



# Public Space Evaluation: Central Square

January 26, 2021 | Daniel Wolf, Neighborhood Planner

# Agenda

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01

Study goals

02

Data

03

Findings

04

Discussion





“A good city is like a good party – people stay longer than really necessary, because they are enjoying themselves.”

*- Jan Gehl, Danish urban designer*











  
**YES  
WE'RE  
BACK!**  
cheer food lab



# Study Goals

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- Capture the state of public life in Central Square
- Investigate relationships between site conditions and patterns of activity
- Identify opportunities to unleash Central Square's potential as a flourishing place for people

# Data Collected

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Site  
Conditions



People Moving

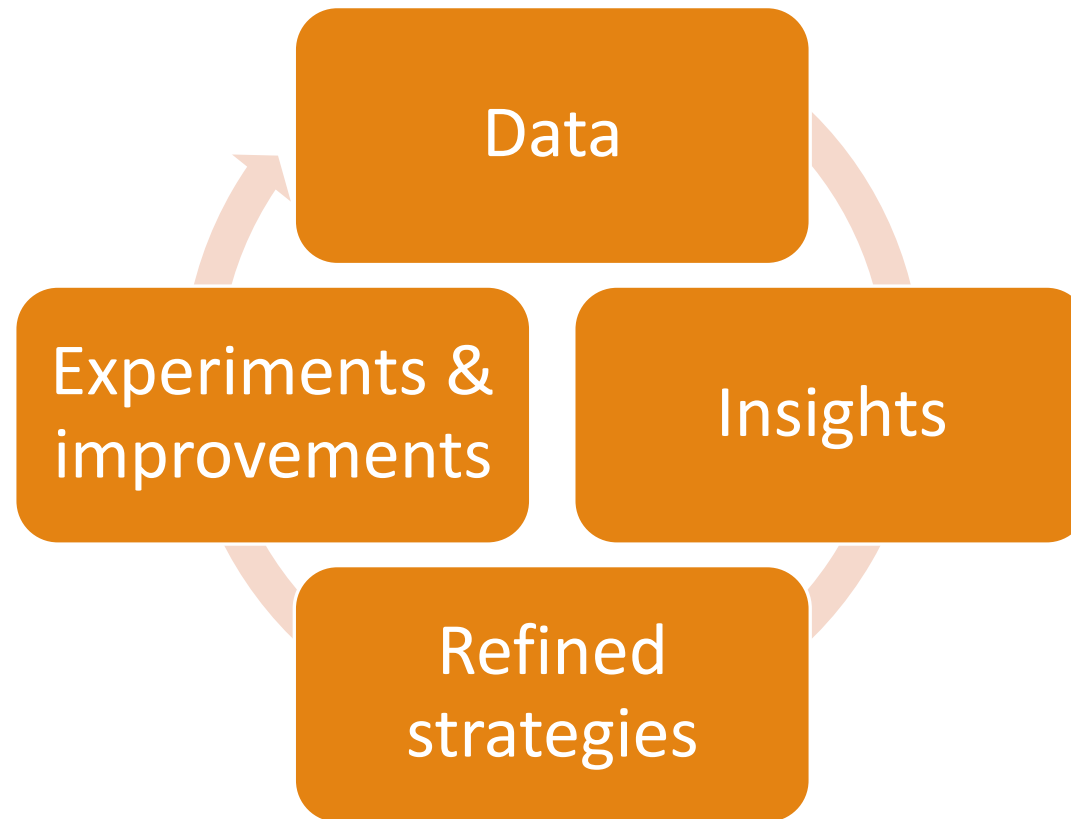


People Linger



# Evaluation Framework

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# Grounding Assumptions

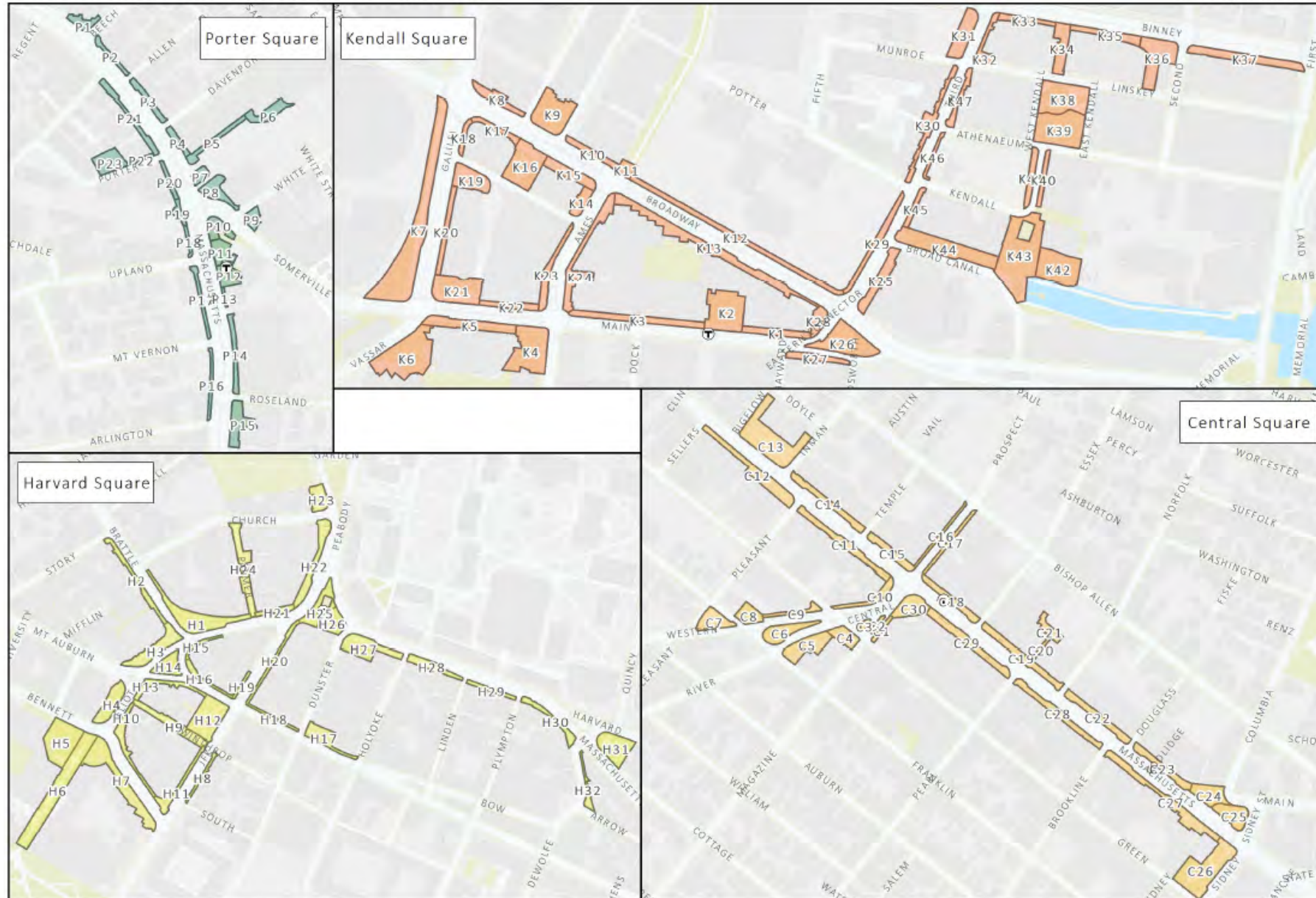
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- Tree canopy, seating, and storefront conditions contribute to stationary activity
- Pedestrian volume increases chance of stationary activity (if the conditions are right)
- Data limitations

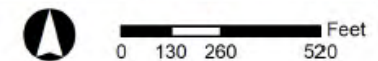


# The Data





Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 4, 2020.





# Types of Data Collected: Seating Capacity and Storefronts

Seating Capacity and Storefront Conditions Worksheet									
Before:		During:				After:			
Initials	AC	Notes (other observations or conditions)				Weather**		Temperature	cool
Date	7/26/19					Clouds	clear		
Day of Week	Thursday					Precipitation	none		
Time Started Page	12:30 pm					Time Completed Page	1:20 pm		
Square	2.2 hr								
Page #	1								

Zone #	Seating Capacity				Storefront Conditions*				Notes
	Private	Public movable	Public fixed	Public secondary**	Entrances	High activity uses	Civic, institutional, etc. uses	Low activity uses	
16	30	0	0	0	4	2	2	0	
17	0	0	5	15	6	2	0	0	
18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
19	0	0	0	0	10	0	7	0	

\*Storefront key:  
 High activity uses (retail, personal/business service, café, restaurant, drinking establishment, entertainment use, barber shop, dry cleaner, print shop, etc.)  
 Civic, institutional, religious, or social services (government use, post office, library, community center, student center, religious building, educational use, social service center, museum)  
 Low activity use (office, medical clinic, financial office, bank, residential use, childcare facility, real estate agency)

\*\*For public secondary seating, mark one of the following approximate ranges to indicate capacity: 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-20, 21-40, 40+

\*\*\*Weather key: temperature (cold, cool, warm, hot), clouds (clear, partly cloudy, mostly cloudy, overcast), precipitation (none, a few drops, less than 5 min rain, more than 5 min rain)



# Types of Data Collected: Seating Capacity and Storefronts



### Seating Capacity and Storefront Conditions Worksheet

Before:		During:		After:		
Initials	AC	Notes (other observations or conditions)		Weather**	Temperature	Cool
Date	7/26/19				Clouds	clear
Day of Week	Thursday				Precipitation	none
Time Started Page	12:30 pm				Time Completed Page	1:20 pm
Square	Public					
Page #	1					

