

DSNI Research Brief

*Development without Displacement:
The Spatial Face of Potential Gentrification
in
Boston, Massachusetts*

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Introduction

This Research Brief was prepared for the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) based on discussions with Chris Jones, Executive Director of DSNI, and staff during the Fall of 2013. (A preliminary draft was shared with DSNI in November 2013). The genesis of this Research Brief are recent intense real estate and development activities occurring in some of the most economically distressed areas in Boston.¹ The aim of this Research Brief is to highlight areas of the city that are associated with variables typically linked to gentrification. The five maps below show those parts of the city where these variables are ‘bunched up’, in a sense.

The maps and information presented here should be treated only as preliminary for generating further discussion. The maps and index do not identify areas that are experiencing gentrification, necessarily; this can probably be better accomplished via on-the-ground observations. But the approach utilized can assist with identification of neighborhood areas that stand out in terms of the bunching up of variables associated with gentrification. This might be helpful in the design of early and pro-active strategies against displacement.

The term gentrification is used to describe areas of the city that have experienced disinvestment –or lack of investment-- or economic distress, but are *nevertheless experiencing significant (and even rapid...) increases in land and real estate values, at the same attracting new, more ‘middle-class’ renters and home-owners*. These same areas may be witnessing a loss of lower-income individuals and families, as well as long-time residents. In many urban areas, including Boston, gentrification contains a racial and ethnic dimension. That is, neighborhood areas where residents were predominantly Black, Latino, or Asian find themselves no longer able to afford to live in their old neighborhoods, or actively being displaced through rapid and relatively high increases in housing costs and replaced with new White residents who can afford the higher housing costs.²

¹ See Mary Moore, “Roxbury’s Changing Face” *Boston Business Journal* (November 15, 2013) for a summary of some development initiatives that are raising concerns among long-time residents of Boston’s poorest neighborhoods.

² An earlier paper prepared for Policy Link and the Brookings Institute defines gentrification as a “process of neighborhood change that results in the replacement of lower residents with higher income ones,...”; see, Maureen Kennedy and Paul Leonard, *Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Choices*, Discussion Paper Prepared for The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy and PolicyLink (April 2001). But this particular definition is not comprehensive enough in capturing a process that goes beyond the mere replacement of one group of residents, with another.

Methodological Note

The maps were generated based on variables discussed at DSNI in the Fall 2013. But, I also looked briefly at the extant literature and various data bases to find what is available and quantifiable in terms of data that can be used in the generation of an index for measuring how variables associated with gentrification are bunched up in some places.³ I selected variables which tend to indicate change in residential patterns: declining average household size; racial changes; high growth of one person, nonfamily, households. I also utilized variables that indicate low income status; relatively large numbers of vacant units (these could be on or off the market), and other variables indicating economic vulnerability for long-time residents.

In addition to these variables there may be others that are associated with gentrification, of course. Some might suggest poverty rates, for example. But this may or may not be a good variable associated with potential gentrification absent more contextual information. In order to capture economic or housing vulnerability I added into the index the number of children who are being raised by grandparents. (In some census tracts there are upwards of 20% or higher of all children in such households). Based on informal discussions with a range of people working in community settings I suspect that higher numbers of children living with grandparents might be associated with neighborhood areas more vulnerable to displacement. In addition to this latter variable there may be others that should be identified, though not typically raised within discussions about gentrification.

A variable that should be used in assessing how the utilization of land is changing are condo conversions and sales over various periods of time. This information was not used only due to costs in obtaining the data; but the next iteration of understanding the components and processes of gentrification in Boston neighborhoods should include more real estate-related variables.

By collecting data about these variables based on census tracts, I was able to use a “site score” methodology with GIS software (MapInfo Version 12.0, and Pcensus 11.0) giving each variable a weight of “1” and then rank order all the variables by census tracts. How an index is utilized to show a relatively ‘high’ category, versus a lower category in terms of scores is important; categorization and use of specific colors in maps can reflect bias. To avoid this kind of bias I relied on ‘Natural Breaks’ methodology --which is generated by MapInfo GIS software in the creation of thematic maps-- to assure that the values in in the categories (in this case 4 categories) are as close

