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# The State of Equity in Metro Boston

## Policy Agenda

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# Roadmap to Equity

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## A Vision for Our Future

The region's residents have a vision for the region they want to pass along to their children and grandchildren. They want a region where job opportunities are plentiful and high-quality, where a wide variety of housing types exist to suit a range of needs and preferences, where both cities and towns have well-maintained parks and other green space, and where transit provides convenient connections as people go through their daily lives. This vision, spelled out in 2008 in the *MetroFuture: Making a Greater Boston*<sup>1</sup> plan, is of a region that serves all of its residents, and provides them all with ample opportunities to thrive. It has equity at its core.

The MetroFuture plan contains 65 goals for the region, and 20 of those goals relate directly to equity. See page seven for the complete list of equity goals. Many more goals relate to improving the quality of life for all of the region's residents, and these too would be advanced by moving forward an equity agenda. The plan also contains 13 Implementation Strategies, which lay out a "roadmap" of policy, programmatic, and funding changes necessary to achieve the region's goals.

The importance of equity to the region's future – and to the implementation of *MetroFuture* – has never been more certain, as demographic and social changes mean that the well-being of the region will depend increasingly on the well-being of those residents who have historically lacked both resources and opportunities: low-income communities, immigrants, members of racial/ethnic minority groups, and the region's older residents, to name a few.

### What is Equity?

Equity means all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to attain their full potential.

(This is the definition from the *State of Equity in Metro Boston Indicators Report*. Credit to King County, Washington)

However, recognizing the importance of equity to the region is not enough. MAPC, as an institution, must set priorities and manage operations in a manner that is consistent with the oft-quoted phrase of Angela Glover Blackwell, the founder and CEO of Policy Link, "The only way to get to sustainability is through equity." As one of the few truly regional public agencies in Greater Boston, we must play a leadership role in educating the public as well as state and local officials about the ongoing inequality of our region; we must choose legislative and regulatory priorities with equity in mind; we must develop a strategic plan<sup>2</sup> that reflects equity goals; we must choose

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<sup>1</sup> *MetroFuture* is a plan for the region through 2030. It was approved in 2008 by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and developed with the participation and leadership of thousands of the region's residents. For more information on *MetroFuture*, visit [www.mapc.org/metrofuture](http://www.mapc.org/metrofuture).

<sup>2</sup> *MetroFuture* is the plan for the region, whereas MAPC's strategic plan is the plan for our agency. MAPC's last strategic plan was written in 2005, and updated in 2010. We are now working on a new strategic plan, scheduled for completion in June, 2014.

technical assistance projects that move us closer to an equitable region; we must develop a more diverse Council and Executive Committee; and we must hire and deploy a more diverse staff.

## About this Document

This document is designed to serve as a plan to help the region get on track to achieve its *MetroFuture* equity goals. It is an update to the *MetroFuture* Implementation Strategies, designed to reflect successes, setbacks, and changed circumstances in the five years since the strategies were released. Based on the findings of the 2011 *State of Equity in Metro Boston Indicators Report*<sup>3</sup>, we as a region now have a clearer sense of where we stand relative to our equity goals. This Policy Agenda begins with an analysis of demographic changes we are experiencing and a discussion on the drivers of inequality. The main contribution of this document, however, is the recommendations that the region can use to meet its ambitious equity goals by 2030 given the realities of the region's current challenges. The recommendations were developed in consultation with allies and experts, including those that were consulted throughout the development of the Indicators Report. The recommendations fall in three main categories:

*Invest in places*, to ensure that all of its residents, regardless of race or class, have the ability to live in areas of opportunity, however they might choose to define that opportunity. This section is the largest of the report, reflecting MAPC's historic emphasis on land use and spatial planning.

*Invest in people*, according to need and regardless of where they might live.

*Build more equitable public systems*, to ensure that all decision-making processes and investments are made with the interests of the region's historically underserved populations in mind.

The State of Equity Policy Agenda will be a guide for short-term action in the region, with recommendations selected if they have a reasonably high likelihood of either success or major progress over the next two to five years. They are not intended to be comprehensive; rather the recommendations have been highlighted based on their timeliness, significance, and likely impact. These recommendations were also chosen to be easy to communicate and inspiring to those who have been working on these issues for decades, as well as those who are new to the equity field.

These policies were developed to serve as the means to move from the inequities identified in the Indicators Report to achieve the vision of where we want to be as described in *MetroFuture*. Please refer to the graphic that illustrates this progression on page six. Most will not, in and of themselves, be sufficient to achieve our vision – but they are meaningful starting points, not the entirety of what is required. In addition, many advance multiple objectives. For example, additional targeted investments in transit oriented development (TOD) can advance everything from the creation of affordable housing and jobs to safer neighborhoods and improved air quality.

As with the *MetroFuture* Implementation Strategies, the recommendations listed on the following pages include recommendations for planning, policy and funding changes at every level of government, and steps that can be taken by the private sector and even by individual households

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<sup>3</sup> Available online at [www.regionalindicators.org](http://www.regionalindicators.org)

across the region. The strategies cut across community types<sup>4</sup>. For example, some may be more applicable for urbanized communities with well-developed public transportation networks, but most have relevance for all communities and many could be implemented at the state or regional level. MAPC could be a leader in implementing some of these activities (e.g., zoning reform), but others will be advanced by allies (e.g., increasing the minimum wage).

MAPC will seek to advance these recommendations in one or more of the following five roles:

Leader – in a few campaigns within its core area of expertise, MAPC is well positioned to play a leading role in developing alternatives and calling for their adoption.  
Examples: equitable TOD and affordable housing production, climate change adaption, transportation finance campaign, and increased public participation in planning processes

Coalition member – in other cases, MAPC will join campaigns led by others, and will bring its constituency and expertise to support the work of an allied organization.  
Example: increasing the Commonwealth’s minimum wage

Data and policy analyst – some issues may suffer from a lack of clear data or an inadequate supply of information on possible solutions. In these cases, MAPC will use its mapping, data analysis, and/or policy development expertise to help illuminate best practices or new ideas.  
Example: breaking the link between segregation and poor school quality

Voice for change – in places where MAPC is not positioned to be a leader and there is not a clear leader in place, MAPC will call for change and leadership on the issue.  
Example: expanding the Circuit-Breaker Credit to low-income homeowners and renters

Monitoring progress – in all cases, MAPC will continue to track the region’s progress on its equity indicators, as well as its progress on advancing the recommendations in this report.  
Example: regularly updating the equity indicators to track progress

Allies and other actors in the region will also play these roles in many cases, and MAPC will work to ensure that efforts are supportive of one another.