Zone #	Seating Capacity				Storefront Conditions*				Notes
	Private	Public movable	Public fixed	Public secondary**	Entrances	High activity uses	Civic, institutional, etc. uses	Low activity uses	
16	30	0	0	0	4	2	2	0	
17	0	0	5	15	6	2	0	0	
18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
19	0	0	0	0	10	0	7	0	

\*Storefront key:  
 High activity uses (retail, personal/business service, café, restaurant, drinking establishment, entertainment use, barber shop, dry cleaner, print shop, etc.)  
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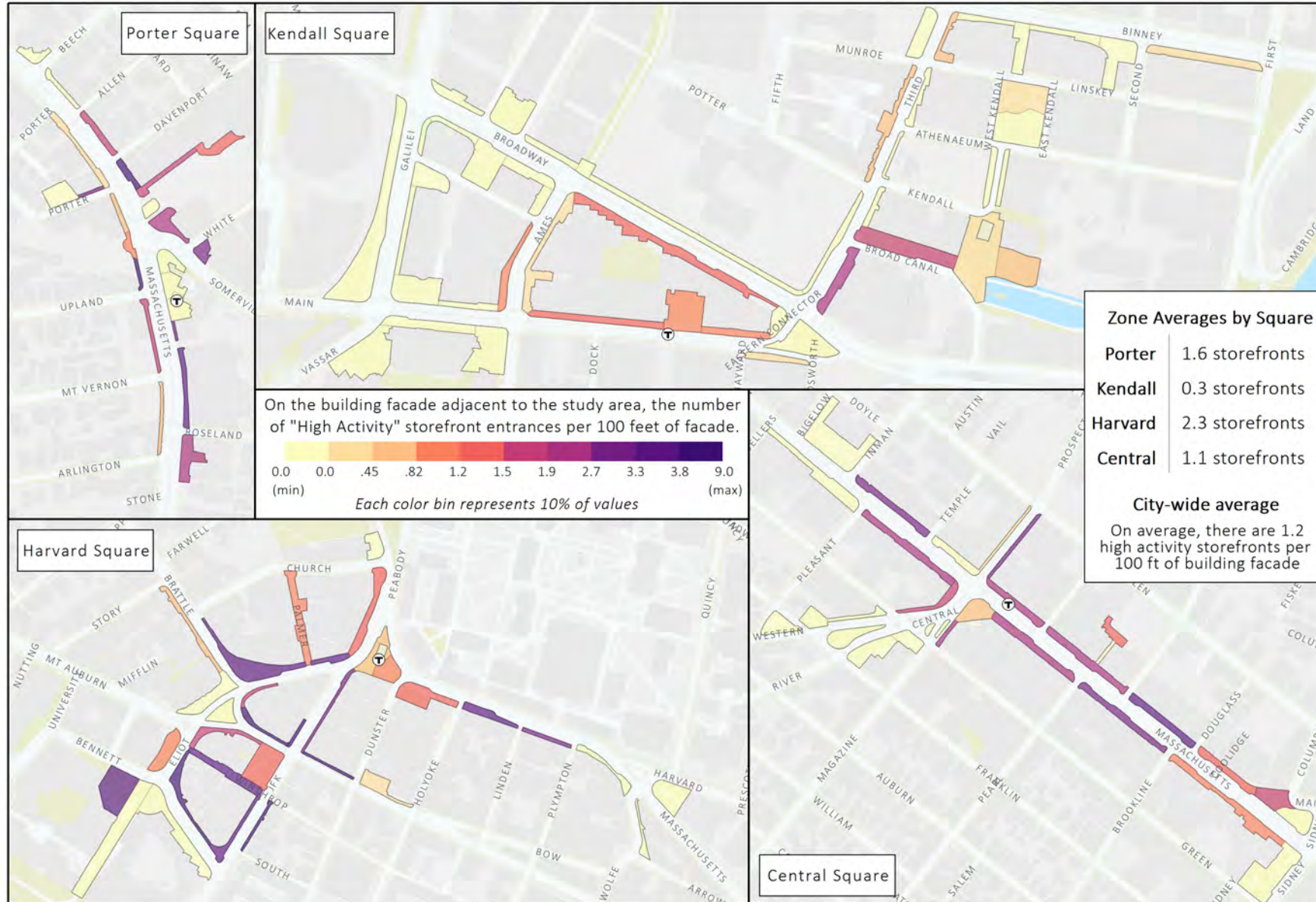
\*\*\*Weather key: temperature (cold, cool, warm, hot), clouds (clear, partly cloudy, mostly cloudy, overcast), precipitation (none, a few drops, less than 5 min rain, more than 5 min rain)





## Storefront Density | "High Activity" Storefront Types

High activity storefronts include uses like cafes, restaurants, bars, dry cleaners, entertainment, barber shops, dry cleaners, etc.



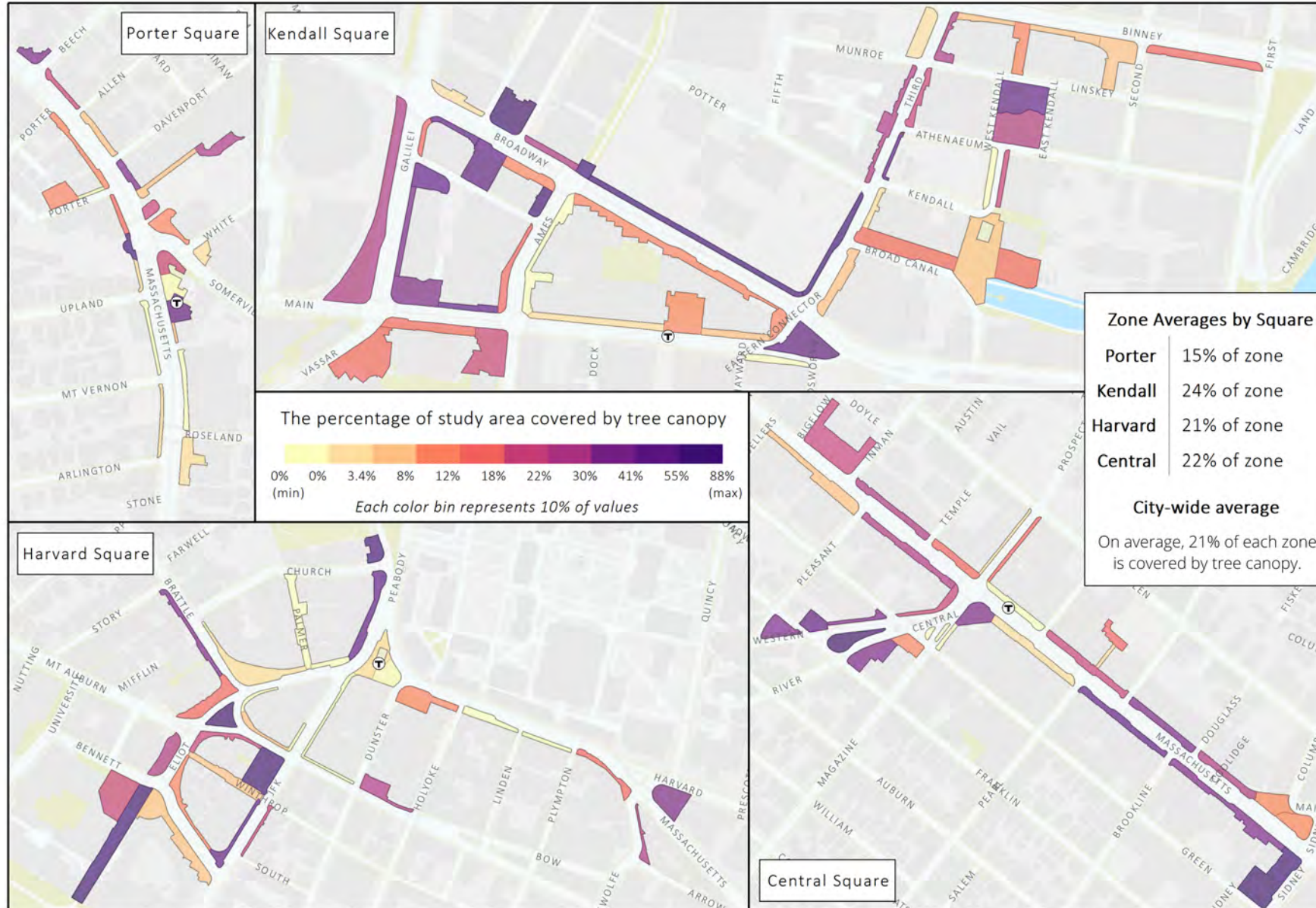
Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 26, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.



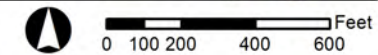


## Tree Canopy Coverage | Site Conditions

Documenting the environment of our public spaces can help us understand what qualities of the public realm are perceived to be inviting by the public.



Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 26, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.



