

6

S T R A T E G Y S I X

Improve City Life and School Quality

Summary

Adopted in 2008, MetroFuture is Greater Boston's long term regional plan. The foundation of the plan is a well-defined vision for the region. Thirteen implementation strategies were included to support progress towards the vision. An extensive community engagement process ensured that MAPC constructed the vision and strategies from the hopes and dreams of the region. In anticipation of an update to the regional plan, MAPC is evaluating the extent to which regional actors, either intentionally or unintentionally, implemented these strategies. The authors gathered the information that follows through conversations with MAPC staff and content experts.

One precursor to the vision taking place meant ensuring a high quality of life for all residents, but particularly for those living in urban areas. Strategy #6, [Improve City Life and School Quality](#), offered strategies intended to address these inequities, ensuring that urban education was improved, municipal services were made more effective and efficient, and local vitality was highlighted and pursued.

Federal funding for parks, education, and housing diminished or was precarious in many of these areas, which left the state and municipalities to fill in gaps. The state invested and expanded urban parks. Many of these programs required local partnerships and matching funds, requiring municipalities to plan for urban improvements. The state, with incentives from the federal government, also made important innovations in the pursuit of education reform. However, housing policy environment stayed relatively constant and as housing prices and rents continue to rise, more assistance will be needed to keep people in their homes.

On a regional level, there was a focus on partnerships to increase public safety and emergency preparedness, resulting in multi-jurisdictional efforts to reduce violence and crime. A variety of non-profits pursued preservation or extensions of urban greenspace. Local non-profits fill important educational services gaps, particularly when it comes to out-of-school youth or connecting youth to employment opportunities. Locally, municipalities enacted the Community Preservation Act, which provided additional funds to improve urban landscapes and culture. Municipalities like Arlington, Norwell, and Marblehead invested in key revitalization efforts such as complete streets, parks, and waterfront access. Local data and technology innovations were leveraged to improve decision-making and streamline municipal services.

As more and more people move to urban areas, displacement continues to be an unintended consequence of improving city life. Discretionary municipal resources are dwindling and residents are being priced out of their urban neighborhoods. More focus on vulnerable residents and on the unintended consequences of redevelopment, technology, and urbanization will be needed to ensure a high quality of life for all residents.

Sub-Strategy Review

Sub-Strategy A: Ensure high quality educational opportunities in urban communities

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS

- The state was already in the process of strengthening its education policy in 2008 and the launch of the Obama Administration's Race to the Top program (2009) fast forwarded policy improvements in Massachusetts. Joining Race to the Top meant more liberal rules for charter schools, which included increasing the charter school cap.
- The Massachusetts Legislature passed An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap (2010), which included many significant shifts in education policy:
 - Lifted the hard cap on charter schools and introduced an alternative cap based on need;
 - Privileged proven providers and streamlined their applications for more schools and students;
 - Allowed for innovation schools, which are not charter schools, but have similar levels of autonomy;
 - Enabled initiatives like the Springfield Empowerment Zone, which extended autonomy of innovation schools to larger areas;
 - Provided the state with the ability to more aggressively intervene in underperforming schools. It also enabled the district to intervene outside of the collective bargaining agreement or school committee and to get additional state resources to do so.
- Massachusetts has taken proactive steps to restrict the use of zero-tolerance policies within its public schools. In 2012, Massachusetts legislature adopted Chapter 222: An Act Relative to Student Access to Educational Services and Exclusion from School, which established mechanisms to consider alternatives to suspension for non-serious offenses and mandated additional mechanisms for supporting youth in achieving and maintaining academic success.
- The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) 2.0, released in 2017, was the state's most recent assessment test and it emphasized standards that rely less on memorization and more on conceptual learning.
- The Massachusetts Early College Initiative, developed by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) provides grants of up to \$80,000 to districts and schools to grow and sustain high quality early college partnerships with state colleges.