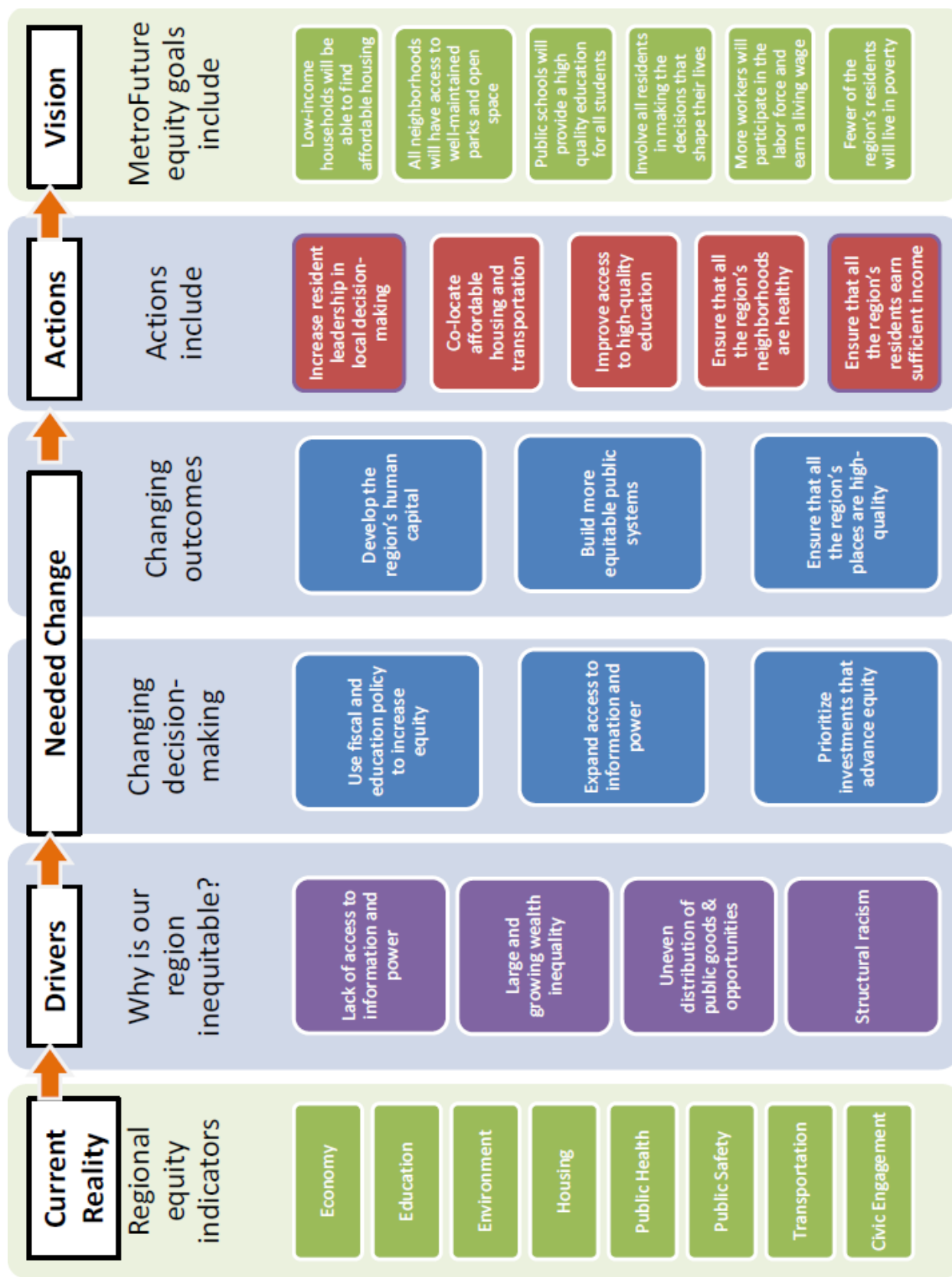
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<sup>4</sup> For planning and policy development purposes, MAPC has created a typology of “community types” for Massachusetts. While each community is unique, many communities share important characteristics with others of their size, land use patterns, growth rates, and so on. In Greater Boston, there are four community types:

- The Inner Core: Boston and its immediate, highly urbanized, neighbors, as well as its older “streetcar” suburbs
- Regional Urban Centers: large, high-density urban areas that are not near Boston, like Framingham, Salem, and Quincy
- Maturing Suburbs: Moderate-density suburbs of Boston, many of which have relatively little land left that has not been built or preserved
- Developing Suburbs: Low-density suburbs that are generally farther removed from Boston. These communities often have mixed-use town or village centers and have more available land for growth

For more information on community types:

[http://www.mapc.org/sites/default/files/Massachusetts\\_Community\\_Types\\_-\\_July\\_2008.pdf](http://www.mapc.org/sites/default/files/Massachusetts_Community_Types_-_July_2008.pdf)



The goals listed below are the equity goals contained in *MetroFuture*.<sup>5</sup>

#14: An increasing share of housing in each municipality will be affordable to working families and fixed-income seniors.

#15: There will be less regional segregation as all municipalities increasingly reflect Metro Boston's growing diversity.

#16: Low-income households will be able to find affordable, adequate, conveniently located housing, and to avoid displacement.

#17: Homelessness will be effectively eliminated from the region.

#18: The region's seniors will have more housing choices and opportunities to downsize while staying in their own communities.

#22: Urban and minority residents will not be disproportionately exposed to pollutants and poor air quality

#23: All neighborhoods will have adequate access to safe and well-maintained parks, community gardens, and appropriate play spaces for children and youth.

#24: Residents in all communities and of all incomes will have access to affordable, healthy food.

#26: All residents will have access to affordable healthcare.

#27: Children and youth will have access to a strong system of early education programs, after-school programs, teen centers, and youth organizations.

#28: Public schools will provide a high-quality education for all students, not only in the fundamentals, but also in areas like health education, physical education, art, music, civics, and science.

#29: More students will graduate from high school and go on to college or career training opportunities.

#31: The region's residents – including youth, seniors, and immigrants – will be well-informed and engaged in civic life and community planning.

#38: More minority and immigrant workers will have opportunities to advance on the career ladder, acquire assets, and build wealth.

#39: More workers will participate in the labor force, earning a living wage through secure employment.

#40: Fewer of the region's residents will live in poverty.

#44: An expanded transit system will provide better service to both urban and suburban areas, linking more homes and jobs.