Types of Data Collected:  
Pedestrian Flow



### Pedestrian Count Worksheet

Before:		During:		After:		
Initials	GP	Notes (other observations or conditions)		Weather	Page #	2
Date	7/25/19				Temperature	hot
Day of Week	Thursday				Clouds	clear
Square	Porter				Precipitation	clear

Hour 1			
Start Time	Position	Pedestrians	
		A	B
12:00	1	34	42
12:10	2	36	19
12:17	3	20	24
12:23	4	56	
12:33	5	21	
12:39	6	29	57

Hour 2			
Start Time	Position	Pedestrians	
		A	B
1:00	1	31	33
1:10	2	32	12
1:17	3	9	18
	4		
	5		
	6		

Reminder: spend exactly five minutes counting pedestrians at each position. That gives you five minutes to walk to the next position.

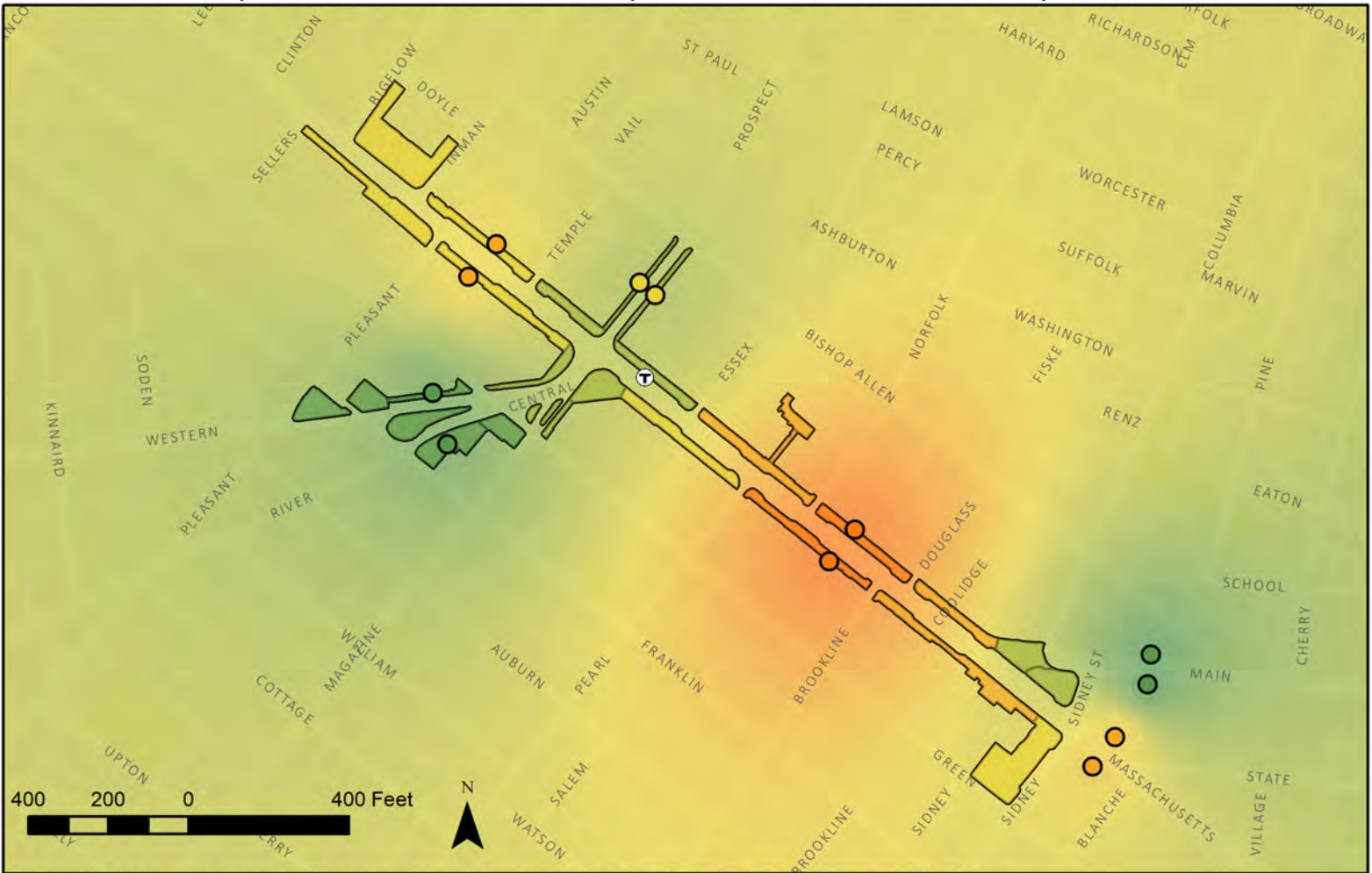
Weather key: temperature (cold, cool, warm, hot), clouds (clear, partly cloudy, mostly cloudy, overcast), precipitation (none, a few drops, less than 5 min rain, more than 5 min rain)



# Pedestrian Flow: Estimated Averages



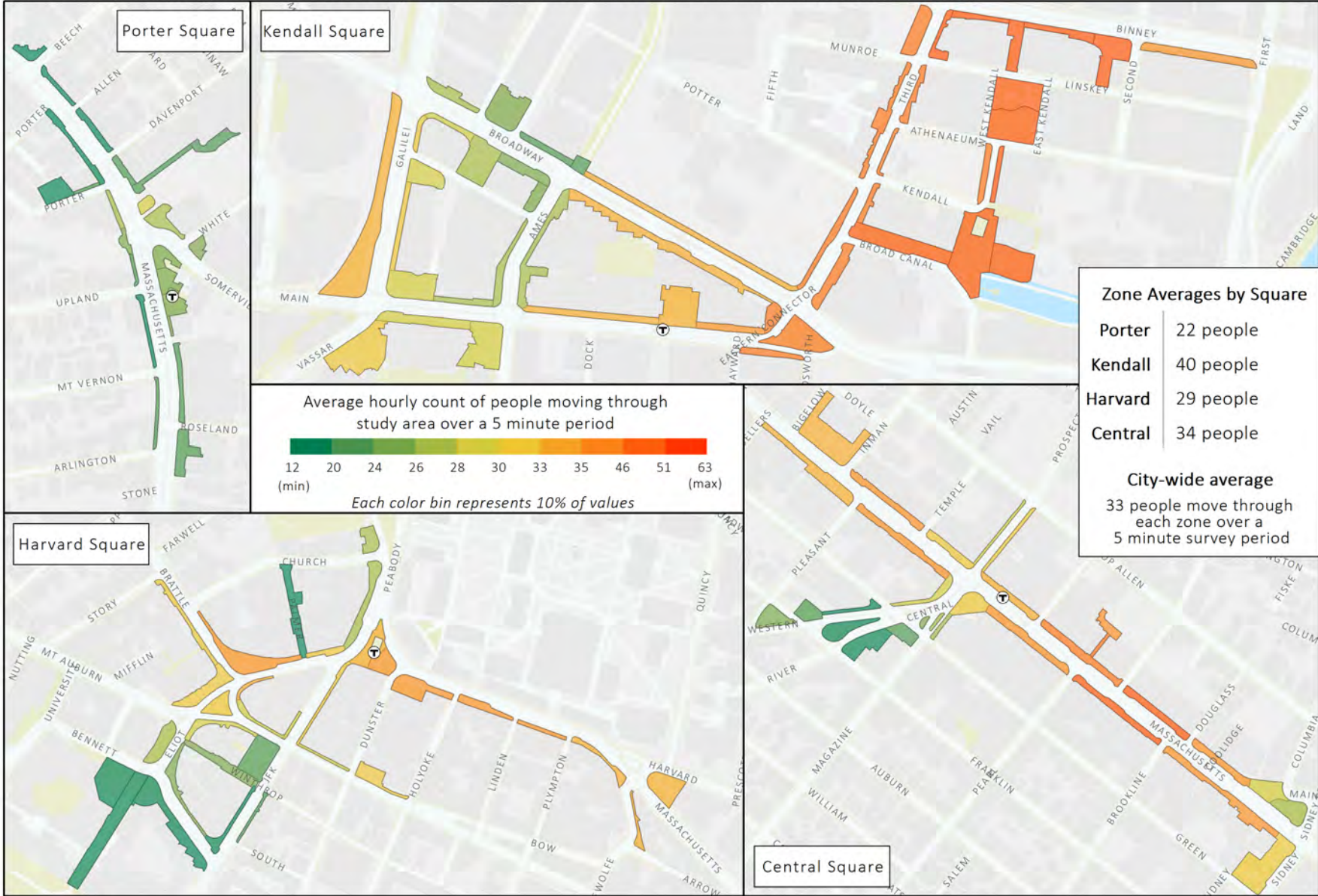
Example of Pedestrian Activity Data Estimated - Midday in Central



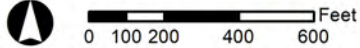


### Pedestrian Volume | Estimated average over all surveys

Understanding how people move through a study area can provide a critical baseline for interpreting stationary activity.



Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 27, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.