- The Baker-Polito Administration also awarded \$1.25M in grants to launch new college access and completion programs. Through the Department of Higher Education's Performance Incentive Fund, the largest share of the fund is being used to launch new programs to allow high school students to take college courses before graduating from high school.
- 100 Males to College was created in 2015 to increase college access, enrollment, retention, and success for low-income males and males of color and particularly young, low-income Latino and African American men so that their prospects for success in college and careers are more attainable. The grant funding supports curriculum development, recruiting students, cultivating partnerships with community groups and identifying community resources, and delivering high impact activities for family engagement to support student success.
- In early 2017 the State was awarded \$2M from JP Morgan Chase to improve career education and expand career pathways for students.
- The MA Legislature established the Extended Learning Time (ELT) initiative, providing \$1,300 per pupil in grants to add 300 hours of annual education to transform learning. In 2014-2015, 22 schools in MA were participating. Massachusetts had 80 charter schools as of 2015, 66 of which had longer school days and/or years than average.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Funding for new initiatives is very rare.
- Since 2008, there have been few local attempts at significant changes to education.
- The majority of MA public high school students attend public Massachusetts universities, but funding for public higher education has decreased by about \$1,000 per student since 2008.

RELEVANT INDICATORS¹

- Overall, reading proficiency for the third grade student population in the region increased by 1 percentage point to 62% between the 2008-09 and 2013-14 school years. The results also show (see Figure 1) persistent educational disparities based on race and ethnicity, English language proficiency, and special education status, though there were some improvements. Despite gains in reading proficiency among 3rd grade Black (up 5 points to 37%) and Latino (up 1 point to 34%) students, their scores remain 25 and 28 points below the regional average of 62% proficient in the 2013-14 school year.
- Proficiency in math for 10th graders increased more substantially than reading for third graders. Black students saw the biggest gain, increasing nearly ten percentage points between 2008-09 and 2013-14. English Language Learners were the only group to not see significant improvement on the 10th grade test.

¹ While not directly tied to the success or failure of a sub-strategy, indicators show how the region has changed in the face of the aforementioned actions or inactions.

Figure 1: Advanced or Proficient 3rd Grade English MCAS Scores (2008-09 to 2013-14)

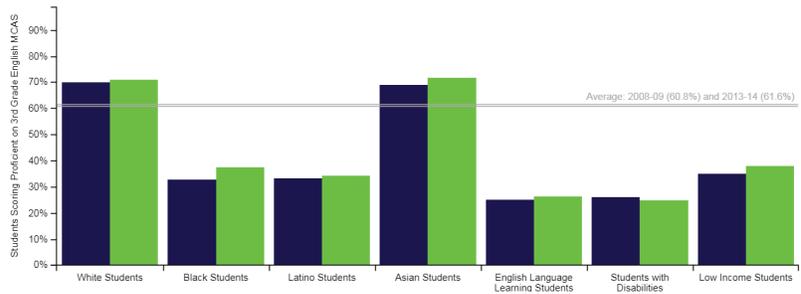
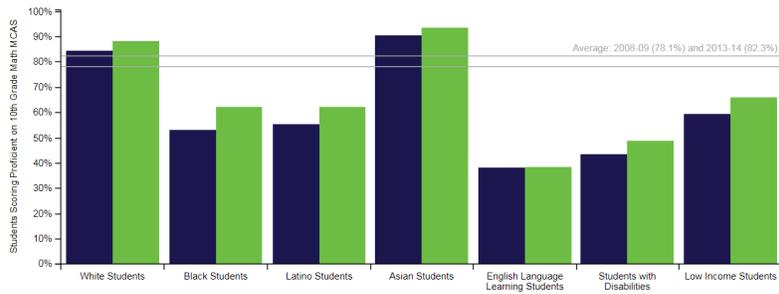
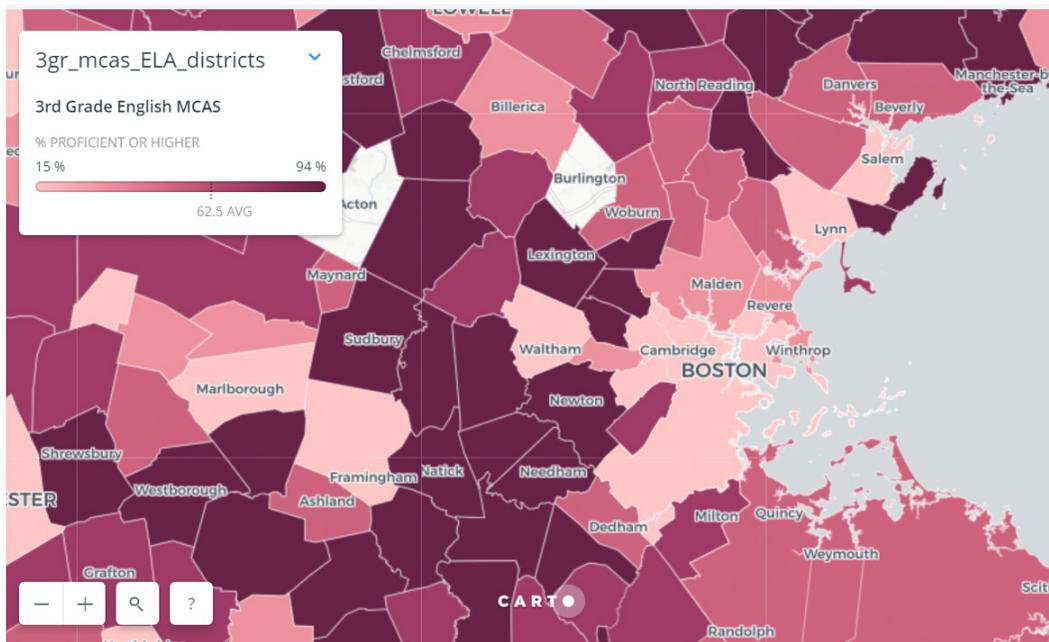


