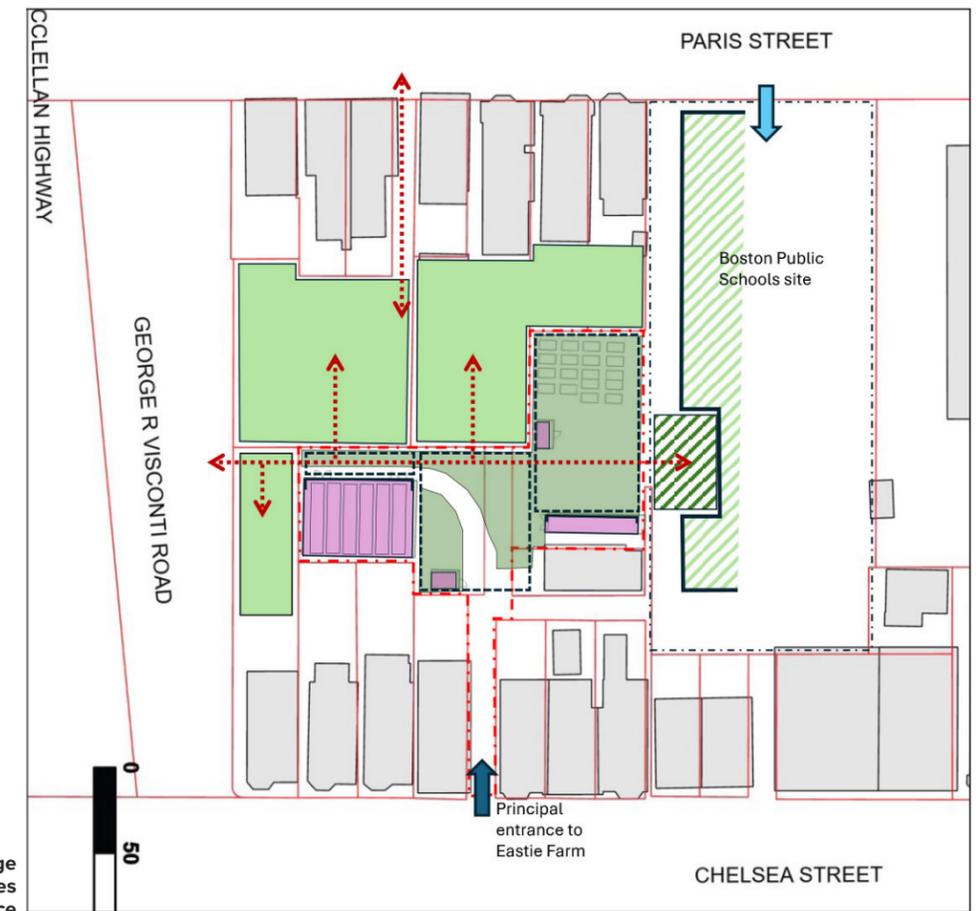
All of this would require special zoning regulations or perhaps some form of a new redevelopment zone that could be used to improve other underutilized mid-block areas in Boston.



This sketch imagines a design for the entire midblock engaging all of the property owners.



Initial expansion of the campus can include underutilized properties adjacent to Visconti Road.



Subsequent expansion would engage the owners of all of the properties abutting the entire mid-block space