Types of Data Collected:  
Stationary Activity

Time Started Page		12:00		Time Completed Page		12:24																											
Square		Porter																															
Page #		2																															
		Gender	Age	Posture	Sun	Activities																											
Zone #	Group #	Male	Female	Other/unknown	0-12	13-18	19-40	41-64	65+	Standing	Sitting - private	Sitting - pub. movable	Sitting - pub. fixed	Sitting - pub. secondary	Lying down	In sun (20%+)	In shade (80%+)	Consuming	Conversing (in-person)	Phone/Laptop, etc.	Reading	Playing	Physical recreation	With pet	Waiting for transit	Selling	Canvassing/soliciting	Working (other)	Performing	Smoking	Panhandling	Notes on groups/individuals	
1501	22	1	1																														
1502	22	1	1																														

# Stationary Activity Survey Overview

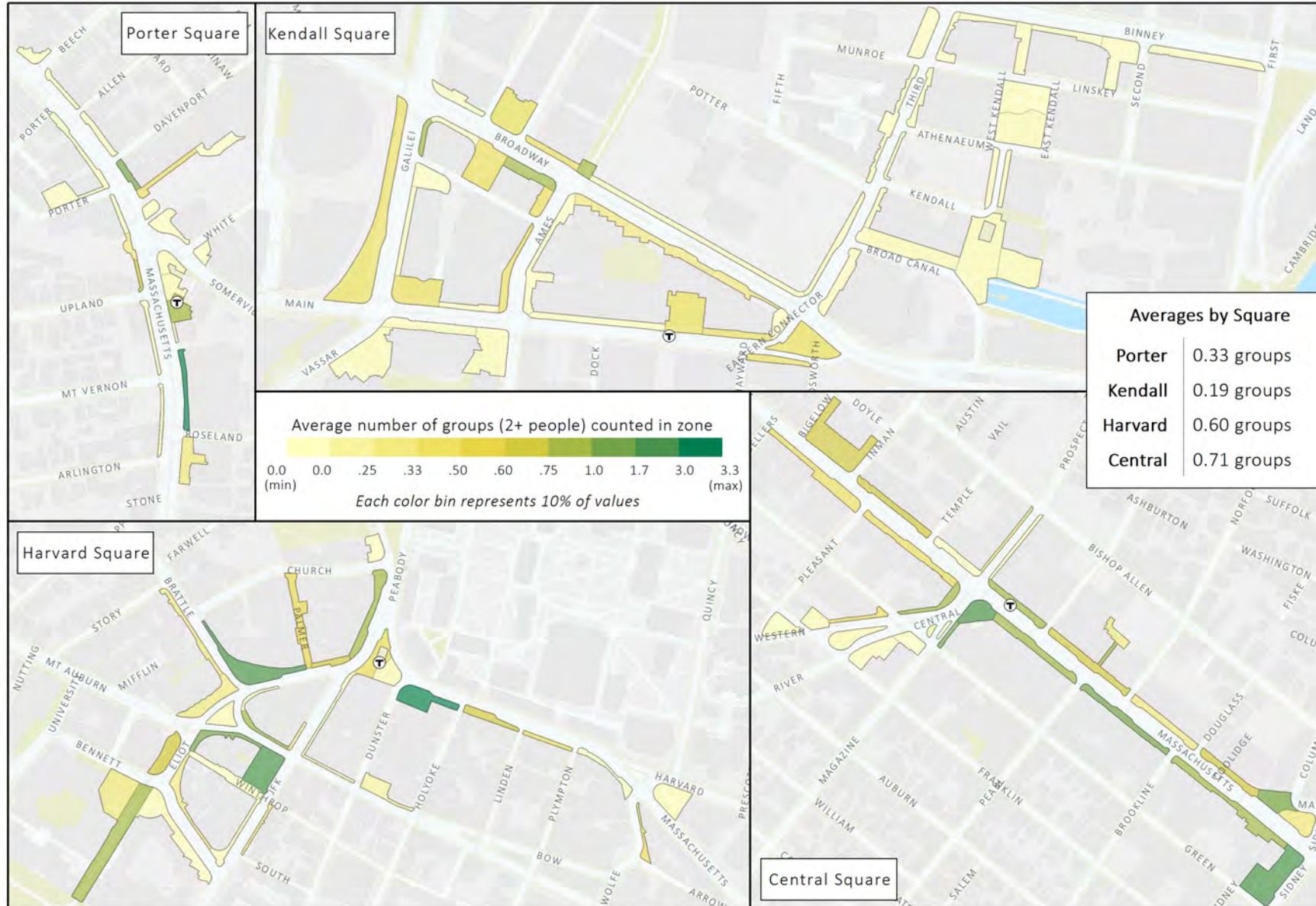


Average number of surveys collected per zone in each square:

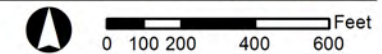
	Morning 8:00 – 9:30 AM	Midday 12:00 – 1:30 PM	Evening 5:30 – 7:00 PM	Total surveys
Central	1	2.4	2.4	5.8
Harvard	1	2.5	<b>0.5</b>	4
Kendall	1	1	<b>0.5</b>	2.5
Porter	1	1.4	1.5	4



# Number of Groups | Morning + Midday Study Periods



Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 26, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.



# Findings





# Findings by Block

# 1369 Coffeehouse (Block)



- 8 people lingering on average
- Private seating is highly utilized (13%)
- Private seating feels open to public and is mixed with public seating
- **Recommendation:** replicate this kind of seating elsewhere





# 730 Tavern (Block)

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- 5 people lingering on average
- Highest amount of private seating (62)
- Only 3% of private seating is occupied
- **Recommendation:** storefront intensity could support 1369-style public/private seating mix



# Leader Bank (Block)

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- 1 person lingering on average
- No high-activity storefronts
- Stationary activity is lowest of all zones on Mass Ave



# Carl Barron Plaza

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- 18 people lingering on average
- Twice as much activity as second most active zone
- Centrality, canopy, and seating capacity set the plaza apart from other zones



# Central Square Florist (Block)

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- 9 people lingering on average
- Zone with third highest stationary activity, despite lowest tree canopy coverage along Mass Ave zones studied
- Two thirds of people lingering are waiting for the bus



# CVS (Block)

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- 9 people lingering on average
- 92% are waiting for the bus
- Notable lack of tree canopy (second lowest of all zones studied on Mass Ave)





# H-Mart (Block)



- 2 people lingering on average
- Surprisingly low stationary activity (about 25% of similar zones), despite:
  - Some of highest pedestrian volumes (300-1000 per hour)
  - Central location
  - High storefront intensity
- Most “privatized” block (16 private seats and 0 public seats), but seating was empty during every observation
- **Recommendation:** conditions support significant public seating (or public/private)





# Target (Block)

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- 7 people lingering on average
- Highest pedestrian volumes across the four squares (250-1500 per hour)
- Second most “privatized” block: 34 private vs. two benches.
- One of two “coziest” blocks in Central: richly textured storefront experience; good tree canopy
- **Recommendation:** significantly more public seating





# Harvard Square Eyecare (Block)

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- 3 people lingering on average
- Low activity likely due to:
  - Unengaging, repetitive, and inactive storefront experience
  - Low seating capacity (2 benches)



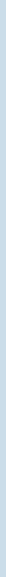
# Middle East (Block)

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- 8 people lingering on average
- Highest pedestrian volumes across the four squares (250-1500 per hour)
- Third most “privatized” block: 54 private vs. two benches.
- One of two “coziest” blocks in Central: richly textured storefront experience; good tree canopy
- **Recommendation:** add public seating





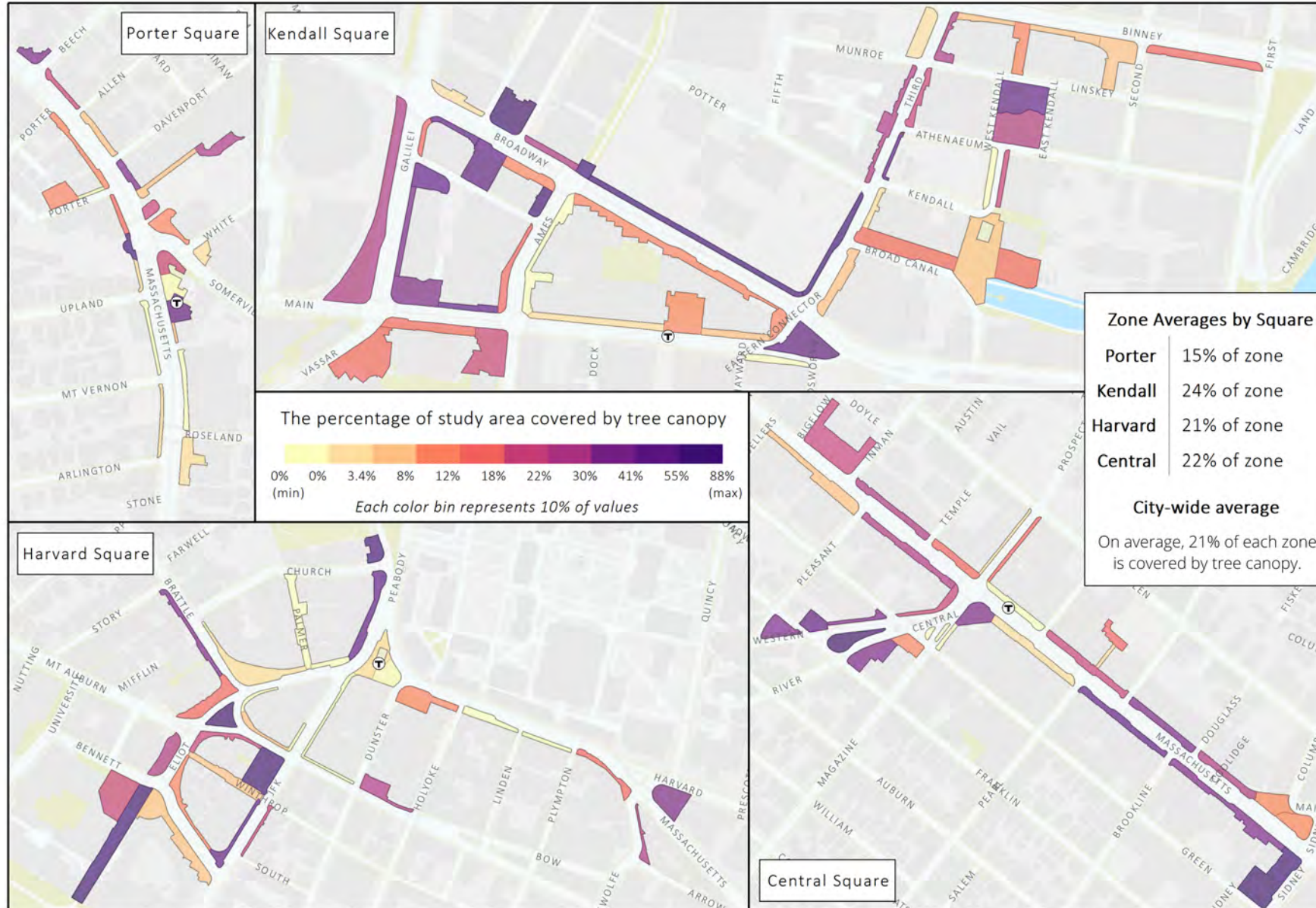
# Site Qualities



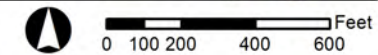


## Tree Canopy Coverage | Site Conditions

Documenting the environment of our public spaces can help us understand what qualities of the public realm are perceived to be inviting by the public.



Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 26, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.

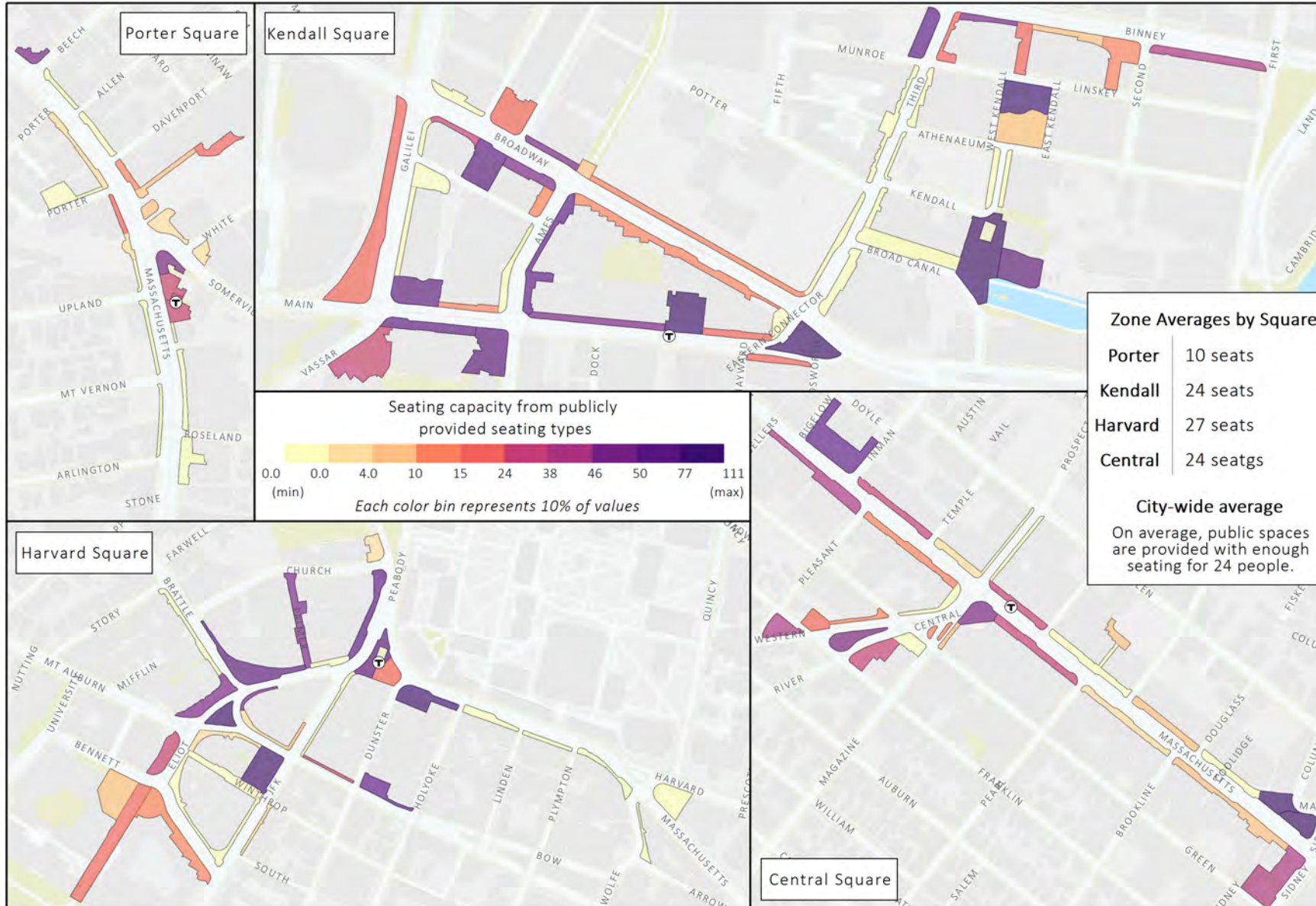




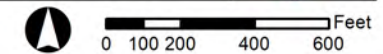
# Publicly Provided Seating Capacity

Includes public moveable, public fixed, and public secondary (built into landscape) seating types.

Public Realm Evaluation: Cambridge, MA



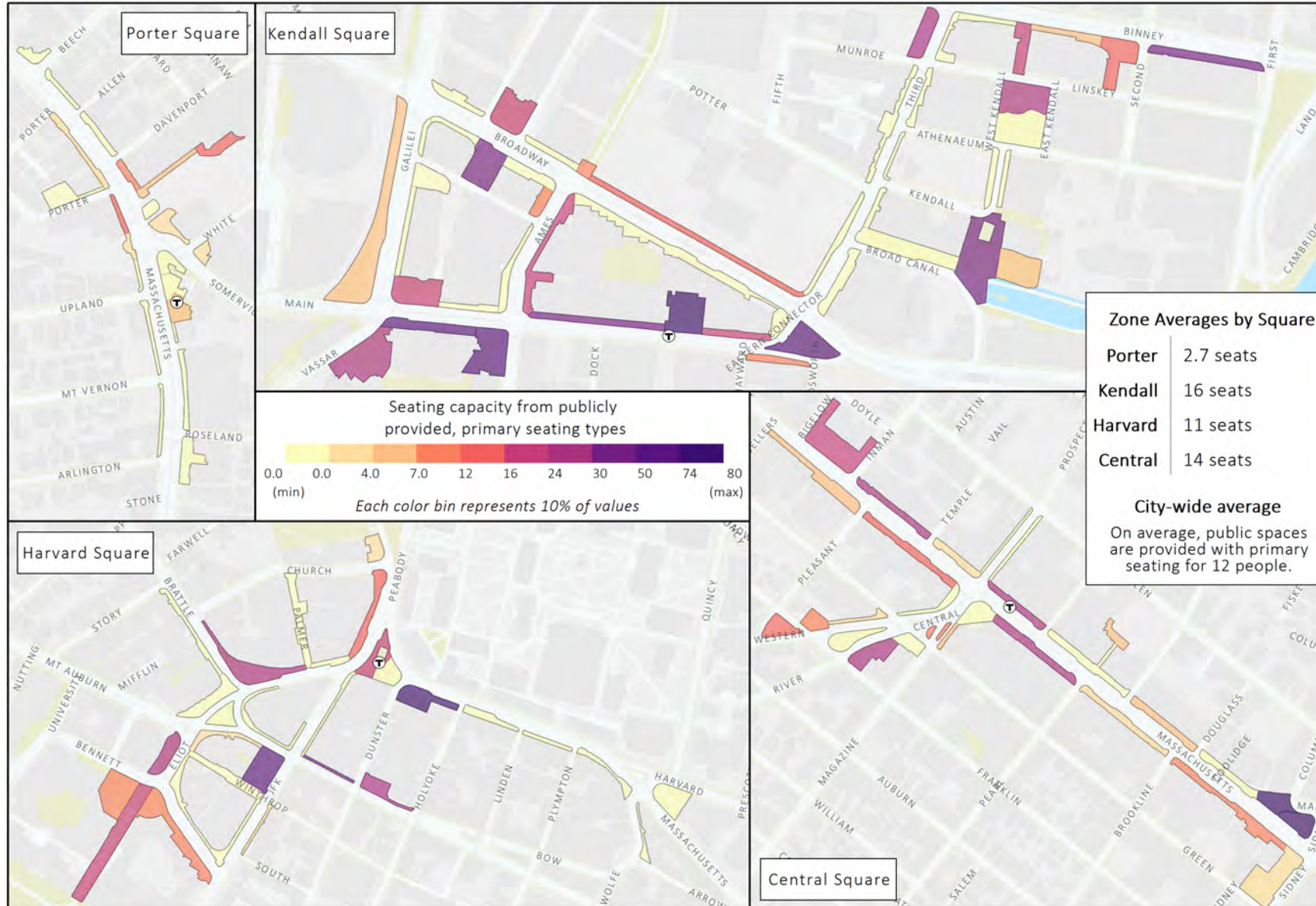
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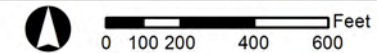