³ The approach is similar to one I used to generate ‘neighborhood distress’ scores in a research report prepared for the Barr Foundation, “Community-based Nonprofits and Neighborhood Distress in Boston, Massachusetts (February 2009); also see, James Jennings, “Measuring Neighborhood Distress: A Tool for Place-based Urban Revitalization Strategies” *Community Development Journal*, vol. 43, no. 4 (October 2012), 465-474; and, Erin Heacock and Justin Hollander, “A grounded theory approach to development suitability analysis,” *Landscape and Urban Planning*, vol. 100 (2011), 109-116, where the authors construct a “development likelihood” index as a tool for identifying waterfront areas most susceptible to development; and as a tool to enhance community awareness and participation in civic discourses related to such.

to the average of the category as possible.⁴ I used the following data bases to generate the index: American Community Survey 2007 – 2011 5 Year Estimates; Population Estimates and Projections 2013 and 2018; 2010 Census; and an average mortgage index developed by Synergos Technologies based on mortgage risk exposure and risk ratios.

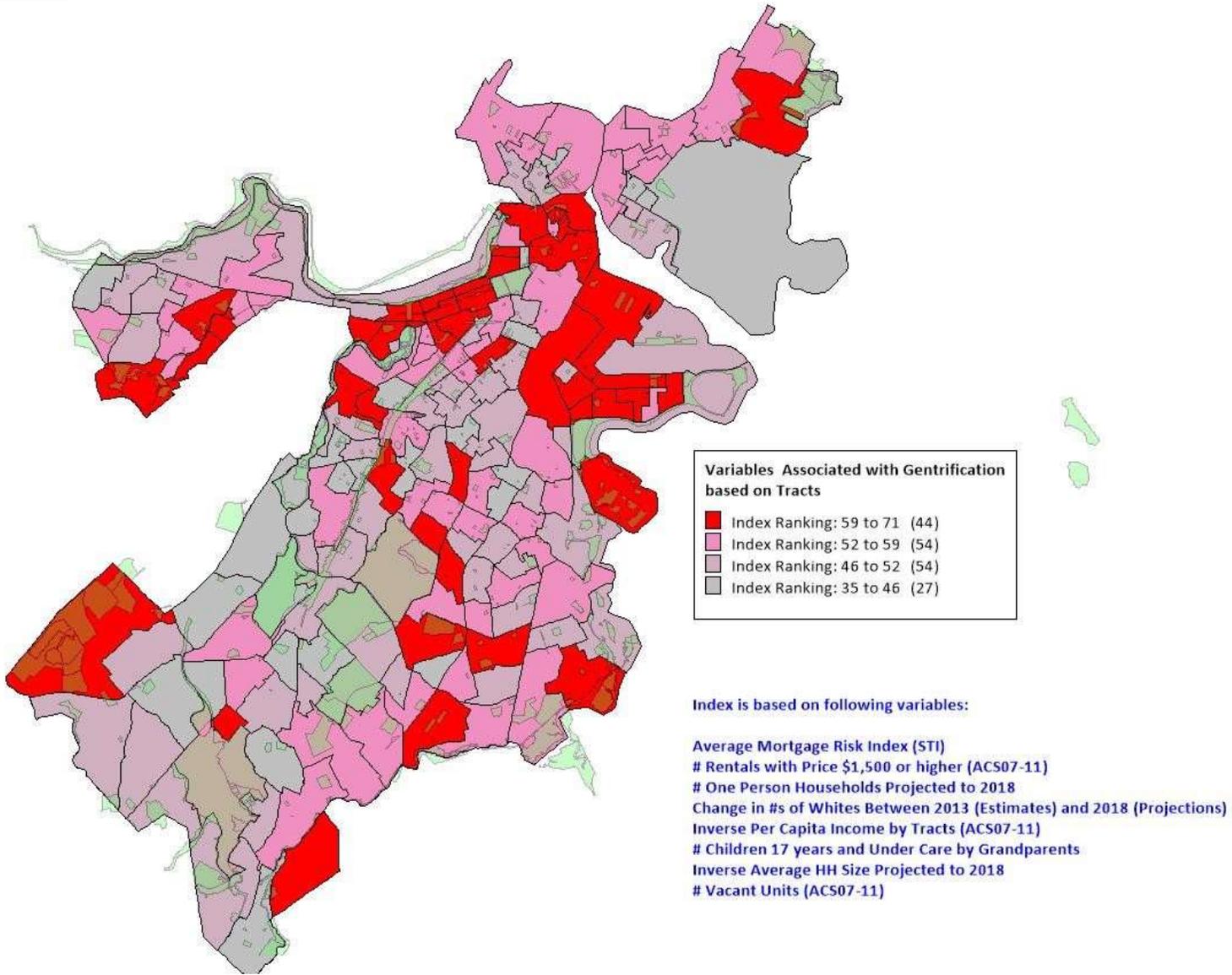
⁴ Natural Break methodology “creates ranges according to an algorithm that uses the average of each range to distribute the data more evenly across the ranges. It distributes the values so that the average of each range is as close as possible to each of the range values in that range. This ensures that the ranges are well-represented by their averages, and that data values within each of the ranges are fairly close together. MapInfo Professional bases its Natural Break algorithm on the procedure described by Jenks and Caspall in their article “Error on Choroplethic Maps: Definition, Measurement, Reduction” from the *Annals of American Geographers*, June, 1971.” *MapInfo 11.5 User Guide*, p. 293