#50: People with disabilities will find it easier to get around the region.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.mapc.org/sites/default/files/MetroFuture\\_Goals\\_and\\_Objectives\\_1\\_Dec\\_2008.pdf](http://www.mapc.org/sites/default/files/MetroFuture_Goals_and_Objectives_1_Dec_2008.pdf)

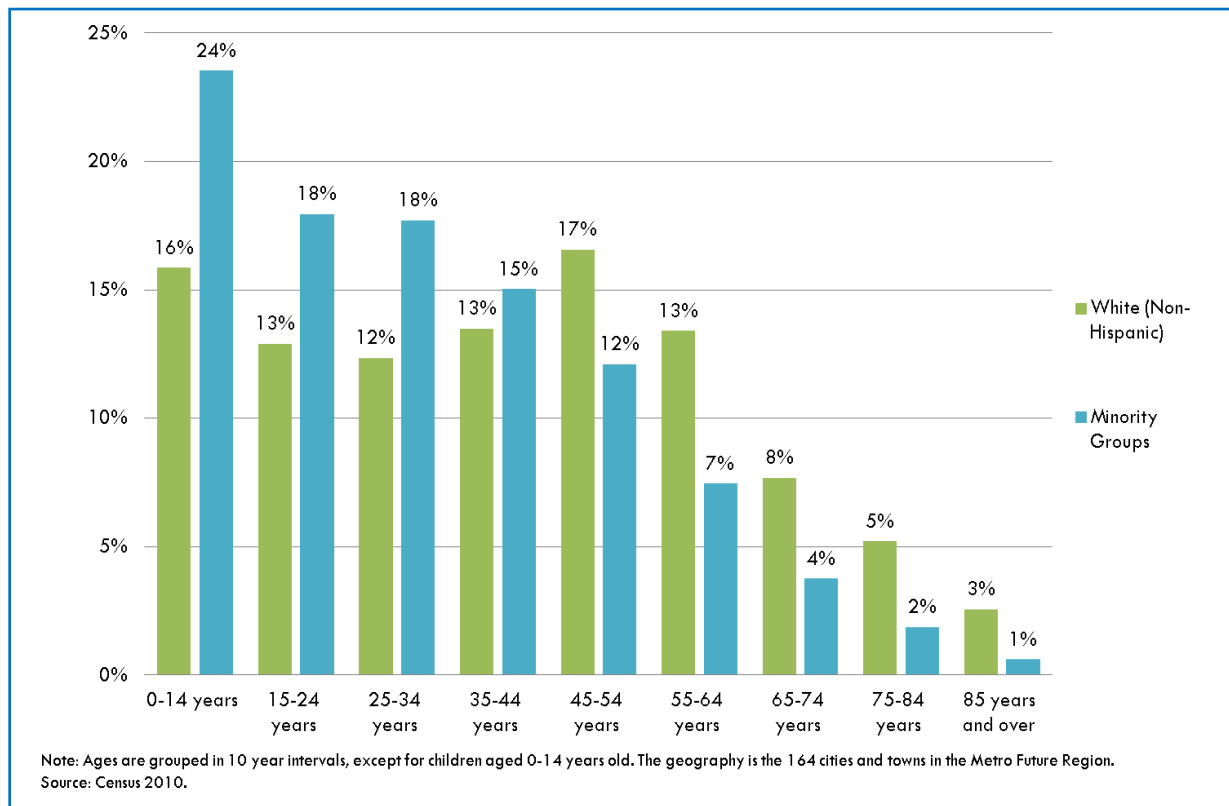
## We are growing more diverse...

The Metro Boston region is undergoing major demographic changes, with even more on the way. These changes shape the region we experience today, and will continue to have a profound influence on the region as we move toward 2030. The State of Equity in Metro Boston Indicators Report identified three major trends:

*The racial and ethnic diversity of the region is increasing, particularly among its youngest residents*

The region's population in 2030 will look very different than it did in 2010, as increasing shares of the population will be made up of members of racial and ethnic minority groups. As discussed in the Indicators Report, the most recent Census data show that Metro Boston has become more diverse overall between 2000 and 2010, with Latinos and Asians making up the fastest growing minority groups, while the region's White residents actually declined as a share of the population. These latest data suggest that, while they still remain heavily White, suburban areas experienced some of the region's largest percentage increases in minority group populations, compared to dense urban areas. The region's minority groups are still heavily concentrated in a small number of cities, but the region overall is moving toward increased diversity.

Age distribution of the region's White and minority population





As the White population ages, diversity is increasing among youth even more quickly than the population as a whole. Although over one quarter of the region's residents are members of racial/ethnic minority groups, over 40% of the region's children under age five are Black/African American, Asian, Latino, Native American, of more than one race, or of another racial/ethnic group. Looking within, rather than among, racial categories, we see that about 25% of the population of the minority groups listed above is under 15, while only 16% of the White population is in this age group – a gap of nearly ten percentage points.

*Immigrants make up a growing share of the region's population.*

In addition to an aging White population and an increasingly diverse young population, the region has also experienced a growth in its foreign-born population, which has increased since 2000 by three percentage points. The 2011 American Community Survey shows that about 17% of the population of the Metro Boston region is foreign-born. Looking at the countries of origin for the region's foreign-born population gives us an indication of the incredible demographic change that the region is undergoing. Over a third of the region's immigrants were born in Latin America, nearly one third were born in Asia, followed by one fifth in Europe. Nearly 10% were born in Africa, and smaller percentages were born elsewhere in North America and in Oceania (i.e., Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Islands).

This increase in foreign-born populations was not distributed evenly throughout the region. It was higher than average in 15% of the MAPC municipalities, mainly Boston's Inner Core and the Regional Urban Centers. These municipalities include Everett and Malden, each of which experienced at least an 8 percentage point increase. In a few municipalities, however, the population of foreign-born residents even declined.

*The population is aging overall, and in some communities in particular.*

The region is aging. In 2000, roughly 21% of the region's population was 55 or older. By 2010, this percentage had risen four points to 25%. According to demographic projections made for the *MetroFuture* plan, between 2000 and 2030, the senior population in the MAPC region is projected to increase by 79%, while the total population will increase by only 9%. Over this time period, the proportion of seniors will increase from 10% to 22%. By 2030, the over-65 group will constitute more than one-quarter of the population in 37 out of the 101 communities in Greater Boston.