# Primary Seating Capacity

Includes public moveable and public fixed seating types



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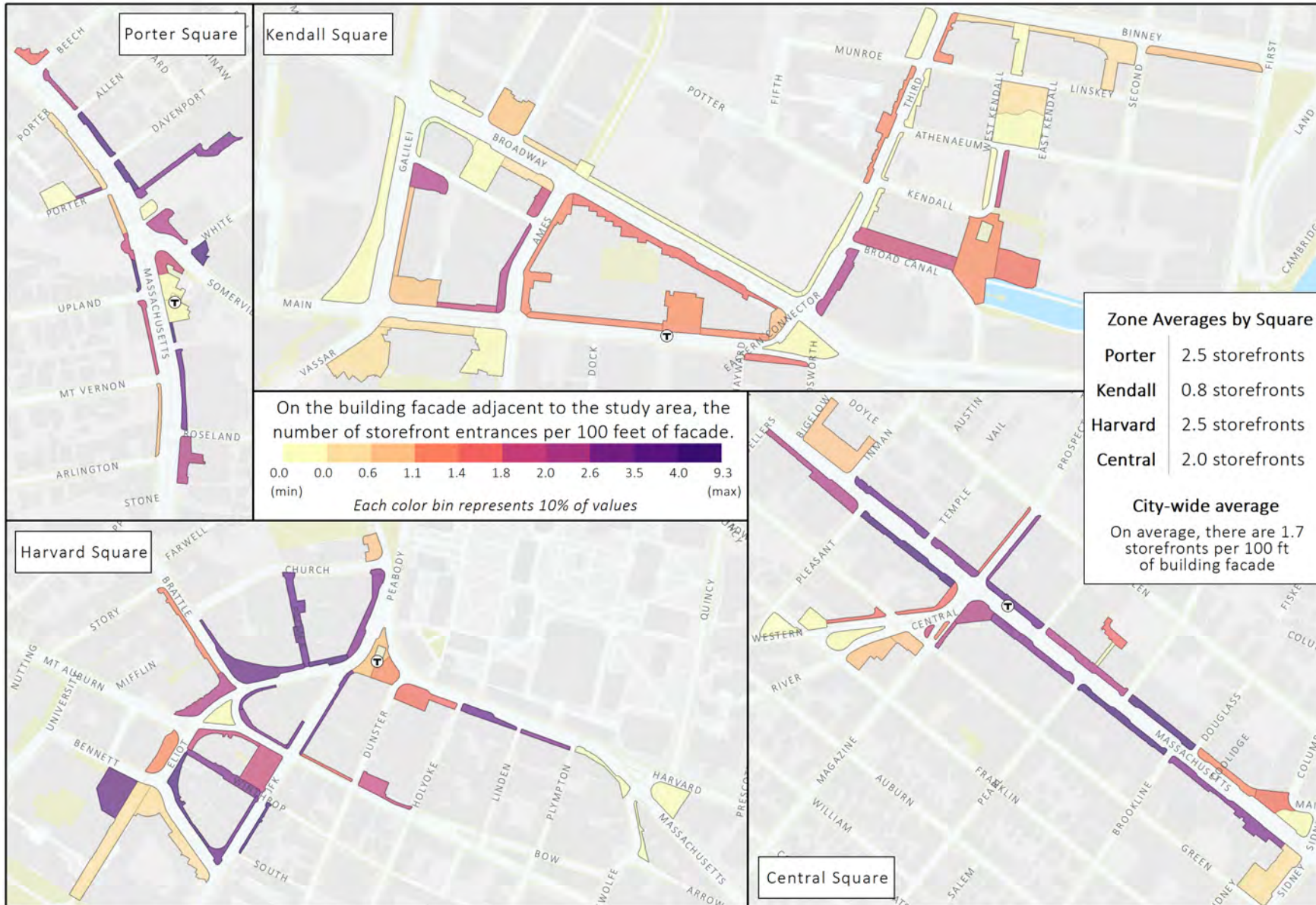






## Storefront Density | All Storefront Types

Documenting the environment of our public spaces can help us understand what qualities of the public realm are perceived to be inviting by the public.



Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 26, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.



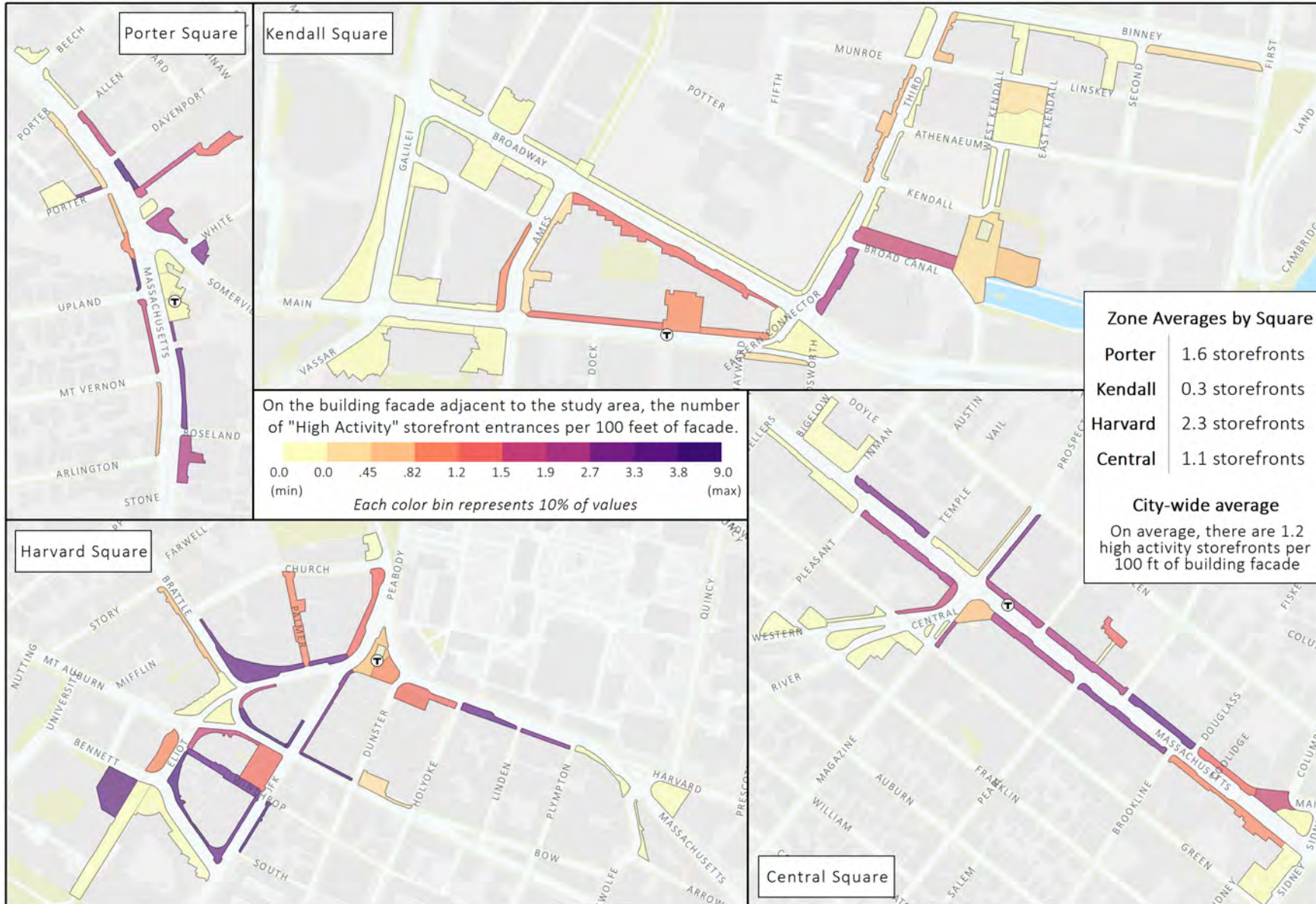
0 100 200 400 600 Feet





## Storefront Density | "High Activity" Storefront Types

High activity storefronts include uses like cafes, restaurants, bars, dry cleaners, entertainment, barber shops, dry cleaners, etc.



Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 26, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.