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The maps that follow do not necessarily mean that gentrification is taking place in the highlighted areas, as mentioned above, only that those factors which tend to be associated with gentrification all have high scores, or values, in these areas when rank-ordered by census tracts.

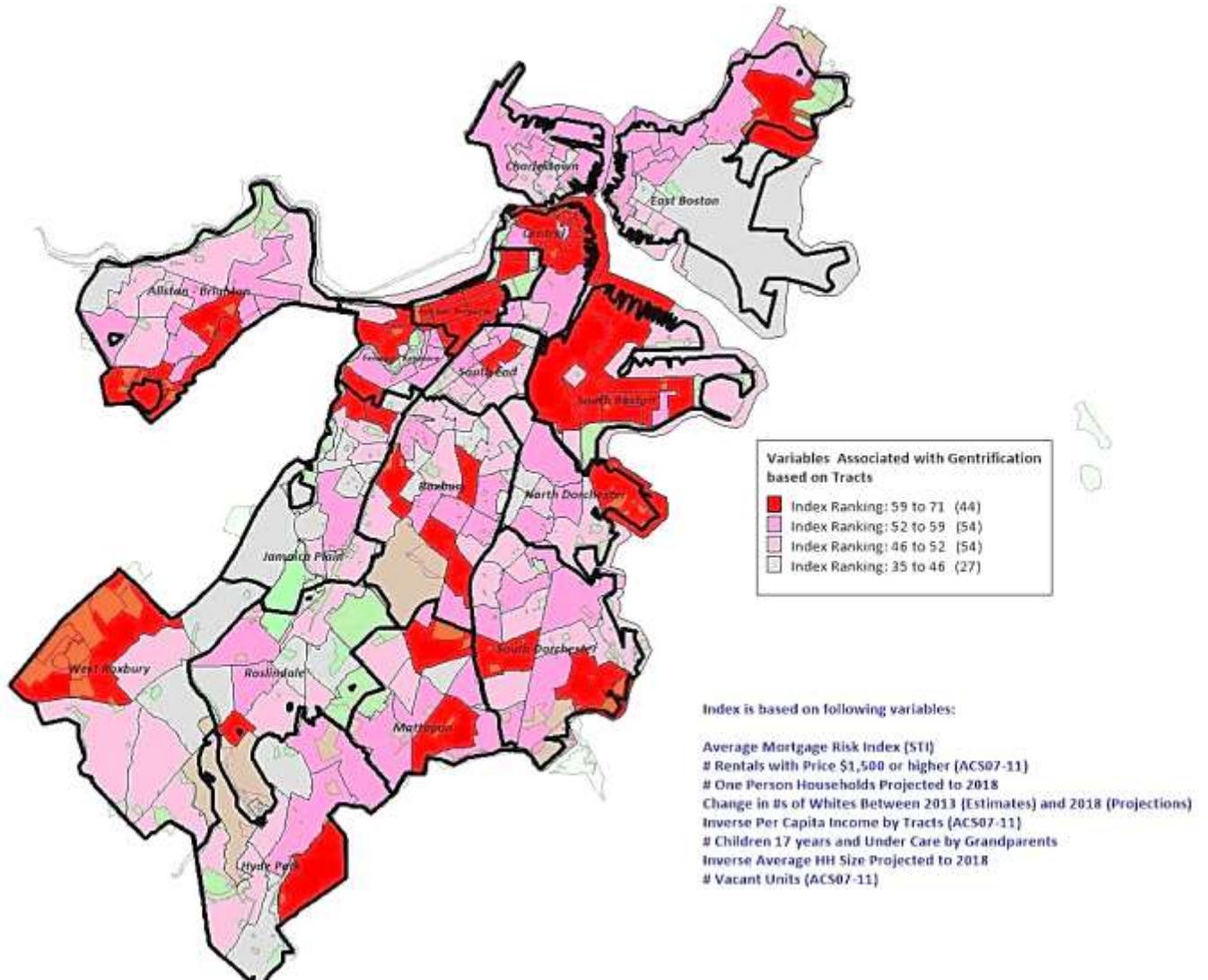
The first map, Map 1, presents this information on the basis of census tracts (2010) in Boston. It shows those areas where there is a 'high' score in terms of variables associated with gentrification are bunched up. The maps that follow this one, provide additional geographic context so that readers can obtain a sense of particular locations.

