

The Road to Reopening and Recovery

On Wednesday, May 13, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) staff, along with Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone and Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll, gave a presentation to the state’s Reopening Advisory Board. The board is tasked with “advising the Administration on strategies to reopen the economy in phases based on health and safety metrics.” MAPC and the Mayors are grateful to Governor Baker, Lt. Governor Polito, and EOHED Secretary Kennealy for inviting us to present to the Board and for their leadership on confronting the pandemic.

Below is a summary of what MAPC, Mayor Curtatone and Mayor Driscoll presented to the Board on behalf of a working group of Mayors and Managers in the MAPC region. This highlights the values and priorities that we believe should be central to any reopening strategies.

The Road to Reopening and Recovery

We identified the following principles that must guide the Commonwealth’s approach to recovery:



Grounded in Science

Any steps toward reopening and recovery should be made based on the best available data and science, including information about cases in Massachusetts and our surrounding states. Cities and towns need to understand the metrics being used for the following three items:

- Clear and consistent reduction in disease indicators for at least 14 days.
- Testing, tracing, and isolation protocols must remain in place and be capable of handling remaining infections.
- The Commonwealth must have procedures for identifying and addressing hotspots and tightening restrictions.



Coordinated & Regional

Cities and towns should work together with the Administration to create a unified plan for reopening. Communication must occur in both directions to avoid creating confusion for officials and residents. A communication strategy will be even more important after reopening begins.



Equitable

Recovery must be equitable, ensuring that vulnerable populations, low-income individuals, and people of color are all included in measures that help to restart our economy. Special and sustained efforts must be focused on the recovery of small or “Main Streets” businesses. Our hardest hit areas will not come back on their own, and will help from state and local authorities, including financial assistance.



Prioritize Health & Welfare

We must prioritize public health and the welfare of our communities. Doing so is the only way to ensure economic health in the long-term.

Our working group identified two overarching issues that require special attention, especially because our region is small and dense. First, the Reopening Advisory Board must consider ways to lift communities that have been hardest hit by COVID-19 infections and the resultant economic impacts. The Board must also lay out a clear plan for coordination and communication with cities and towns. We discuss each of these issues in turn.

Equity

COVID-19 continues to disproportionately impact our lowest income communities and our communities of color. As we reopen our businesses and our communities, we cannot leave them behind and further entrench inequities and disparities. We must make these opportunities available to all people, regardless of immigration status.



Below are some actions that should be taken as the state begins to reopen the economy:

- Increase testing in our frontline communities to quickly identify hotspots.
- Safe quarantine and isolation facilities should remain open and be sensitive to community needs.
- Reopening guidelines and resources must be accessible, translated into multiple languages, and easily understandable. Contact tracing calls must also occur in multiple languages.
- Safe recreational opportunities should be available for residents of all income levels.
- Provide special help and financial support for small businesses in frontline communities and historically underserved communities.

Coordination & Communication

Cities and towns are eager to partner with the state to cautiously advance reopening efforts. The following points are areas where we believe this coordination would be the most strategic:

Notice: Cities and towns need at least 72 hours of notice before the state moves into each reopening phase, including Phase 1, and at least 48 hours of notice before new guidelines are adopted.

Closure triggers: There must be a clear shut down plan when hotspots are identified through robust testing and contact tracing. These triggers should also be communicated in advance.

Public Marketplace for PPE and Sanitization: Cities and towns should be able to reliably access quality PPE and cleaning supplies and not have to compete with private industry to obtain these essential goods.

Ongoing Involvement: Municipalities should inform ongoing decisions about reopening schools, childcare, and recreational facilities.

Local Authority: The state should clearly identify areas where municipalities have local authority to act, such as jurisdiction over local roads, enforcement, and shutting down businesses for noncompliance.

The working group next identified four areas of concern with specific recommendations for the Reopening Advisory Board: (1) Testing, Contact Tracing, and Safe Quarantine/Isolation, (2) Main Streets Businesses, (3) Enforcement, and (4) Transportation.

1 Testing, Contact Tracing, and Safe Quarantine/Isolation

Testing, contact tracing, and safe quarantine/isolation options are critical to ensuring that we understand the prevalence of COVID-19 and are able to slow its spread.

- **Expansion of Community Wide Testing**

Beyond accurate and timely reporting of test results (including daily positive rate), the state needs a clearer plan for expanding testing across the Commonwealth, especially as it moves to support broader community testing to include asymptomatic individuals.

The state needs to be proactive with testing efforts and not leave it up to municipalities or healthcare providers to figure out. The expansion of testing availability comes with its own set of challenges. However, the state can provide direction and help build and sustain partnerships between communities and clinical partners.



i. Create a clearer framework to guide testing expansion:

1. Set per capita goals for testing (infection and antibodies);
2. Conduct more broad surveillance testing to aid modeling;
3. Ensure sufficient and regular testing of high-risk populations and communities; and
4. Target tracking of disease prevalence trends by municipality and share data on percent positive cases by municipality.

ii. The framework to expand testing should prioritize equitable access using indicators such as:

1. Levels of chronic disease in a community;
2. Race, ethnicity, income;
3. A community's existing testing capacity, especially in high-risk communities.

iii. The state should develop protocols to ensure adequate testing of symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals, and should use site-based and mobile testing and home-based testing if and when it becomes available.