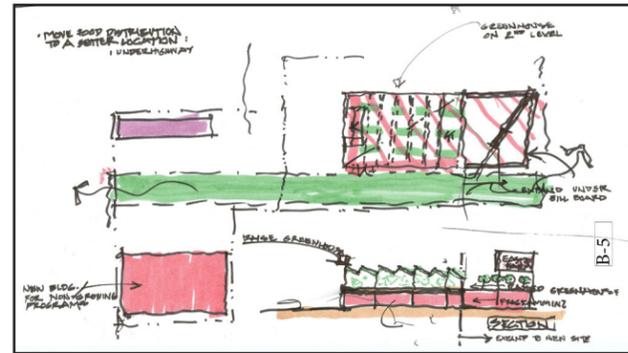
Design the Campus

The School Site

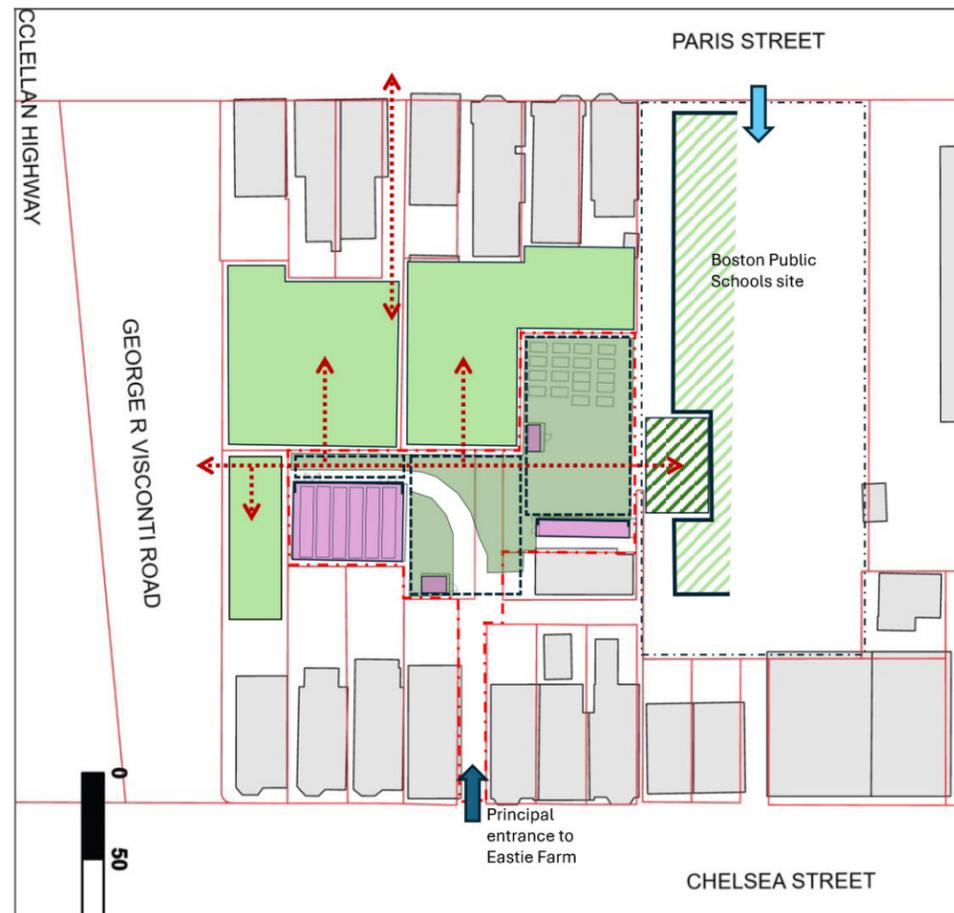
In this diagram, the school site is also in play. Here the NE-SW axis is extended by making sure that future development on the vacant lot controlled by Boston Public Schools responds in some way to this axis. This could be as modest as providing access to pedestrians and small trucks. But in this more ambitious vision, the new school here would engage in a proactive way with the Eastie Farm campus. In its full achievement, this is not just a matter of the way a new building would be massed. The connection would also be through the public school curriculum, with classes on urban agriculture and lab studies, much of which Eastie Farm does already in a more limited way but which is clearly part of the Eastie Farm mission.

It is worth noting that there is a grade change between Visconti Road and the Eastie Farm lot. On the one hand, this makes access more difficult. On the other hand, it can be exploited to create split-level access to lower and upper levels of a two-story structure which one of the design sketches suggested.