Figure 2: Post-Recession Employment Growth by Community Type



- Sub-strategy A documents the ways in which policy makers prioritized or failed to prioritize educational opportunities in urban areas. In the map below, representing 3rd grade english MCAS scores by municipality, it is evident that the the suburbs continue to outperform the more urban Inner Core.

Map 1: Percentage Advanced or Proficient in 3rd Grade English MCAS Scores (2013-2014)



- The region's in-school suspension rate declined from 1.5% in 2012 to 1.4% in 2015. Over the same period, the out-of-school suspension rate declined from 3.4% to 2.4% of all students. Despite overall decreases across districts, the rates of disciplinary action continue to remain the highest within majority student of color school districts. In school year 2015, the rate of in-school suspension (2.1%) within majority student of color districts is 1.1 percentage points higher than in school districts which are more than 75% White. For out-of-school suspensions, the rate of out-of-school suspensions in majority student of color districts (4.8%) is 3.7 percentage points higher than in districts with 25% or fewer students of color.

Figure 4: Percent of Students Receiving In-School Suspensions (2005-06 to 2015-16)

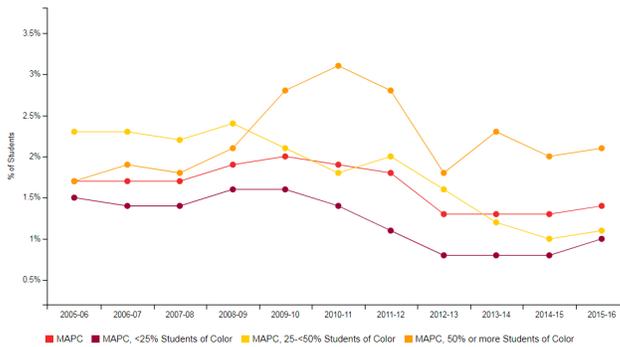
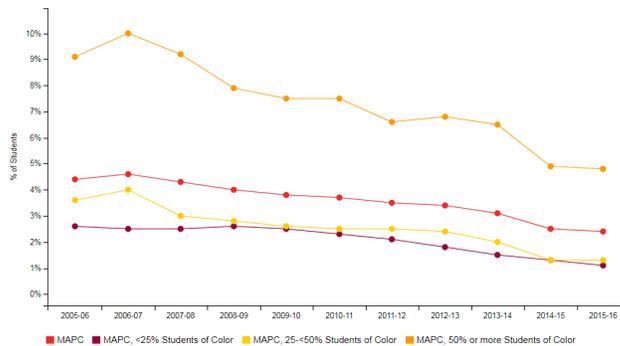


Figure 5: Percent of Students Receiving Out-School Suspensions (2005-06 to 2015-16)