0 100 200 400 600 Feet

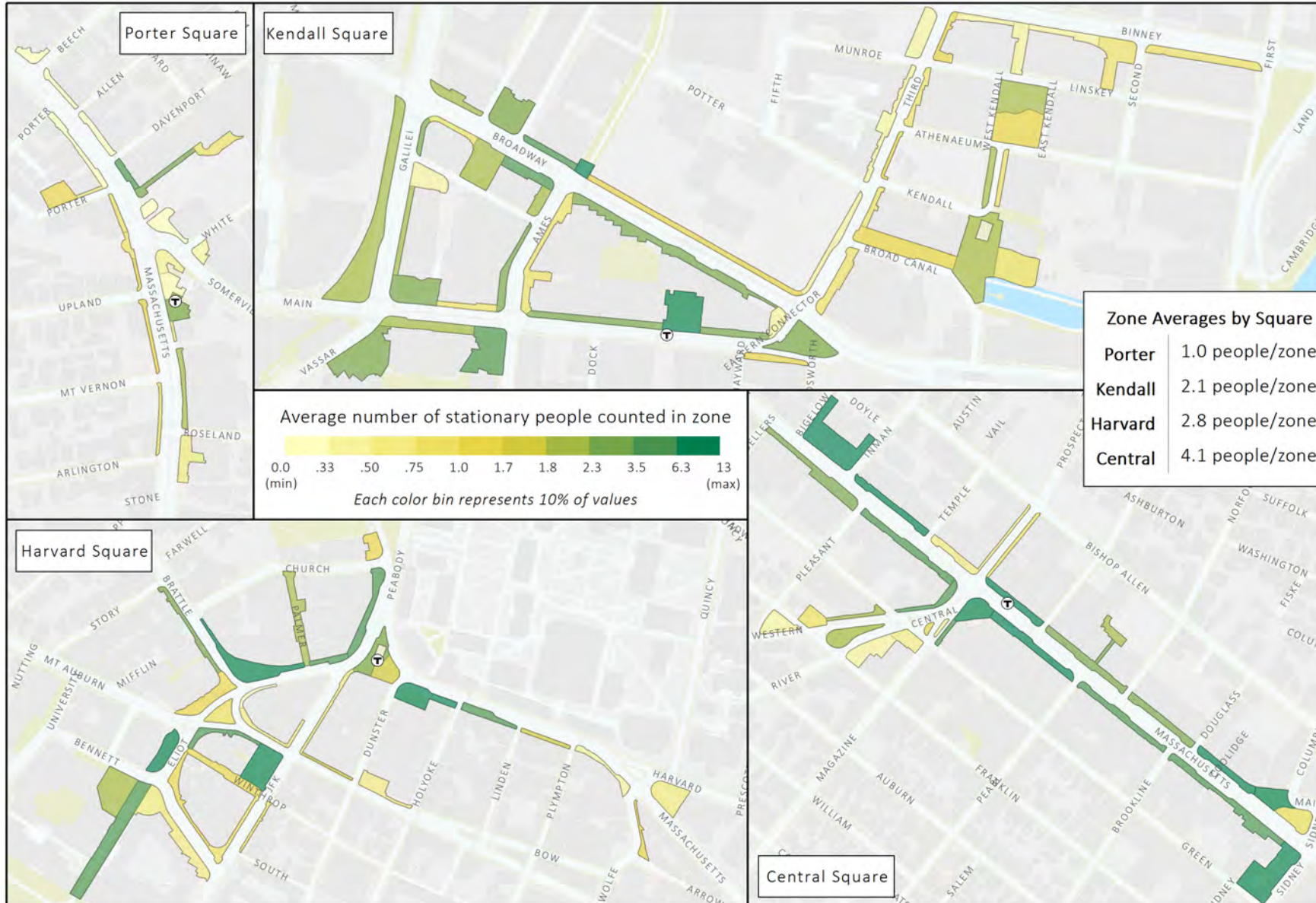


# Stationary Activity

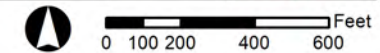


# Number of Stationary Individuals | Morning + Midday Study Periods

Public Realm Evaluation: Cambridge, MA

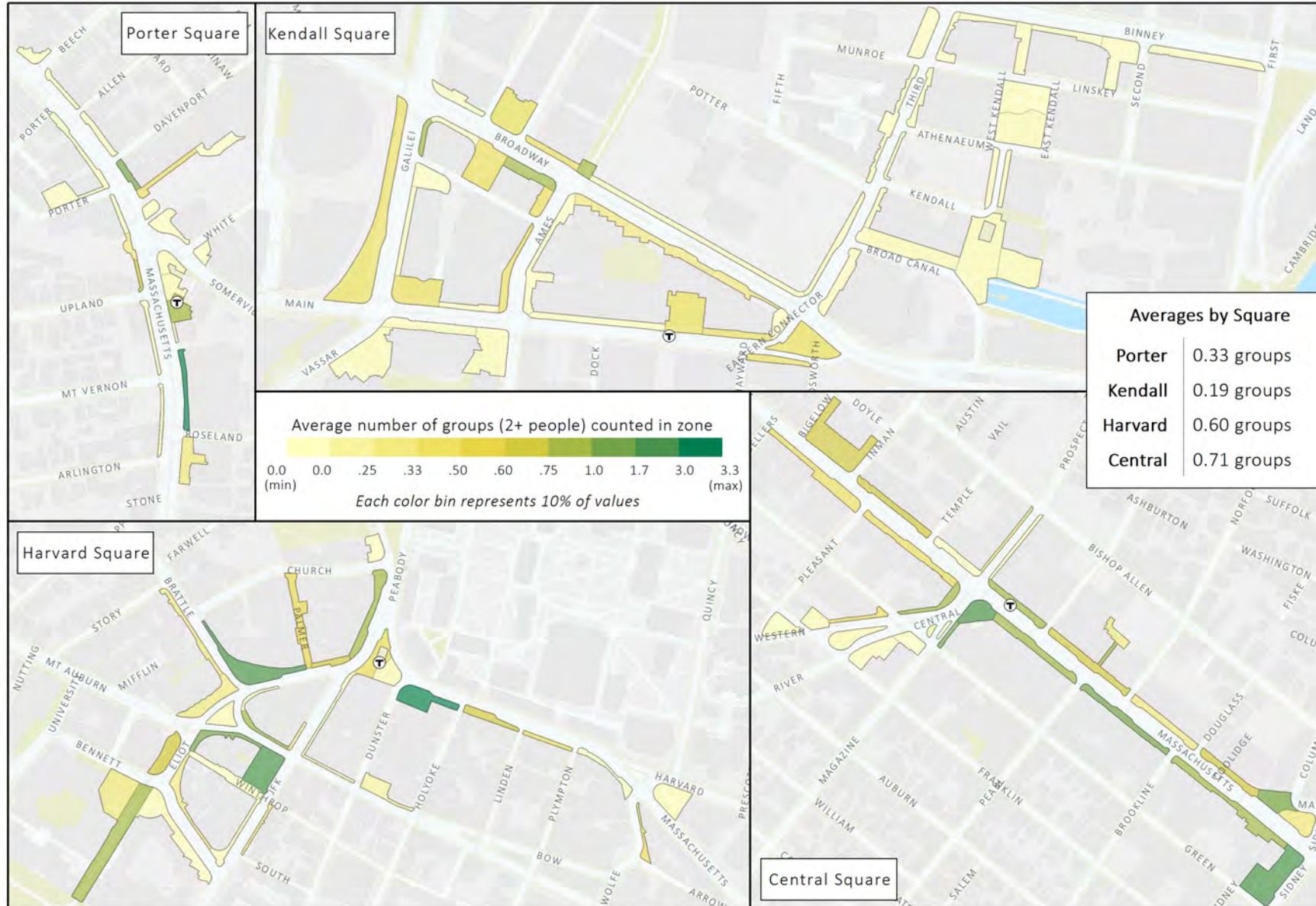


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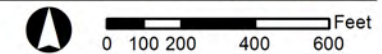