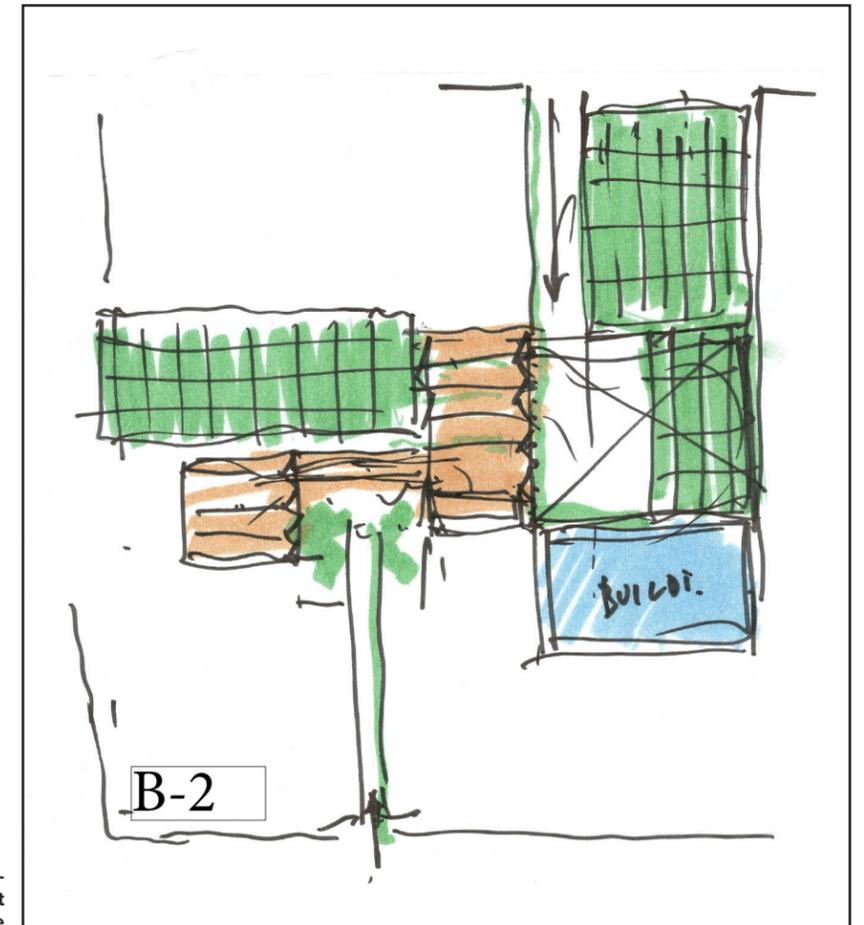
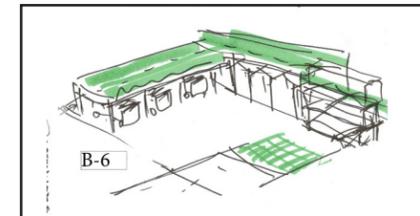
Exploiting the grade change at the west edge of the site, this sketch images a 2-story structure with the greenhouse above.



Murals painted on the sides of the two large shipping containers that house the hydroponics demonstration and other uses.



In this ultimate iteration, the school site is designed to engage the overall open space network of the Eastie Farm campus.