Sub-Strategy B: Improve urban public safety

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- Community engagement and relationship-building for community policing has increased. Boston is seen as a national model for police-community relations.
- The state's Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) and the MAPC-administered Shannon Community Safety Initiative (helping communities create comprehensive plans for tackling youth gun violence) were noted for helping reduce gun violence in Massachusetts; state gun homicide rates fell 35% from 2010-2015.
- Anti-gang activity has grown in the region:
 - The North Shore Gang Task Force formed in the 2000s as a partnership with the FBI, Middlesex and Essex County law enforcement, and local police in Chelsea, Lynn, Lawrence, Haverhill, and Everett.
 - The Joint Juvenile Gang Unit between Revere, Lynn, Chelsea and Boston is another collaborative formed in the 2000s to tackle increasing youth gang activity.
 - The 71-member gang unit in Boston, formally known as the Youth Violence Strike Force, takes a three-pronged approach to policing: prevention, intervention, and enforcement. This includes playing basketball with youth and providing wraparound services to keep youth off the street
- Emergency preparedness has increased:
 - The Urban Area Security Council built collaboration for emergency preparedness between cities, police, fire, public health, and transit groups.
 - The Northeast Homeland Security Regional Advisory Council (NERAC) convened a regional, multidisciplinary school threat response team, provides coordination for regional SWAT teams, and built hospital emergency management capacity.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Shannon Grant funding has decreased in recent years. The program could benefit from more research and funding.
- Gang activity has been increasing in Revere and surrounding North Shore communities since the 2000s.
- NERAC funding has decreased from a high of \$6.5 million in 2004 to \$1.1 million in 2017.

RELEVANT INDICATORS:

- In the Metro Boston region, the areas with high poverty and high concentrations of people of color tend to be municipalities in the Inner Core and they experience

higher crime rates. Throughout the state, both violent crime and property crime rates have decreased steadily each year from 2009-2015, however geographic inequity in the distribution of crime remains. Violent crime has decreased 14.4% with 3.9 violent crimes occurring per 1,000 residents; and property crime has decreased 26.5% with 16.9 property crimes occurring per 1,000 residents. Chelsea, Lynn, and Boston continue to have the highest violent crime rates in the region with 10.8, 7.8, and 7.1 violent crimes committed per 1,000 in 2015. Adjacent Inner Core communities such as Somerville, Cambridge, and Everett had violent crime rates per 1,000 of 2.4, 3.0, and 3.4 respectively. By contrast more affluent municipalities in maturing and developing suburbs such as Weston, Hanover, and Wayland continue to have much lower rates at under 0.1 crimes per 1,000 people.

- Findings: Between 2000 and 2015, property crime decreased in all community types, most dramatically so in the Inner Core (-43%), where rates fell from 3,338 per 100,000 in 2000 to 1,896 per 100,000 in 2015. Property crime also decreased 37% in Developing Suburbs, 36% in Regional Urban Centers and 35% in Maturing Suburbs.
- The disparities in property crime rate in 2000 were high for the Inner Core, with a property crime rate of 3,338 per 100,000, and Regional Urban Centers, with a rate of 2,712 per 100,000, compared to the 1,404 per 100,000 in Developing Suburbs. The disparity decreased by 2015 for the Inner Core 48%, falling from a difference of 1,934 to 1,006 per 100,000. The disparity in property crime rate in Regional Urban Centers compared to Developing Suburbs also decreased 35%, falling from a difference of 1,308 to 852 per 100,000.