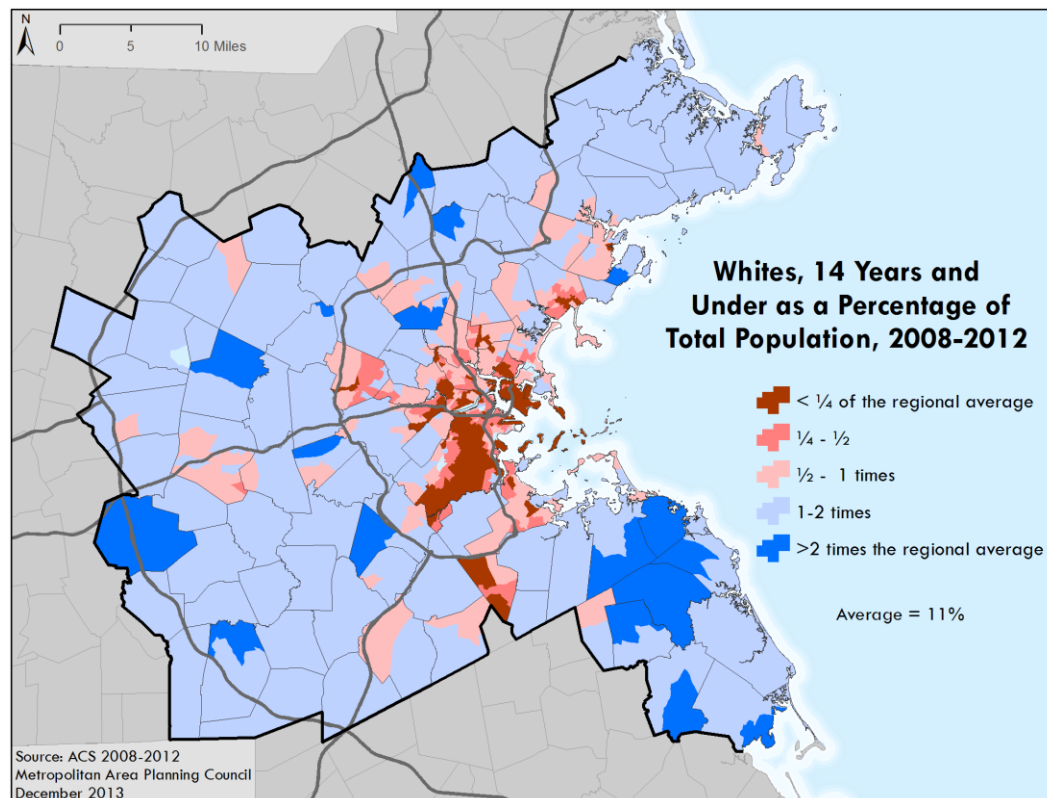
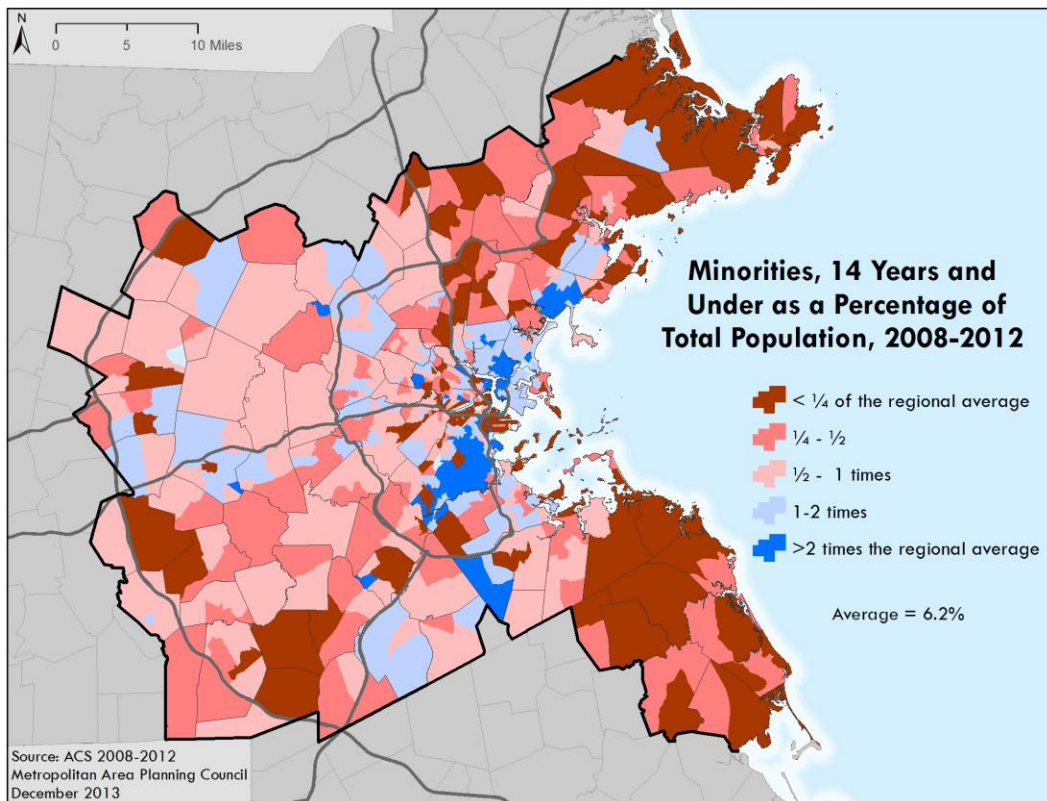
Unlike previous generations, the aging baby boomers are expected to be healthier, more active, better educated, more likely to remain in the workforce, and more likely to participate in community life. The changing demographics will nonetheless have many implications for how we plan for the future. The region's challenges will include adjusting its social infrastructure, health care, and other services to support healthy and productive aging, and adjusting its physical infrastructure such as transit to better accommodate the specific needs of an older population.

### ... and we are growing less equal

These changes are significant in particular when thinking about the future of equity in the region, as all relate to populations that have historically been underserved. These demographic shifts will substantially impact the region's ability to reach the *MetroFuture* goals by the year 2030, because they align with groups that have suffered inequality in the region. Scientists agree that there are no genetic or biological reasons that some racial/ethnic groups should have worse outcomes than others. Yet race and ethnicity are powerful predictors of health, education, prosperity, and more. Rather than biology, it is social factors that explain the stark differences in outcomes by race/ethnicity.

One of the key findings from the indicators report demonstrates just how segregated our region continues to be. While the diversity of our region's youth is increasing, the maps on the following page show how segregated the geographic distribution is of our children. If people were randomly distributed throughout our region without regard to race/ethnicity, about 11% of the people in every neighborhood would be white children (under 15) and 6% would be children of color. These are the "regional averages." However, looking at maps of where our children actually live, we see very few places that actually have such concentrations. These concentrations cannot be attributed solely to income, as higher-income minority children are more likely to be from high poverty areas than their White counterparts. The consequences of this segregation are serious and include disparities in educational attainment and future economic opportunity.

The State of Equity in Metro Boston Indicators Report is the first in a series of indicator reports that will monitor the region's progress toward achieving goals set out by the *MetroFuture* plan. The report clearly established the gap between where residents want their region to go and where it stands presently. It looked at 30 indicators, beginning on the page 12, that broadly depict the quality of residents' lives across the region. From infancy through old age, the report showed that virtually all of the region's residents face some obstacles to achieving their goals, and some residents face far more obstacles than others.