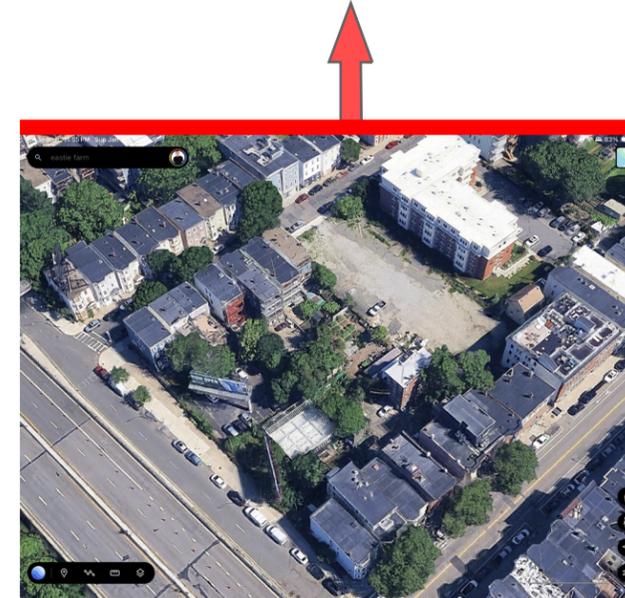
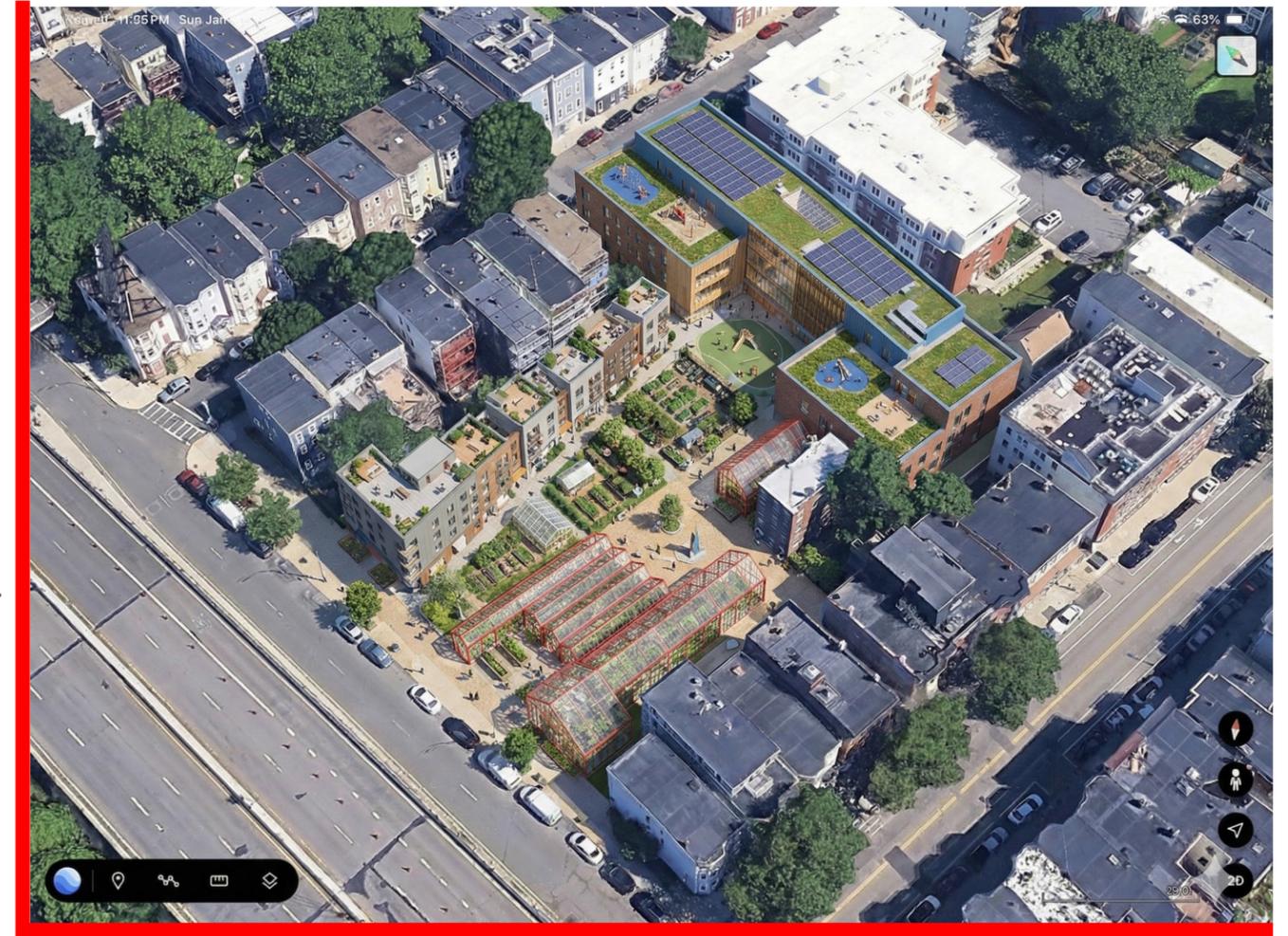