Figure 6: Property Crime by Rate by Community Type

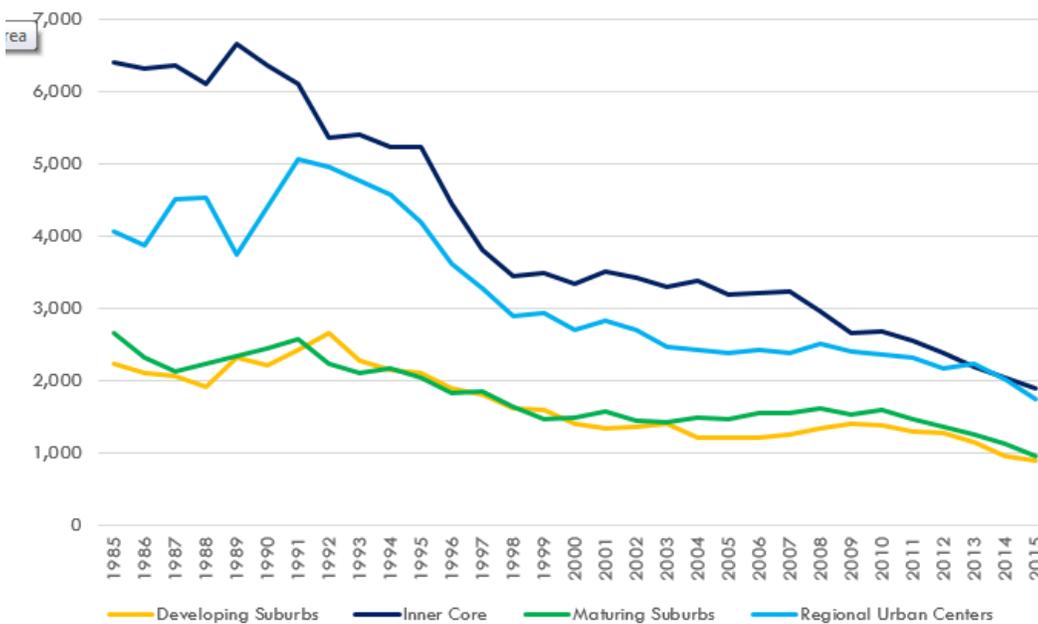
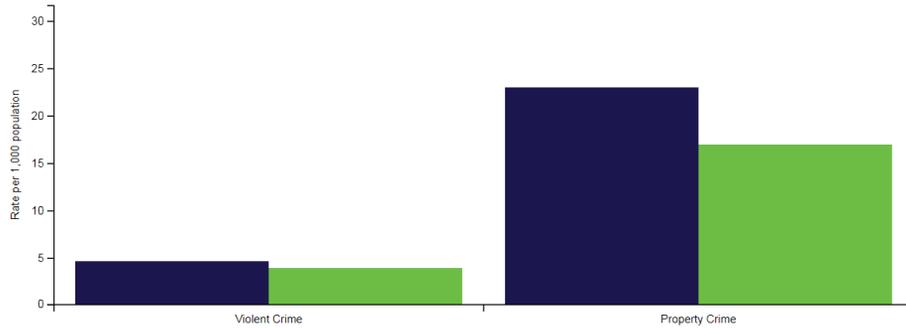
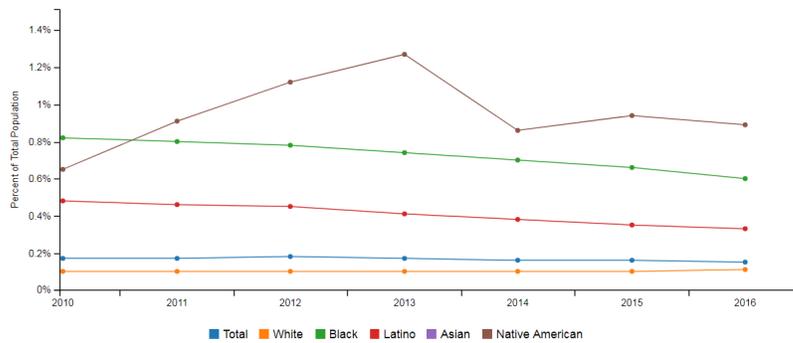


Figure 7: Violent Crime and Property Crime Per Capita (2009 vs 2015)



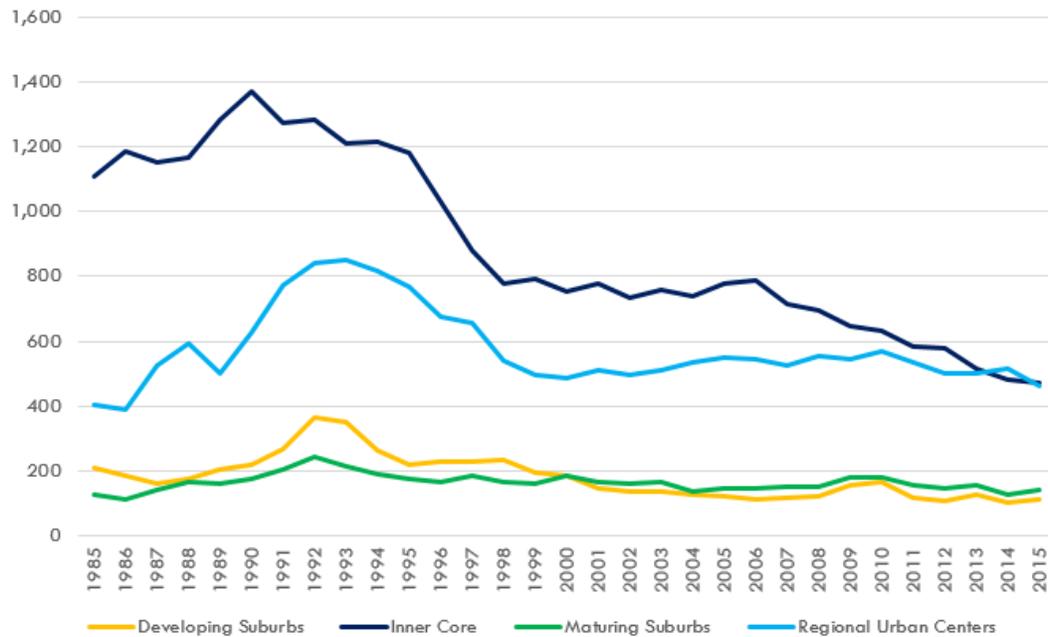
- The state incarceration rate has decreased nearly 12% from 11,361 on January 1, 2010 to 10,014 in January 1, 2016. However, despite noticeable decreases, disparities still persist as Native American, Black, and Latino populations continue to have above average incarceration rates. Within our region, the Inner Core receives the highest number of returning former prisoners in the state, while Developing Suburbs receives the lowest. Boston, Lynn, and Quincy received the highest number of returning formerly incarcerated people on average from 2009-2016. The state's average three-year recidivism rate⁶ has decreased 7 percentage points from 2008-2012 to 32%.