## Key Findings from the 2011 State of Equity Indicators Report

Indicator	Key Finding
<i>INEQUITY ACROSS THE REGION</i>	
Dissimilarity Index - Segregation	Over 60% of Black/African American residents of Metro Boston would have to move to a new neighborhood to achieve complete integration with Whites.
	Roughly 60% of all Latino residents of Metro Boston would have to move to a new neighborhood in order to achieve complete integration with Whites.
Household Income	The richest fifth of the population earns, on average, more than 10 times the income of the poorest fifth.
	There is a more than twofold gap between median White and Latino household incomes.
Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality	Incomes are distributed less equitably in Metro Boston than in 85% of the metro areas in the US.
Tax Burden as a Percent of Family Income	Massachusetts' poorest families pay more than twice as much of their income on taxes as do the Commonwealth's richest families.

Indicator	Key Finding
<i>INEQUITY IMPACTS CHILDREN</i>	
Youth Asthma Hospitalization Rate	Black/African American youth are hospitalized for asthma at over five times the rate of White youth.
Open Space per 1,000 Residents	Inner Core communities and Regional Urban Centers have less open space in their neighborhoods (per capita) than do suburban communities.
Distance to the Nearest Open Space	Much of the Inner Core, many Regional Urban Centers, and some Maturing Suburbs offer residents open space resources within walking or biking distance.
Attendance of High-Poverty Schools	Nearly three quarters of Black/African American and Latino students attend high-poverty schools, while just over 10% of Whites do.
3rd Grade English Language Arts MCAS Scores	A gap of nearly 40 percentage points separates White and Black/African American children in third grade reading proficiency rates.

Indicator	Key Finding
<i>INEQUITY IMPACTS TEENAGERS</i>	
10th Grade Math MCAS Scores	White and Asian 10th graders score “proficient” or “advanced” on the math MCAS at rates nearly double those of Latinos and Blacks/African Americans.
High School Graduation Rates	Greater Boston suffers from dramatic disparities in graduation rates by school district, with rates ranging from 54% in Chelsea to 98-100% in many other districts. More than 90% of the region’s White and Asian students graduate in four years, while slightly more than 70% of Black/African American and 75% of Latino students do.
High School Dropout Rates	Dropout rates for Blacks/African Americans and Latinos in the region are at least three times as high as those for Whites and Asians.
Exclusionary Discipline Rates	Predominantly White school districts have an out-of-school suspension rate of about 4%, while more diverse districts have out-of-school suspension rates of nearly 15%.
Violent Crime Rates	Boston, Chelsea, and Lynn experience, on average, five violent crimes per 1,000 residents, while many suburban municipalities suffer fewer than 1.5 crimes per 1,000 residents.
High School Students’ Plans for After Graduation	A third of students in predominantly White districts plan to attend a four-year public college, while less than a quarter of students in more diverse districts have the same plan.
Young adults’ access to MBTA transit	Well over three quarters of the areas with high concentrations of teens and young adults (25% or more), are within a quarter mile of MBTA transit.

Indicator	Key Finding
<i>INEQUITY IMPACTS ADULTS</i>	
Educational Attainment Rates	While fewer than 10% of Whites lack a high school diploma, roughly 35% of Latinos have not completed high school.
Labor Force Participation Rates	While only 65% of those lacking a high school degree are active in the labor force, 88% of those with a bachelor's degree are.
Poverty Rates	Nearly 25% of Latinos, nearly 20% of Blacks/African Americans, and over 15% of Asians in our region live in poverty compared to 6% of Whites
	While fewer than 10% of families overall earn less than 130% of the poverty line, more than 25% of female-headed households with no spouse present earn less than that amount.
Housing Affordability	Over 60% of the poorest households are living in unaffordable housing, defined as housing that costs more than 30% of gross household income.
Housing Cost Burden	About half of the renters in Massachusetts pay more than 30% of their income on rent.
Foreclosure Rates	Foreclosure rates were 10% or higher within parts of Roxbury and the South End between January 2007 and June 2008.
Home Loan Denial Rates	In many low-income Boston neighborhoods, as well as Randolph, Rockland, and Chelsea, more than 40% of high-income buyers are unable to get loans for home purchases.
Premature Mortality Rates	Blacks/African Americans die prematurely at three times the rate of Asians and one and a half times the rate of Whites.
Hospitalizations due to High Blood Pressure	The rate of hospitalization for hypertension is more than seven times as high for Inner Core Blacks/African Americans as for suburban Whites.

Indicator	Key Finding
<i>INEQUITY IMPACTS SENIORS</i>	
Transit and Sidewalk Access for Seniors	The concentration of seniors is over twice as high in sections of Framingham and Weymouth as it is in the region overall, yet these areas offer seniors limited transportation options.
Transportation Services for Seniors	Most of the communities offering multiple paratransit options for seniors already have train or commuter rail access, whereas the municipalities with only 1 or 2 shuttles tend to be farther from the city where such services are needed most.
Poverty Rates for Seniors	Nearly 35% of Latino households headed by a senior bring in less than \$10,000 per year, while just under 8% of White households are in this lowest income category.
	14% of grandparents who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren live in poverty compared with rates of only 9% of the region's residents overall.
Dissimilarity Index for Nursing Homes	About 65% of Black/African American nursing home residents would have to move to a new facility in order to achieve integration with White nursing home residents.



## Drivers of Inequality

There are several key social factors that are driving the inequalities we see today, and which will impede the region's ability to reach its goals by 2030. Most, although not all, of the inequalities measured in the indicators report are caused by the interaction of two or more of these factors, and the most persistent inequalities arise when all factors are in play. UNEVEN ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND POWER is the larger context in which all of the phenomena that lead to inequities occur. This inequality impacts the ability of all groups to participate in decision-making processes and advocate for their interests. As a result, inequitable systems result in inequitable outcomes, across the breadth of the regional indicators findings.

LARGE AND GROWING INCOME AND WEALTH INEQUALITY is a major impediment to the region accomplishing its goals. As we reported in the Indicators Report, over the last 40 years the region has echoed national trends as wealth has become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands and upward mobility has become less and less of a reality for many people. Incomes have become increasingly stratified toward the top and the bottom, with wealth increasingly concentrated in the hands of those at the top of the economic spectrum.

This has had substantial effects, both on household well-being and on the region and country as a whole. On a household level, for most Metro Boston families in the middle and lower classes, incomes have remained stagnant or even declined in real dollars. Household assets, too, have declined for many in recent years, particularly in 2007-2010 when housing prices fell substantially. This means that families are more vulnerable to shocks like the loss of a job or the dissolution of a marriage, but it also means that households are less able to invest in their futures or take financial risks. These factors make it harder than ever for families to move up economically.

RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION REMAINS A FACT OF LIFE IN METRO BOSTON. In the Indicators Report, we found that the region's Black/African American and Latino residents were concentrated in its Inner Core and Regional Urban Centers, while many of its suburban communities were overwhelmingly White. While the region is becoming more integrated over time, it is happening neither everywhere nor quickly. This longstanding residential segregation is a product of decades of overtly discriminatory local, state, and federal policies, which were in place until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as well as private sector and individual racism and discrimination. These official government policies have been replaced now by market and social forces that continue to make it a challenge for members of racial/ethnic minority groups to move into many predominantly White suburban communities, and unlikely that White residents will move into communities where significant numbers of racial/ethnic minorities reside.

The distribution of racial/ethnic groups in the region is inversely related to its distribution of "opportunity structures," or institutions that create opportunity and improve well-being. These structures can be public, like public schools or parks; private, like employment centers or high-quality housing; or can be aspects of neighborhood quality more broadly, like communities that are safe and healthy. While most people agree that all members of our society deserve these things, we see that they are distributed spatially in ways that do not reflect that ideal. They also

show major spatial variation in quality. While public parks may be distributed evenly across an area, the quality of these parks may vary substantially.

This uneven access to power and information, persistent and growing inequality, and uneven distribution of opportunity is bad for all of us. Societies with large gaps between the rich and the poor struggle more with social ills — like crime and poor health — than do their more equal counterparts. Segregation, particularly when accompanied by concentrations of poverty, also has social costs that extend beyond the residents of low-opportunity neighborhoods, including greater burdens on social service and criminal justice systems and lost productivity. And while it is a new field of research, academics are starting to examine the impact that inequality and segregation have on economic growth. Early studies have shown that there is a correlation between equity and economic growth, and that reductions in poverty in central cities can correspond with stronger regional economic growth<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> For a summary, see the PolicyLink and Center for American Progress report “Prosperity 2050: Is Equity the Superior Growth Model,” at [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/04/pdf/prosperity\\_2050.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/04/pdf/prosperity_2050.pdf)

# Equity Policy Agenda

## Invest in the Region's Places

The most surefire way to ensure that all the region's residents have access to the opportunity to achieve their full potential is to make all of the region's places into places of high opportunity.

**Use transportation investments to improve access for underserved communities.**

While the MBTA provides service to much of the population in Boston's Inner Core, there are major impediments to maintaining and expanding this service. To continue existing levels of service, the MBTA must meet its immediate needs: paying off its debt service, resolving decades of deferred maintenance, and improving frequency and reliability of service on key routes. It must also think strategically about selecting key expansion projects to help it move beyond its hub and spoke configuration and better serve transit-dependent suburbanites. Outside of the MBTA system, transit systems fare much worse, with underinvestment resulting in limited or no weekend or evening service, long waits between buses, and limited route options that may miss important employment or housing centers.

Implementation Step:

- The needs of Environmental Justice (EJ) populations<sup>7</sup> should be prioritized in project selection criteria, and EJ communities should be engaged in ongoing project selection processes.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is in the process of developing new project selection criteria, as required by the transportation reform and funding bill passed by the Legislature in 2013. These criteria must balance congestion relief and transportation operations with MassDOT's goal of tripling the number of trips made by biking, walking, and transit by 2030. In addition, the needs of EJ communities (which include low income

### Invest in the Region's Places

#### *Recommendations at a Glance*

Use transportation investments to improve access for underserved communities.

Prevent displacement of residents from transit-rich neighborhoods.

Produce more affordable housing especially near current or planned transit.

Improve urban air quality.

Prepare for climate change with vulnerable populations in mind.

Design and retrofit municipalities to ensure resilience.

Address climate change's economic threats to the livelihoods of at-risk populations.

<sup>7</sup> The Commonwealth of Massachusetts defines EJ as follows: "Environmental Justice Population" means a neighborhood whose annual median household income is equal to or less than 65 percent of the statewide median or whose population is made up 25 percent Minority, Foreign Born, or Lacking English Language Proficiency." Environmental Justice Policy, Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, 2002.

residents, members of minority groups, immigrants, and those with limited English proficiency) must be taken into account so that the project selection criteria will prioritize investments in historically disadvantaged areas.

These project selection criteria should be developed with leadership from the communities who have been least heard in transportation decision-making, and those whom transportation decisions have negatively impacted in the past. In addition, the ongoing transportation decision-making that is informed by these project selection criteria must engage EJ communities in order to ensure that investments are targeted so that the benefits and the burdens of transportation projects are shared more equitably, and address the continuing legacy of past transportation decisions.

- The state should invest in improving service on existing transit routes serving low income communities and communities of color.

A recent Northeastern University study demonstrated that travel times and levels of service vary widely for different populations of transit commuters, and that there is a strong correlation between race and the quality of transit service. Improvements to the bus system – in both the MBTA and the regions served by Regional Transit Authorities (RTA's) – are particularly essential to reversing this trend. MassDOT should invest in innovative solutions such as Bus Rapid Transit, Diesel Multiple Units, and bus signal prioritization in order to improve travel times and level of service on bus and commuter rail routes that serve historically underserved populations.

In addition, the recent transportation finance act directed RTAs to develop comprehensive service plans. These plans should focus on better connecting low-income residents in their service areas with jobs, education and essential services. Additional investment in RTAs is needed to reduce headways and extend service into evening and weekend hours.

- EJ communities should be included in efforts to increase safe opportunities for walking and biking.

Equity in transportation means more than equitable access to destinations; it also means equitable access to the non-transportation benefits that certain transportation options carry with them. Walking and biking for transportation have powerful health benefits: by incorporating physical activity into daily routines, active transportation is one of the best tools to address health disparities related to obesity and lack of physical activity. Walking and biking for recreation can also have significant health benefits, especially if recreational opportunities can be accessed safely and easily. In addition, investments in walking and biking can have positive economic impacts, as pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure create more jobs per dollar spent than investments in motor vehicle and transit infrastructure. Studies from New York City, Oregon and Washington State have also shown that increasing pedestrian and bicycle traffic is beneficial to local business districts, even when parking or travel lanes are removed.

However, bicycle improvements in particular are typically the result of advocacy on the part of existing cyclists for new trails or on-street facilities. While people of all demographics use bicycles for transportation and recreation, bicycle advocates tend to be White and wealthier than the overall population. Advocating for a new off-street trail typically requires years—even decades—of dedicated and highly-skilled volunteer effort. Low-income communities can be left out of these improvements as a result. MassDOT should ensure that its statewide plan for off-street bicycle facilities prioritizes new trails in historically underserved areas, even if they lack a vocal advocacy group. Municipalities should also ensure that on-street facilities are equitably distributed, and the state should provide increased financial support for local bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements.