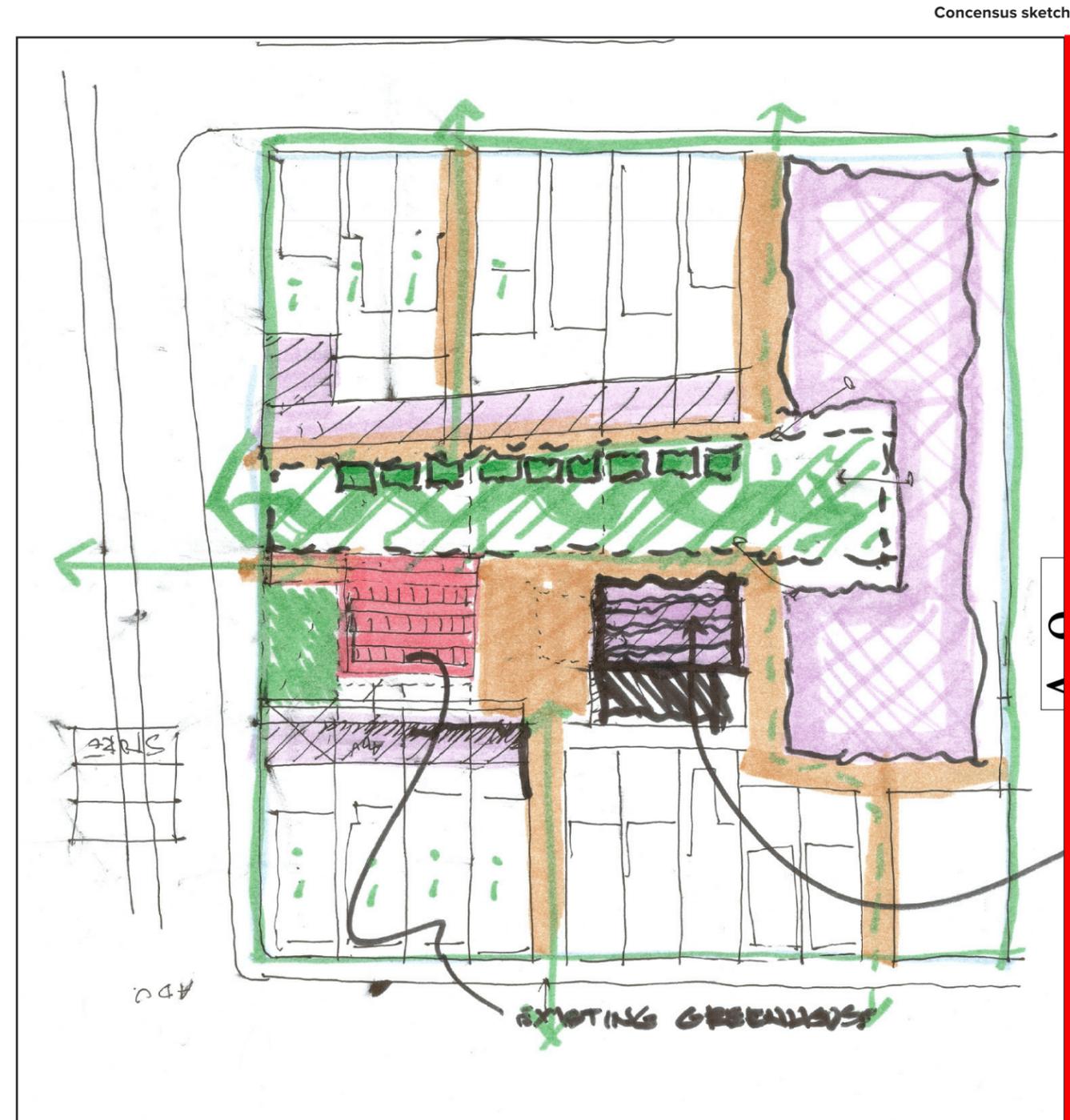