MAP 1

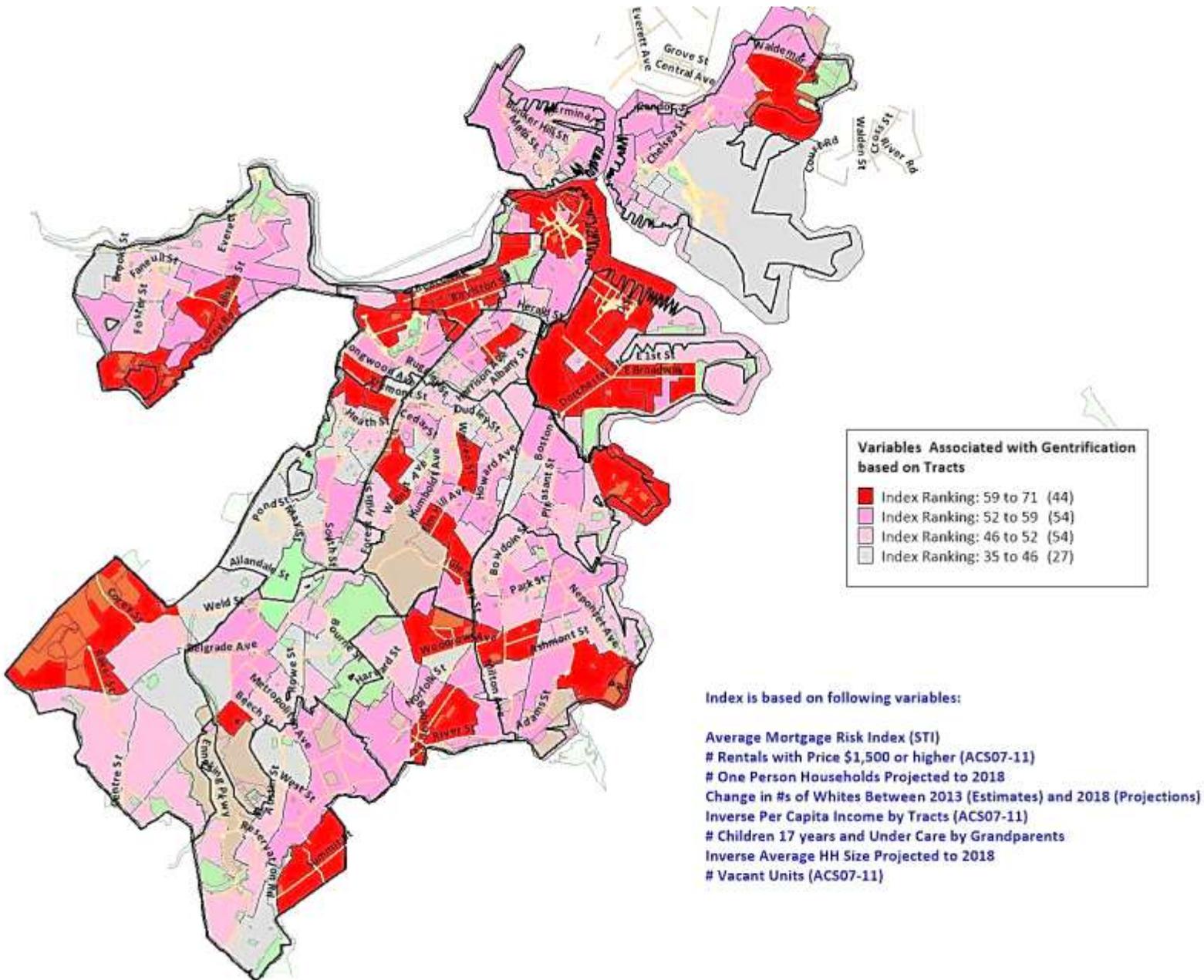


The following is the same map as above, except that it shows the Boston Redevelopment Authority Planning Districts boundaries.