- Adequate transportation should be ensured for people of all ages and abilities through increased investment in ADA accessibility and improvements to para-transit service.

Accessibility for people of all ages and abilities must be improved throughout the transportation system. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that accessibility is brought up to federal standards when a street or a transit stop is reconstructed. The state and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) should also provide dedicated funding to municipalities and transit agencies to make accessibility improvements outside of larger reconstruction projects.

Massachusetts transit agencies are also required by the federal government to provide para-transit service, which is used by riders who for health or disability reasons are unable to use regular transit options. These riders are some of the Commonwealth's most financially vulnerable citizens, and they have faced steep fare increases, including a doubling of fares in 2012 on the Ride, the MBTA's para-transit service. Yet the MBTA and other human service transit providers face continual cost pressure, as the operating costs to provide this service are higher on a per-trip basis than fixed-route transit, and have been increasing at a far higher rate.

In order to provide better service and keep fares in check, the state should aggressively pursue Medicaid reimbursement of eligible para-transit trips, and shift as many trips as possible to fixed-route transit by improving accessibility and adopting best practices for eligibility screening, such as tiered pricing or means-testing. The state should also improve service by consolidating para-transit providers where possible so that riders are not charged multiple fares for a single trip, and by providing statewide rider information and eligibility screening.

### **Prevent displacement of residents from transit-rich<sup>8</sup> neighborhoods.**

As the region invests in the expansion of the Green Line and improvements to the Orange Line, neighborhoods around existing transit stops will become increasingly desirable. Gentrification and the displacement of low-income residents from their homes will become an increasing risk. Expanded transit and neighborhood amenities, often referred to as transit-oriented development

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<sup>8</sup> Defined as neighborhoods with frequent, reliable, and convenient public transportation.

or TOD, are important social goods, but must be managed in such a way that they benefit all of the residents of the communities they are supposed to serve.

To do this, state and local governments must invest in preserving rental and homeownership housing for households at all income levels, particularly very and extremely low income families. This could be achieved by a number of steps, listed below.

#### Implementation Steps:

- Municipalities should preserve existing affordable rental housing.

The best way for municipalities to ensure that the market doesn't price out low-income households is to take steps to preserve currently affordable rental housing in areas that are well-served by current or planned transit. To accomplish this, municipalities should take several steps, including the following:

- When property values rise, there is a real risk that building owners who receive state or federal subsidies to provide affordable apartments to low-income households will choose to rent their properties at market rate instead of continuing to receive subsidies. Municipalities must work to prevent this from happening by closely tracking their inventories of subsidized housing and identifying that housing that is at greatest risk.

Cities and towns should work closely with the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation (CEDAC), the state agency that leads housing preservation efforts. Municipalities should create "preservation catalogs" to identify and track subsidized housing near transit stations that is at the highest risk of loss, and develop local strategies to preserve these units, such as negotiations with owners and supporting efforts to organize tenants. They can also take advantage of new rights and responsibilities under state's new housing preservation statute (add citation), and eventually make recommendations about how to strengthen the law.

- Municipalities should prioritize the use of Low Income Housing Tax Credits and other funding sources to recapitalize and modernize location-efficient affordable homes.

Investing in preservation and reuse is a more efficient use of state resources than investing in new construction. While both need to occur, the state's first priority should be ensuring the preservation and rehabilitation of its existing affordable housing. This is particularly the case when looking at existing affordable housing near current or planned transit, where affordability is most threatened by the forces of gentrification.

- The state should explore expanding the Circuit Breaker Credit to low-income homeowners and renters.

The Circuit Breaker Credit is a state tax credit for low- and moderate-income senior homeowners who pay a significant portion of their income in local property taxes. It provides a refund, in the form of a state tax credit, for eligible taxpayers who pay more than 10% of their income in property taxes. Senior renters are also eligible, and can count up to 25% of their rent. The goal of the credit is to reduce some of the burden of housing costs for those who can least afford to bear them.

Of the states that have a Circuit Breaker Credit in place for low-income individuals and families, there is a great diversity in the credit's target population and administration. While Massachusetts currently only offers the credit to taxpayers 65 and over, many states make it available for all low- and moderate-income homeowners and renters, regardless of their age. The Commonwealth should investigate broadening the program in this way. This reform would help to reduce the primary expenses for the region's less well-off residents, and would also contribute to a shift to a more progressive tax system overall.

- Municipalities should take special steps to direct housing and community development resources toward households at risk of displacement.

Areas near planned or existing transit and major new developments are particularly vulnerable to the displacement of low-income households, as market values rise beyond what these households can afford and the incentives for providing subsidized housing become less appealing. However, there are a number of steps municipalities can take to ensure that as few residents are displaced, and as much affordable housing is preserved, as possible.

- Municipalities should negotiate Community Benefits Agreements with developers.

Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) are contracts between developers and members of a community, generally represented by municipalities or community based organizations. These contracts outline the developer's responsibility to the community to mitigate any potential negative impacts of the new development. These mitigation activities could include preference for hiring local workers, environmental preservation activities, or the development of affordable housing or payment into a local affordable housing trust fund. While CBAs can be challenging to enforce, municipal involvement makes them far more likely to be implemented.

- Municipalities should implement inclusionary zoning.

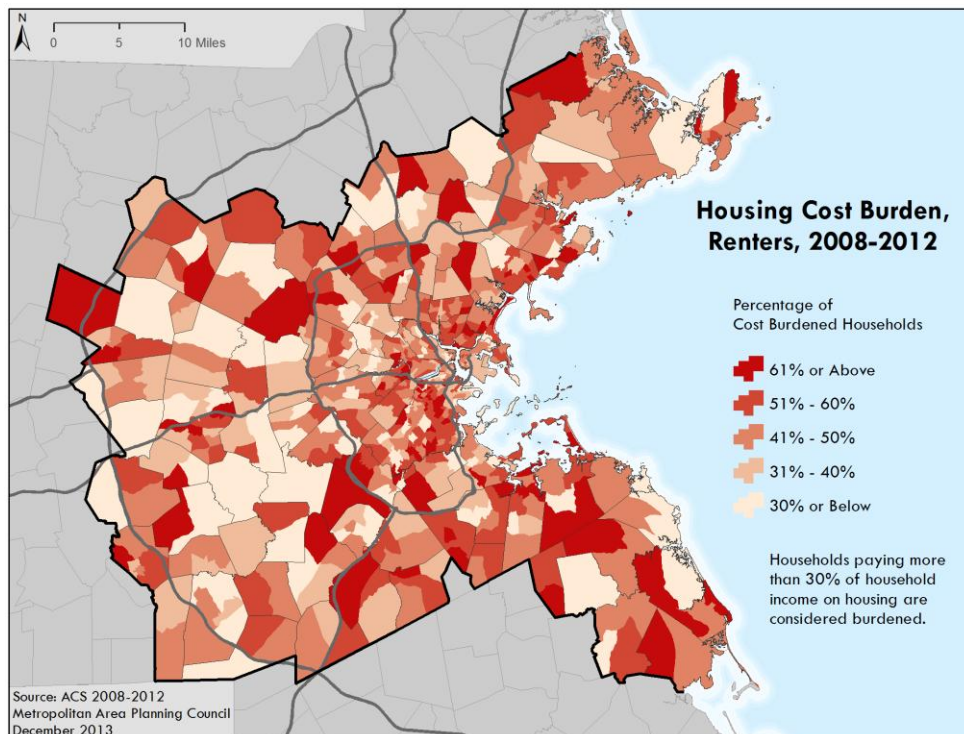
Inclusionary zoning requires or incentivizes developers of market rate housing to set aside a percentage of their units for low- and moderate-income households. It can provide developers with incentives to offset the cost of providing the affordable units, like allowing them to build at increased density, reducing parking requirements, or streamlining the permitting process. This form of zoning could be particularly effective