Workshop sketch illustrating expansion into the vacant school site

Design the Campus

Consensus plan sketch

The consensus sketch showing the transformation of the entire mid-block including new infill development and extension of the open space system into a future school.



Photosimulation of a new Eastie Farm campus. Small-scale redevelopment in the center of the mid-block defines and activates the campus while providing much needed housing. The billboards are removed making the farm more visible from Visconti Road.

Design the Campus

Decentralizing as well as expanding

As Eastie Farm outgrows its current location, the issues related to expanding the existing campus intersect with the larger issue raised above about the degree to which the campus wants to have a dispersed presence. Eli Spevak LF14 suggests that there certainly are some creative ways to try and expand that space to make it work better for bringing in produce, sorting, and re-distributing. But those modifications would be expensive and/or require land from others - and still wouldn't yield great physical arrangements for this part of Eastie's programming. The workshop brainstorming can be used to home in on the most compelling options for their existing site and then compare that with an option which identifies a different location entirely for the CSA part of their mission. That would allow the original Eastie Farm location to just focus on education, demonstration farming, geothermal, community gatherings, and workforce development - without also needing to host trucks/storage/logistics of a growing CSA program.

Farming at the 294 Sumner
Street satellite site



Future Freight Considerations

In thinking about the logistics on this site, it is important to recognize the rapidly changing world of urban goods movement, especially in terms of so-called "last mile" deliveries which is most of what Eastie Farm has to deal with. This is an environment characterized by smaller electric vehicles, shared delivery lockers, and a network that favors decentralization and flexibility, over concentration. <https://www.planandprocess.com/delivering-the-goods/>

Signage at the 294 Sumner
Street satellite site



A Multi-Year Perspective

Eastie Farm at 10

Eastie Farm's objective is to be more than a "band aid" for the chronic shortage of affordable food - to move beyond a single-dimension, crisis-by-crisis approach to providing food, even though that is important. Eastie Farm's goal is nothing less than to change the food system: to have people understand where their food comes from, how it gets from the point of production to their tables, and how it should be prepared. This holistic approach is as much about education and building community as it is about putting food in people's mouths and can help facilitate broader discussions about neighborhood sustainability and resilience in the face of climate change and gentrification.

Eastie Farm, in the words of one participant, is now, after 10 years since its founding, moving into "adolescence," a metaphor that appropriately captures the growing pains and decision-making that come with maturation. The question of how Eastie Farm can develop in terms of its physical presence is discussed below. A more challenging question is how Eastie Farm can develop as an institution to better fulfill its mission. This raises a host of questions about how big Eastie Farm wants to be in terms of staffing and programming and how a reliable stream of funding can be secured for the long term.



Two Vectors

In a way, Eastie Farm is subject to two vectors: One vector would have Eastie Farm expand both physically and institutionally, with more sites and an even more expansive mission. This supports the most ambitious approach to effecting "systemic" change in the way the city of Boston approaches food security and sustainability writ large. The other vector would have Eastie Farm mature in place, refining its current operation at its current site, with relatively modest expansions to its physical plant.

The two vectors are complementary and more a matter of phasing and opportunity than binary choices.

For that reason, one of the principal recommendations of this exercise is that Eastie Farm exploit its access to the Loeb Fellowship to create a long-term plan. Kannan Thiruvengadam has done a remarkable thing in founding and getting Eastie Farm to its current place. Like many growing enterprises, he is preoccupied with keeping the current operation going and in that context, it can be hard to think in terms of the next 5, 10 and 20 years. And yet, the experience of other maturing "start-ups" (if that is the correct term for Eastie Farm) shows how important it is to have a short, medium and long-term plan, even as that plan will inevitably change as circumstances change and unanticipated opportunities present themselves.

Institution Building for Eastie Farm

One suggestion is that Kannan apply for an Alumni Council Grant in the next round which will be sometime in early 2026. These grants have the express purpose of bringing together Loebes from different classes, locations and disciplines to brainstorm on exactly the kinds of plans suggested here. Sometimes the challenge is physical planning and design - topics which have largely been tackled in the most recent Day of Service workshop. But the convening can just as easily take on the institutional capacity-building and fund-raising issues raised here. The Fellowship has a deep bench of people who have wrestled with similar issues. Of course, it is not an either-or situation. The participants will have design in mind as they wrestle with the institutional issues, building on the foundation of design ideas generated during the DOS.