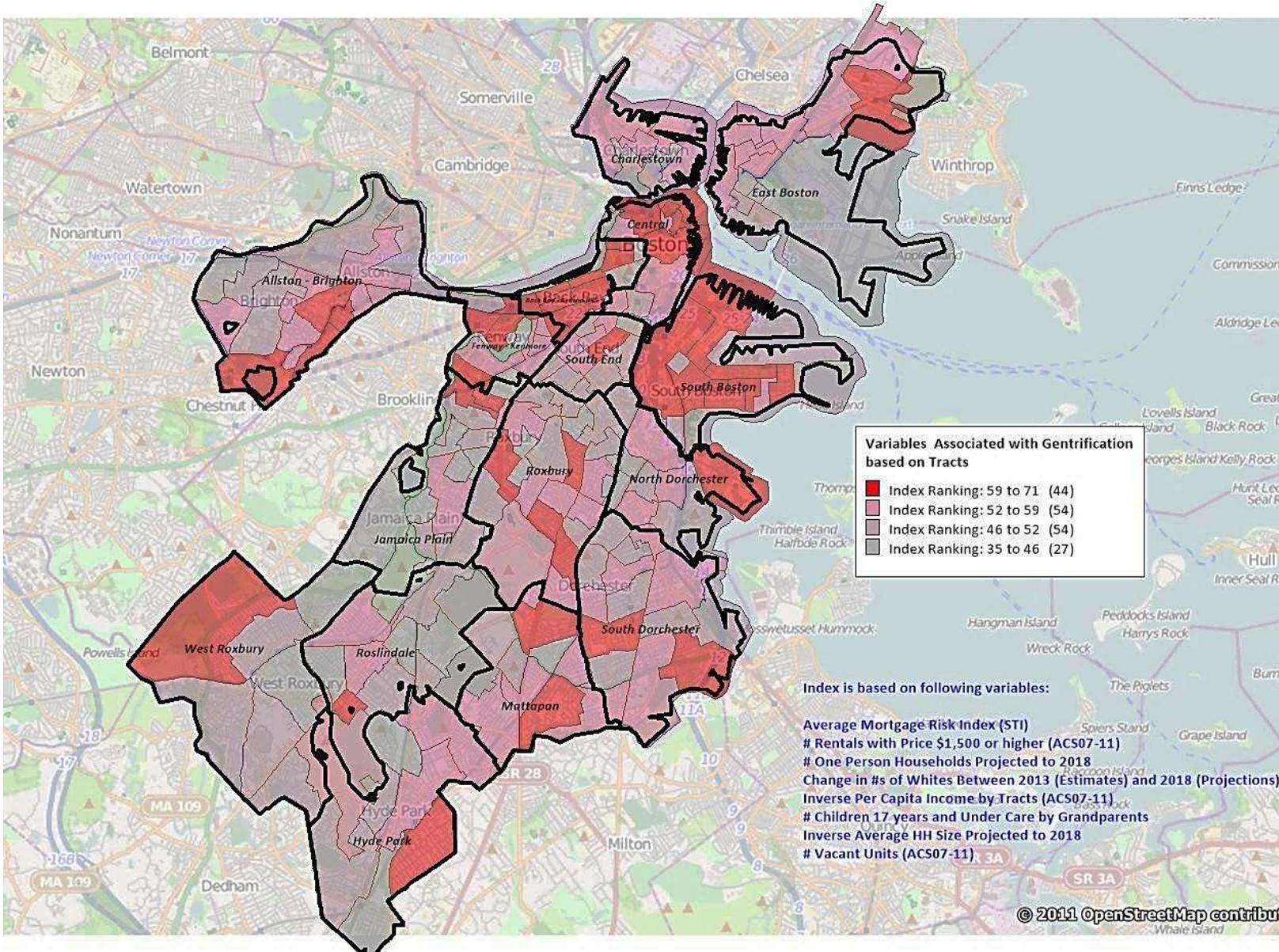
MAP 2



MAP 3, below, shows the BRA Planning Districts and a few select streets with names.