Figure 8: Total Department of Corrections as a Percent of Total Population of Massachusetts (2010 to 2016)



- Findings: Between 2000 and 2015, violent crime decreased in all community types, substantially so in the Inner Core (-37%), Developing Suburbs (-39%), and Maturing Suburbs (-37%), and by a smaller margin in Regional Urban Centers (-5%).
- The disparities in violent crime rate in 2000 were high for the Inner Core, with a violent crime rate of 754 per 100,000 in 2000, compared to 185 per 100,000 in Developing Suburbs, and in Regional Urban Centers, where the rate was 487 per 100,000. The disparity decreased for the Inner Core compared to Developing Suburbs by 37%, so that in 2015, the rate in the Inner Core was 473 per 100,000 and 113 per 100,000 in Developing Suburbs. For Regional Urban Centers, however, the disparity increased 16%, because the decline in violent crime rate in Developing Suburbs outpaced the marginal decline in Regional Urban Centers.

Figure 9: Violent Crime by Community Type in MetroFuture region (1985-2015)



Sub-Strategy C: Foster sustainable neighborhood redevelopment

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- The Community Investment Tax Credit program was created and brings more funding to Community Development Corporations to develop affordable housing, with a cap of \$6 million per year allocated to community organizations across the state. Over 30 community-based organizations in MAPC’s region received CITC funding in 2018.
- Vacant commercial properties in downtown areas were revitalized, and zoning was modified to incentivize filling vacant spaces. For example:
 - Arlington passed a bylaw which established a vacant storefront inventory that imposes a fee on vacant storefronts and requires landlords to provide proof they are attempting to fill the storefront.
 - Norwell, with assistance from MAPC, initiated a downtown revitalization project in 2015 to improve intersections, increase access to outdoor space, plant trees, and increase economic activity.
 - Marblehead and Swampscott worked with MAPC to “repair” a sprawling square, improving pedestrian access and bringing more businesses into the area.
- MassHousing’s Planning for Housing Production grant program allows municipalities to implement housing development strategies; one focus is on infrastructure planning and improvements, which will help facilitate redevelopment.

- The Community Preservation Act (CPA) continues to be a tool for local land acquisition, allowing municipalities to create a local Community Preservation Fund for open space protection, historic preservation, affordable housing, and outdoor recreation. The number of communities receiving CPA funds reached a new high (157) in 2016.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Federal funding cuts to the Department of Housing and Urban Development reduced Community Development Block Grant funding to CDCs and eliminated the Housing Trust Fund.
- Concerns about insufficient funding for 40R/40S deters communities from adopting 40R Smart Growth Overlay Districts (SGODs), which are targeted to under-utilized industrial land and other smart growth locations, incentivizing residential and mixed-use development.
- Municipalities are concerned that there is not enough CPA funding now that a majority of communities, including Boston, have adopted it.
- Concerns around development impacts (infrastructure – roads, sewer; congestion; schools) exist and are used as reasons not to redevelop at higher densities using smart growth strategies.
- High housing costs are putting some urban residents at risk for displacement.

Sub-Strategy D:

Improve urban services, maintenance, and accessibility

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- MAPC helped twenty-two cities and towns purchase smart parking meters, while municipalities like Malden, Maynard and Arlington implemented smart parking programs using data-driven parking solutions.
- Numerous municipalities in the region implemented the see-click-fix program, allowing people to submit online photos/descriptions of infrastructure and public safety and quality-of-life issues.
- The complete streets program has expanded to hundreds of municipalities across the state and has improved street, pedestrian, and biking infrastructure through funding and safer, more accessible streets.
- More funding for Safe Routes to School was established in 2012 with the Transportation Alternatives Program administered by the Federal Highway Safety Administration. The program works with school communities, law enforcement, and public health departments to increase biking and walking among elementary and middle school students.