# Number of Groups | Morning + Midday Study Periods

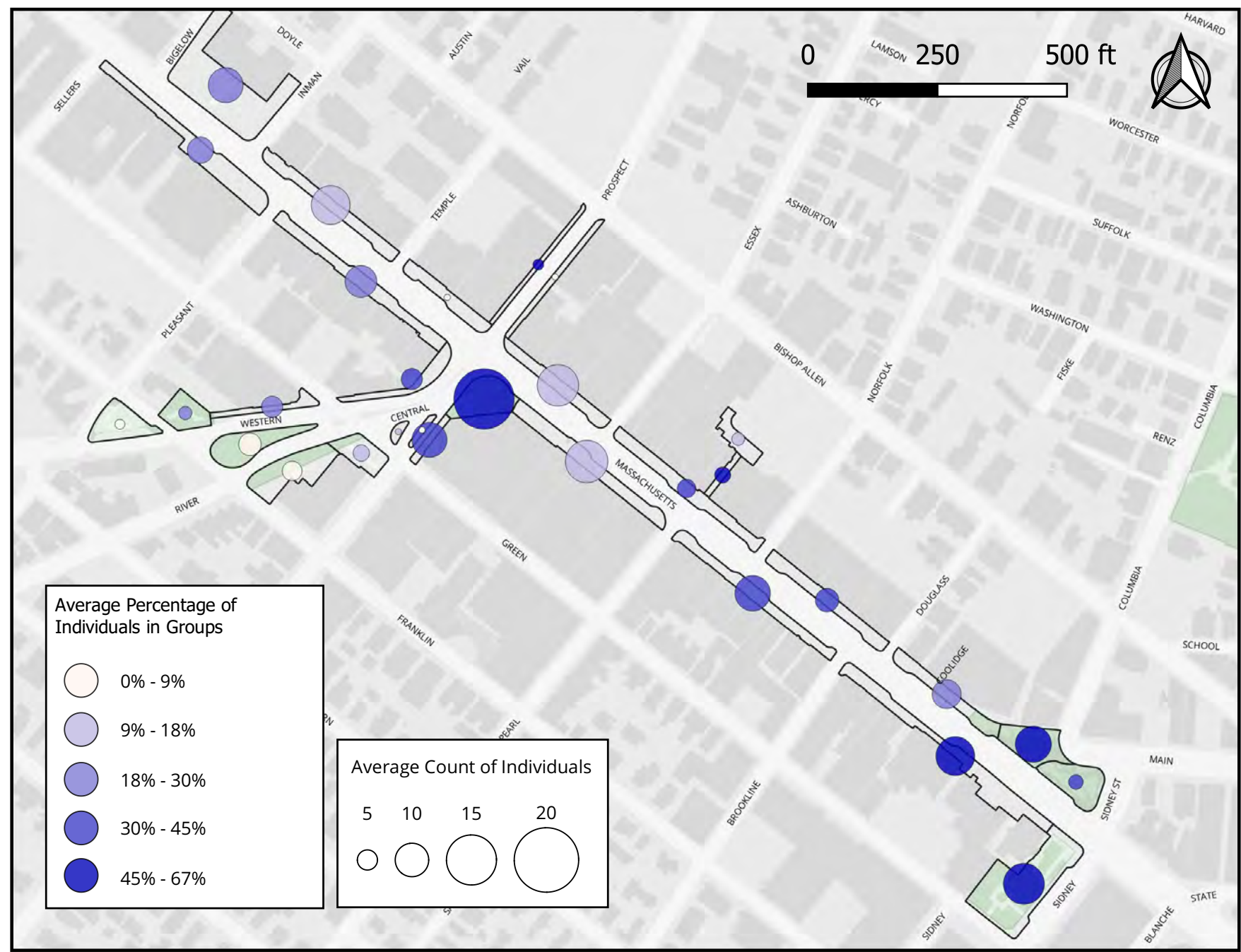


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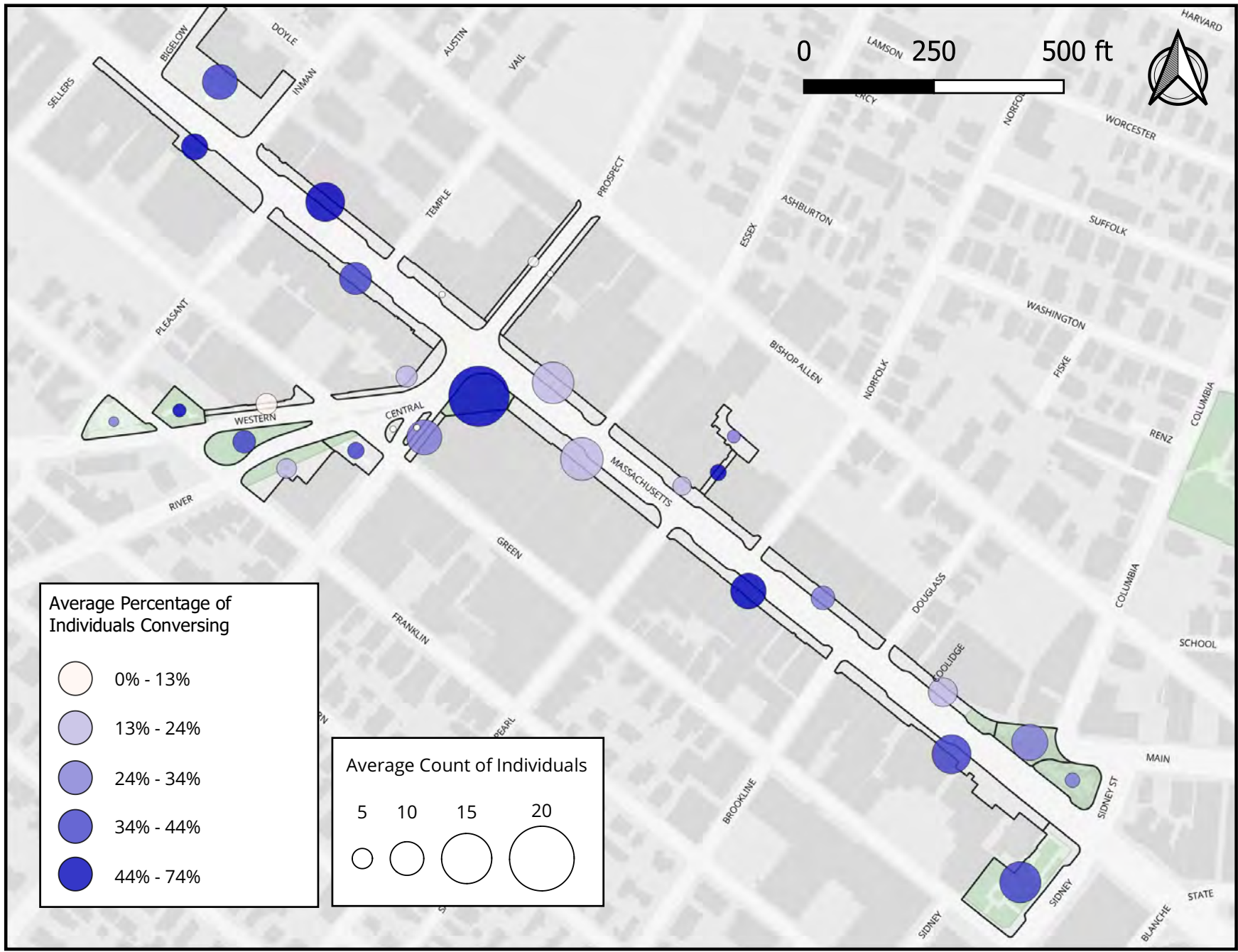




# Portion in Groups



# Portion Conversing

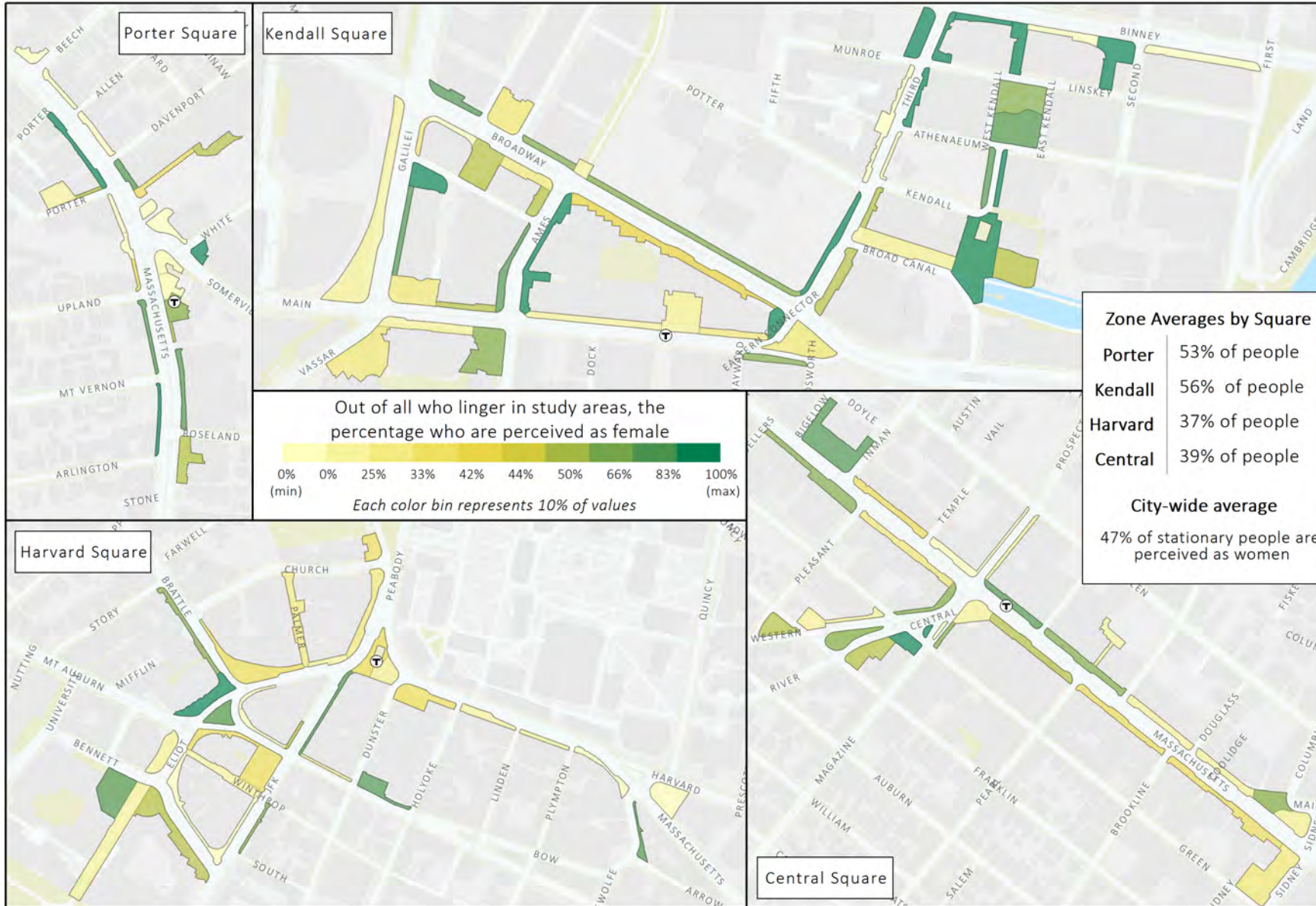




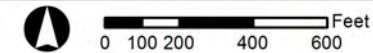


## Women | Morning + Midday Study Periods

Documenting who uses our public spaces can help us understand how they invite or attract different user groups.



Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 26, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.



Portion Women,  
Children, or Seniors  
(perceived)





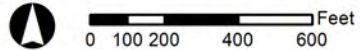


### Standing | Morning + Midday Study Periods

By documenting people's postures, public life data can help illuminate where the seating supply does not meet current demand.



Map prepared by Rachel Bowers on August 26, 2020. Survey data collected through MSYEP in Summer 2019.



# Discussion



# Discussion

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- What insights do you take from this data?
- How might we support a flourishing public life in the square?
- What have you learned from temporary changes during COVID?