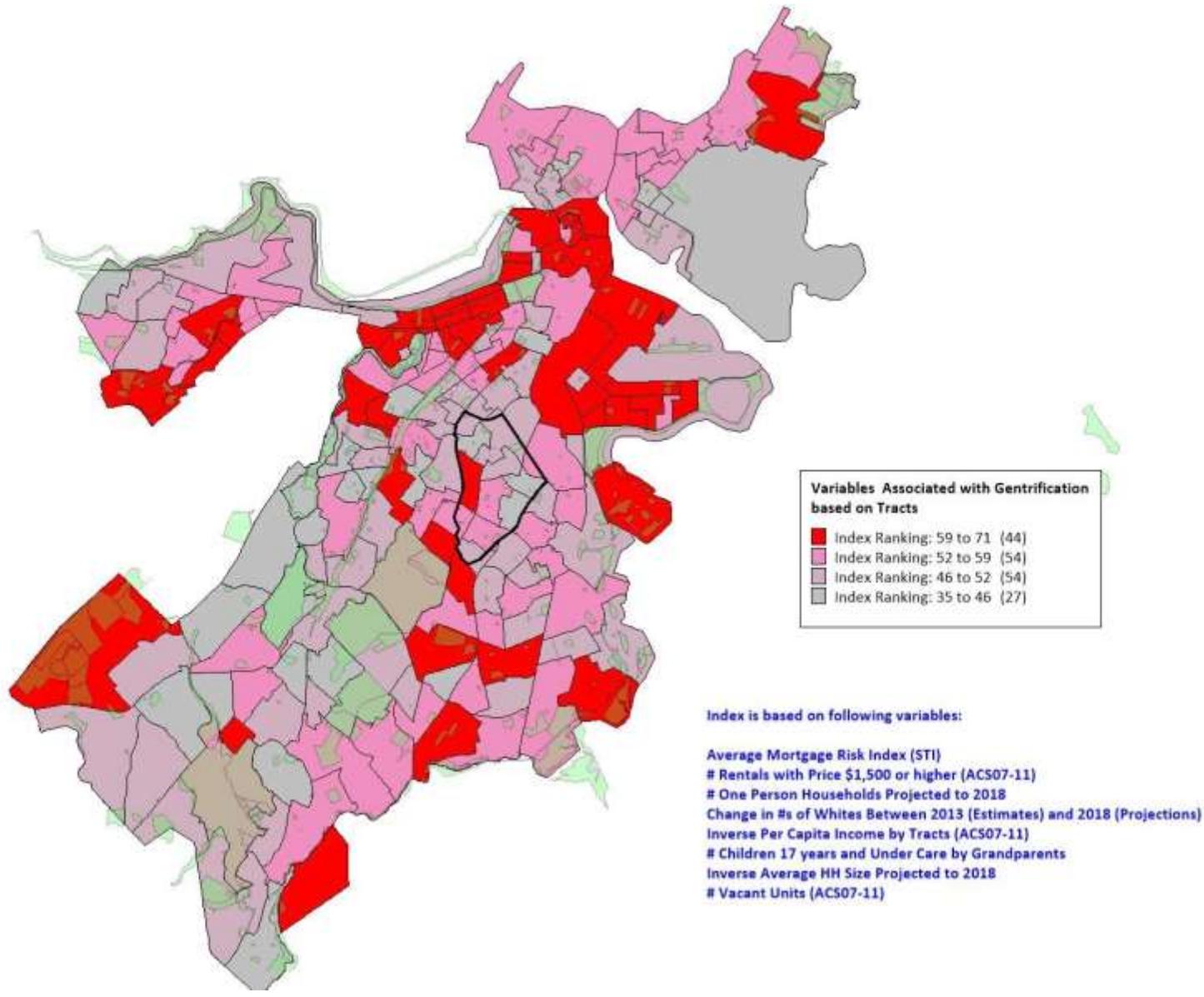


MAP 4 simply provides more geographic context for the city of Boston.



The next two maps show the boundaries for the Dudley Village Campus/DSNI at different zoom levels.

MAP 5



MAP 6