- Numerous municipalities in the region transitioned to online bill-pay and permitting systems to allow for easier, faster services.
- MAPC worked to increase urban mobility services by helping to launch the Hubway (now Blue Bikes) bike share program, with over 1,600 bikes across 170 stations in Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, and Somerville. Similarly, dockless bike share from two vendors will bring these mobility services to 13 more communities in the region this year.
- Public works technology has improved, including the use of sensors to evaluate pavement quality and determine where repairs are needed.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS

- Municipal funding for new investments and services continues to shrink and municipalities are over-reliant on property tax revenue

Sub-Strategy E:

Foster urban vitality: arts, culture, shops, and services

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- [Mass Cultural Districts](#), authorized by the legislature in 2010 and launched in 2011, help local arts, humanities, and science organizations improve the quality and range of their public programs through grants and services. Since 2011, municipalities have created forty-three cultural districts, eleven of which are in the MAPC region.
- Arts and culture features, like the [Boston Greenway](#), are being used to activate spaces in and around Boston, but examples grow more infrequent outside of metro Boston.
- The creation of MAPC [Arts and Culture](#) division has resulted in numerous arts and culture plans and creative place-making workshops to connect arts, culture, and planning. MAPC hired an artist-in-residence to develop more arts and culture projects in the MAPC region. Some municipal arts and culture examples of progress include:
 - MAPC, Everett Community Growers, and the City of Everett developed Earthwork Offering, a community-based public art and urban agriculture engagement project.
 - A Cultural District was implemented in Beverly to promote the arts. Beverly also established Great Estates zoning to preserve historic sites.
 - Wakefield and MAPC implemented the Downtown Wakefield Arts and Culture District.
 - MAPC is working with the City of Boston on the revitalization of the Strand Theatre in Boston's Upham's Corner, which is in the process of being designated an Arts Innovation District.

- The Point Neighborhood in Salem was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2014.
- MAPC worked with the City of Cambridge to develop Small Business Emergency Preparedness curriculum and workshops for small business owners to develop more resilience to disasters.

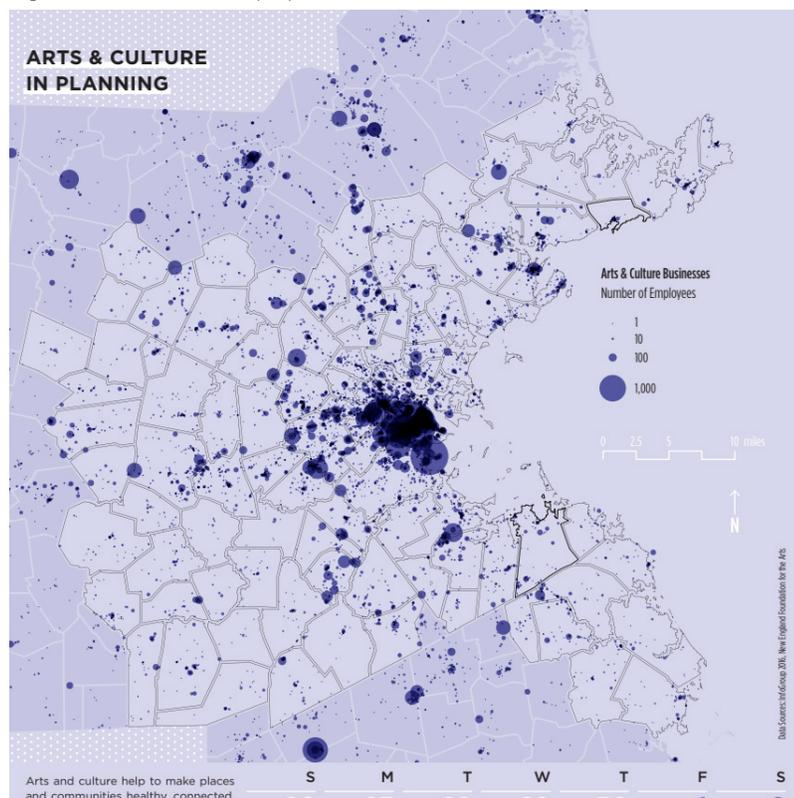
BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Funding is limited for arts and culture planning and installations. National funding is at risk for the National Endowment for the Arts.
- While the importance of arts and culture is growing, it is still not universally accepted as a planning principle. More can be done to communicate the benefits that arts and culture planning can provide.
- Increasing real estate costs are displacing artists, such as in the Fort Point neighborhood of Boston.