Introduction presentation by Kanan and Vedant Ramesh

Funding Opportunities

Eastie Farm as a “Food Hub”

“Food Hub” is defined by the US Department of Agriculture as a business or organization that centralizes the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of local/regional food, helping small-to-mid-sized farms connect with larger markets (retail, wholesale, institutions) and increasing consumer access to fresh food, especially in underserved areas. They act as intermediaries, handling logistics, processing, storage, and sales so farmers can focus on growing, while supporting local economies and building stronger food systems. They can be non-profit or for-profit businesses may focus on different products (produce, meat, dairy) and can be physical locations or “virtual.” The USDA supports food hubs through grants and programs (like the Regional Food Business Centers) to strengthen local food systems, create jobs, and improve food access. The main Food Hubs serving the Boston area are non-profits like the Boston Food Hub and the New Entry Food Hub.

Kannan expressed some skepticism about this idea based on his understanding of the Greater Boston Food Hub. In keeping with the “band aid” metaphor, its focus on distribution addresses a symptom more than the underlying problem. Having said that, engaging with the USDA may provide access to some of the Food Hub grant programs which are fairly extensive.

As suggested above, even though there is some skepticism about the Food Hub program, this USDA program does offer some grants that may be worth pursuing. A quick search by Lynn Richards LF13 on the USDA Food Hub web site yielded numerous opportunities listed at the end of this report.

Donor Advised Funds:

Eastie Farm might be able to capitalize on the great generational wealth transfer that is underway. This is a national and international trend and much of the wealth transfer will go to women. Eastie Farm should expand communications with investment firms, such as Boston-based Fidelity, to connect with people who have Donor Advised Funds (DAFs). Eastie Farm has connections with some DAFs through the Boston Foundation and this would be a possible expansion of that strategy. Firms like Fidelity generally have less robust philanthropic advisory staffing so nonprofits need to work on how to get their programs in front of donors.-

Pilot a “Friends-to-Friends” Strategy

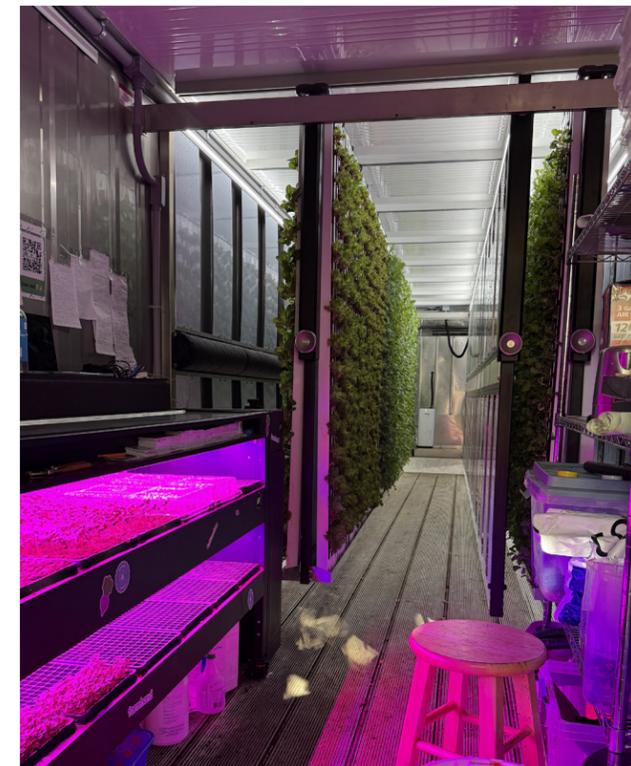
This includes house parties where current Eastie Farm supporters (board members, current larger donors, companies interested in the Eastie Farm mission) would host small gatherings (6 to 12 people) to introduce Eastie Farm to their friends and business associates. This is a strategy that could grow to possibly a dozen small events a year to build Eastie Farm’s base of supporters, donors, volunteers and champions. Kathy Fox is sending Eastie Farm a “how to” guide for this strategy that is in use by an Ohio non-profit that Kathy Fox works with. This strategy requires volunteers or interns in order to bring to scale.

Targeted Internships

Identify college student interns for specific development project assistance such as producing house parties (following an established model), research on high net worth individuals and companies in the region who may be interested in Eastie Farm’s mission, and help with putting grant proposals together under Alex’s supervision. Kathy Fox will introduce Alex to a landscape architecture professor at Northeastern University, since the university has a robust internship program.



Planting beds. This view is across the vacant school property.



Hydroponic demonstration site in one of the trailers..