

Competing Stakeholder Understandings of Livability/Safety: Re-Imagining Broadway, Chelsea, MA

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Purpose

The police department in Chelsea, Massachusetts was awarded funding by the US Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to design and implement interventions that would:

- 1) reduce crime, victimization, recidivism, and youth offending;
- 2) increase trust in police responsiveness and residents' perception of safety;
- 3) reduce elevated risk situations for individuals and families; and
- 4) increase pedestrian use of the downtown business district.

City leaders included: Chelsea Police Department, city employees, chamber of commerce, social service agencies, local non-profits, and more.

Background

The City of Chelsea is 1.8 square miles with a population of 39,272 people: 65.9% are Hispanic or Latino, 21.9% are White, 5.9% are Black or African American, and 3.4% are Asian. As of 2017, 45.6% of residents were born outside of the country. The most common foreign languages spoken are Spanish and Portuguese.

The median age for residents is 33 years and the poverty rate is 19.5%, compared to 12.3% nationally. In 2015, the Uniform Crime Reporting Index ranked Chelsea at 261 out of 263 cities and towns in Massachusetts based on violent crime rates. Historically, crime has been concentrated in the downtown business district.

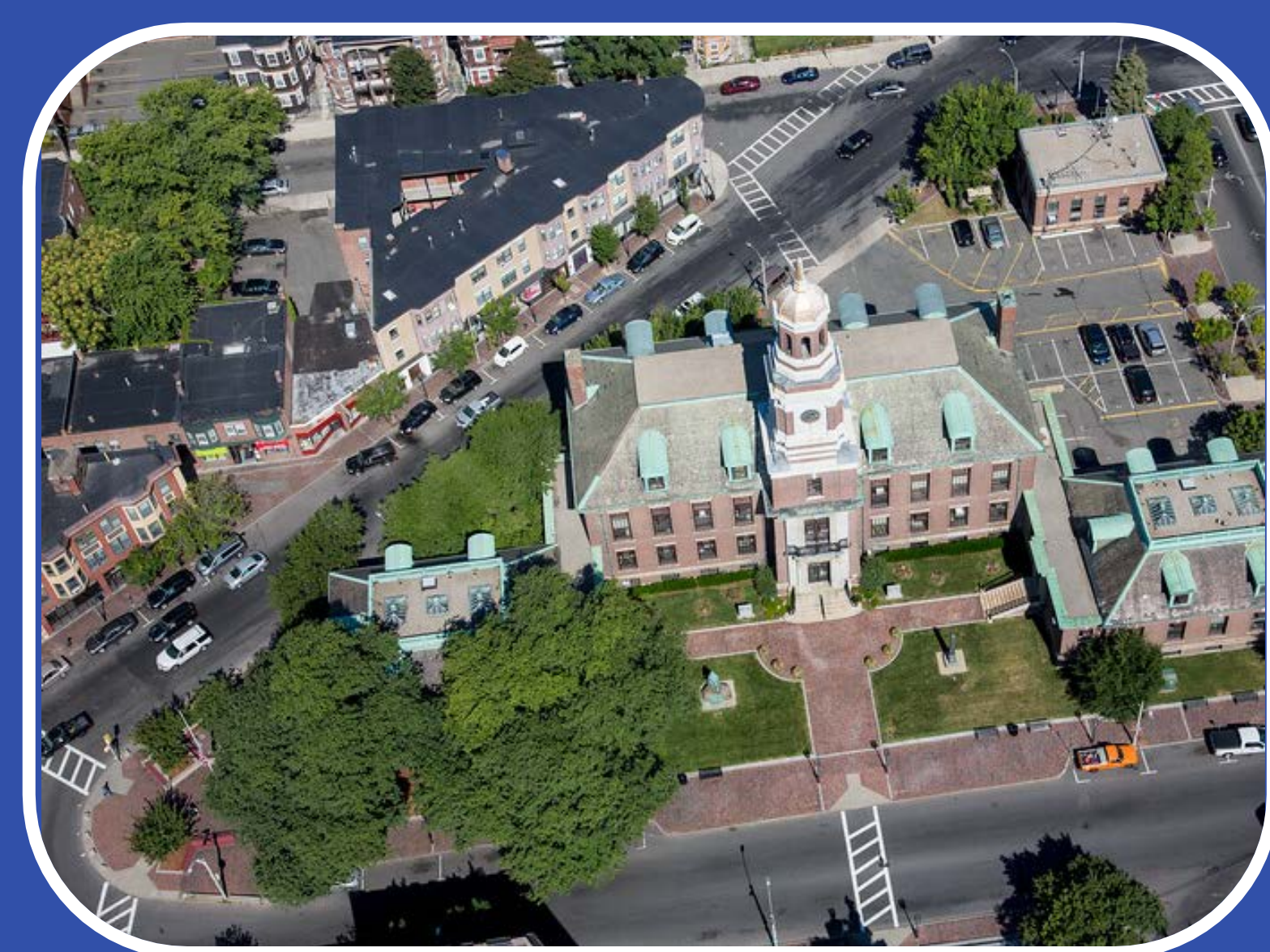
Method

Participants: We recruited 200 survey respondents and 112 focus group participants. The focus group sample included 56 men and 56 women, 52 Latinx, 51 White, 7 African-American, and 2 Asian participants.

Procedure: Surveys and focus groups assessing perceptions of safety, attitudes toward downtown police, downtown activity, and desired changes to the downtown were conducted in English and Spanish.



Build it and they won't come.
City leaders' visions for revitalization can undermine community planning by marginalizing resident input and expertise.



Data

City Leaders: Downtown utilization is limited by fear of violent crime and gangs.

Residents: Downtown utilization is limited by lack of diverse offerings and inconvenience.

City Leaders: "The downtown is lit up like Fenway Park, but no one's around to see it."

Residents: We don't feel safe being downtown at night.

City Leaders: Our vision for the downtown is to become a trendy and upscale destination.

Residents: Our vision for the downtown is to have affordable businesses and restaurants that suit our culture and lifestyle.

Figures