RELEVANT INDICATORS:

- Businesses that embrace art and creativity in their work provide jobs and careers in an ever-growing creative economy. About 4% of jobs in the MAPC region are in the creative economy, defined as occupations and industries with a focus on the production and distribution of cultural goods, services, and intellectual property.

Figure 11: Number of Employees in Arts and Culture Businesses in Massachusetts (2016)



Sub-strategy F: Improve urban parks and the urban environment

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- The state's previous environmental bond bill, "[An Act Providing for the Preservation and Improvement of Land, Parks and Clean Energy in the Commonwealth](#)," was reauthorized in 2014. This was the largest environmental bond in state history with \$2.2 billion in funding. Over \$350 million was earmarked for land conservation programs, including \$111 million for a new urban park program for underserved neighborhoods and matching grants for cities and towns. In the past three years, Fitchburg, Somerville, and Medford have received grants to build community gardens as a part of a larger park renovation. CPA funds, mentioned above, have also been used to reinvest in urban parks.
- There are many more urban farms in the region today than in 2008 - 35 compared to 2. Boston, Somerville, Cambridge, Arlington, and other cities in the Metro Boston area have implemented or are in the process of implementing urban agriculture policies. In 2017, MAPC provided technical assistance to Cambridge in support of its urban agriculture policy development. These improvements build off the Massachusetts Food System Plan and the [Municipal Food Access Strategies](#) toolkit (developed with CLF Ventures), which provides guidance on zoning and other strategies for agriculture, food access and food systems.
- Inner core contiguous open space and recreation plans were completed in Chelsea, Revere, Everett, and Malden. Many of MAPC's Open Space and Master Plans contain recommendations on parks and urban climate impacts. For example:
 - The City of Chelsea [Waterfront Vision Master Plan](#) will improve public access to the waterfront.
- A [Low Impact Development toolkit](#) was developed by MAPC and Commonwealth of Massachusetts EEA as part of the Smart Growth toolkit, which encourages cities and towns to identify critical natural resources for preservation and utilize green stormwater practices. LID has been implemented in developments in Boston, Plymouth, Lincoln, and Acton. The Massachusetts Municipal Stormwater Separated Sewer (MS4) program, established in 2015, encourages more groundwater filtration through the use of green stormwater practices as well.
- The "[Greening the Gateway Cities](#)" is a statewide tree-planting initiative, which has increased the urban tree canopy by 8,000 trees. Chelsea was the first city to pilot the program.
- Hundreds of miles of trails were constructed in the region over the past 10 years:
 - Construction began on the Northern Strand trail connecting Everett, Malden, Chelsea, Saugus and Revere; the governor announced \$1.5M to complete the trail through these gateway cities and improve bridges and drainage.
 - The Newton Upper Falls Greenway trail/linear park was completed.

- Construction began on the tri-community bikeway through Winchester, Stoneham, and Woburn.
- The Watertown Greenway between Watertown and Cambridge was completed.
- Construction began on the Mass Central Rail Trail's first segment between Cambridge and Belmont.
- Increased data availability helps cities and towns establish targeted green space in urban areas. For example, a partnership between the Trust for Public Land and the Metro Mayors Climate Smart Region developed a geospatial decision support tool to use parks, open space and green infrastructure for climate resilience and park equity. Additionally, the Trust for Public Land and MAPC hired the University of Vermont to complete 1-meter resolution data analysis on the tree canopy layer in the Metro Mayors Region to do forest management in the future.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- The cost of land and potential contamination are major barriers to developing urban agriculture.
- Gateway City Park funding has decreased in recent years.
- There is significant uncertainty around federal funding related to capital improvements for climate resilience, which supports greening and improving cities.
- Political leadership and some constituents in certain cities and towns are unsupportive of trail development.

Emergent Themes

- Improving education proved difficult for MAPC given its lack of expertise and partnerships in this arena.
- Technology has played a far more significant role in changing municipal services and accessibility than predicted.
- The increased vitality of urban centers has led to displacement of residents and businesses. Stronger policy and regulatory responses are needed to minimize displacement moving forward.