• **Comprehensive Reporting of Testing**

Municipal leaders need a complete, real-time picture of positive cases and rates in each city or town, to be proactive and protect the health and wellness of residents. This begins with accurate and comprehensive reporting of test results. Current testing reports are inconsistent and incomplete, and typically depict a snapshot instead of getting a full picture of the situation. It is imperative that going forward, we ensure the quality and reliability of testing. More comprehensive data will allow municipalities to make timely and data-driven decisions and help inform communications strategies. We must:

- i. Enhance quality and reliability of current test reporting.
- ii. Provide cities and towns more accurate and comprehensive picture.
- iii. Add new test reporting data points to state dashboard (available to cities and towns).

• **Contact Tracing**

Through the Community Tracing Collaborative, the state should be able to quickly identify those individuals who have come into contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19. Those contact tracing dialogues should include information about how to safely quarantine at home, where to go if you cannot safely quarantine at home, and how to get tested if necessary. If someone tests positive, they should be given information about how and where they can safely isolate.

• **Develop and Disseminate Household Guidance and Support for Stay at Home Quarantine**

Similarly, the state should provide "housing playbooks" with information that municipalities can share with their residents about safely quarantining. Connections to local support and resources is also essential.

• **Standalone Isolation and Quarantine Sites**

We know that many people will never be able to safely isolate or quarantine without risk of infecting others or being exposed themselves. People in unstable or crowded housing situations, unrelated individuals renting rooms or apartments, and residents of a wide array of congregate facilities, might all have trouble safely quarantining or isolating. For these groups, we recommend the state continue to support the regional isolation facilities for as long as is necessary.

We also want the state to consider what more it can do to help quarantine people living in such settings. Cities and towns have created depopulation options for shelters, but if those facilities can no longer be used for such purposes, other safe options must be found and the state can and should be a partner in these efforts. It is important that the state work with cities and towns to get ahead of that outcome and prepare for future isolation and quarantine needs.

2 Main Street Businesses

- **Health, Safety and Workforce Development**

The state should provide clear guidance regarding health and safety practices for small businesses. Small businesses are a critical piece to economic recovery and they require aid from the state in order to safely reopen and thrive.

- i. The plan should identify mandatory health and safety practices, including the following:**

1. Continued telework/work from home when possible
2. Personal Protective Equipment; cleaning and disinfecting supplies
3. Maximum operating capacity during each phase
4. Daily symptom check
5. Social distancing measures
6. Paid sick time off

- ii. Other Practices to encourage:**

1. Contactless payment
2. Logging customer contact information
3. Reopening by appointment or reservation only

- iii. Provide support for small business to access PPE and cleaning supplies, so that small businesses are not competing in the open market for these items.**

- iv. Provide technical assistance for neighborhood businesses to adopt a new business model.**

- v. Assist with a robust statewide marketing and shop local campaign.**

- **Outdoor Vending and Regulatory Support**

State officials should support municipal efforts to creatively use public spaces to support businesses. Some examples of actions that would help local businesses are:

- i. Facilitate curbside pickup**

- ii. Allow sidewalk or street vending**

- iii. Allow outdoor seating for restaurants**

- iv. Convert public and private parking lots to restaurant and retail space**

- v. Create street markets**

- vi. Activate plazas for commerce**

- vii. Provide state guidance for distancing, safety, and sanitation**

3 Enforcement

In order for cities and towns to be effective partners in enforcement, they require real time notification when businesses are given approval to open.

- **In order to make enforcement more effective, the state should clearly affirm local authority. Cities and towns must be able to do the following things:**
 - i. Cities and towns must be able to create more robust standards, requirements, and checklists before businesses can reopen. The state guidance should serve as a floor, but cities and towns must be able to go further.
 - ii. Cities and towns should have the ability to shut down a business for failing to comply with their respective safety plan or other safety regulations.
- **The state should provide funding for municipalities to cover additional regulatory staff to assist with education, adoption of regulations, and enforcement:**
 - i. Leveraging funding through the state Action for Public Health Excellence (SAPHE) Act, the state should incentivize municipalities to hire shared regulatory staff to meet increased demand.
 - ii. Funding should be provided to municipalities contingent upon maintenance of key public health positions within the municipality.
 - iii. There should be an opportunity to pursue a shared or regional staffing model.

4 Transportation

As we begin to reopen, safely moving people to jobs, homes, and hospitals will be critical to adhering to strict public health standards and successfully moving into subsequent phases.

- **Prioritize MBTA bus service to support frontline service workers.**

This includes redistributing buses to higher ridership routes and potentially contracting with private bus operators to have higher frequency of service to prevent crowding.
- **Issue guidance on how cities and towns can repurpose vehicle lanes for dedicated bus and bike lanes and micromobility options where feasible.**

The Governor and MassDOT should clearly indicate that cities and towns have the local authority to make changes to local roads, and emphasize that this is an important piece of the puzzle to accommodate safe travel. This will help local planning staff convince their leadership. This same message should also signal that cities and towns should creatively use the roads and parking lots to enable creative retail in the public realm.
- **Expand Park and Pedal locations.**

Underutilized parking lots should be repurposed so people from further out can drive to the lot, park, and then cycle into work. <https://www.parkandpedal.org/>

Questions?

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