in creating housing in neighborhoods near new or existing transit, which can generally support increased density and reduced parking. While this zoning sometimes allows for payments in lieu of building units, this practice should be limited, particularly near transit stations, where, if anything, affordability requirements should be higher than in sites without excellent transit service.

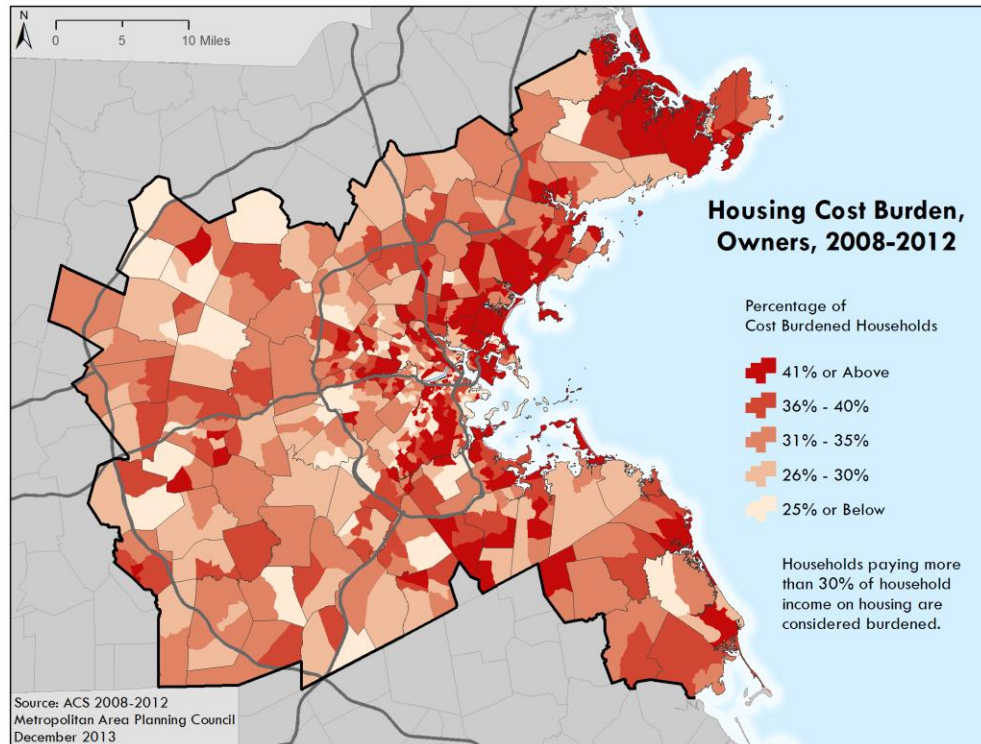
- Municipalities should be enabled to create general linkage funds for development. Linkage fees are charges placed on new commercial or market-rate residential construction to help provide for the construction of affordable homes or the creation of local jobs. Revenues from these fees are generally placed in a municipal trust fund, which is then used to finance new affordable construction or job training efforts. The City of Boston was a pioneer in the creation of this model. It is especially effective in stronger market areas, of which there are many in Greater Boston. By making it easier to adopt linkage fees, additional resources can be raised for local needs.

**Produce more affordable housing, especially near current or planned transit and in high opportunity areas.**

In addition to preserving existing affordable housing, the region needs to focus its resources on ensuring that new housing is built, particularly at the lower end of the market where the region already faces a housing shortage. The following maps show housing cost burdens for existing renters and owners. Additional supply, more subsidized homes, and greater economic opportunities are needed to help alleviate these high rates of housing cost burden.







Where affordable housing gets built is a critical question and there are unmet affordable housing needs across the region. Two types of locations, in particular, are typically ideal places for new investments in affordable housing: 1) in locations well-served by transit and 2) in “high opportunity” suburbs where access to higher-performing schools and safer streets might be particularly valuable for lower-income families. Certainly, investments should be strongly encouraged where these two circumstances intersect. As transportation costs are typically the second highest budget item for a family, access to reliable public transportation that connects people with jobs, school, and other institutions is important. By developing affordable housing in higher opportunity suburbs, economic and racial integration can be advanced.

#### Implementation Steps:

- The Commonwealth should focus and increase existing state funding, including the Low Income Housing Tax Credit and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, for the production of housing near frequent and reliable transit. This investment should particularly target a few areas and population groups most in need, and can leverage existing programs to do so. Fortunately, the Department of Housing and Community Development has already begun to prioritize several of the recommendations included below. Any such programs should also ensure that affordable housing has safe walking and biking connections to transit and other nearby destinations.
  - Focus state affordable housing investments in suburban locations with high quality public transportation and, in the Inner Core, at redeveloping TOD locations.

These two types of locations offer the greatest potential for equitable TOD development. This is especially important as transportation costs are typically the second largest household budget item after housing. By developing affordable TOD housing in so-called higher opportunity suburbs, economic and racial integration can be advanced. Mixed-income, mixed-use urban TOD can help to stabilize neighborhoods by bringing more disposable income and job opportunities to urban locations that already enjoy excellent transit access to jobs, schools, and other institutions.

- Focus state affordable housing investments to serve very low and extremely low income residents.

The demand for affordable housing for individuals and households in these income categories is extreme<sup>9</sup>. But because housing for these income categories require deeper subsidies to build than moderate-income units, developing homes at these affordability levels is more challenging. In many communities, there are few to no units available at these affordability levels. Furthermore, these households are also less likely to own a personal automobile and depend on public transportation, which means it is even more important to locate these units in transit-rich locations.

- Ensure state affordable housing investments also serve larger households by including a sufficient number of three-bedroom units.

Similar to the case of very low and extremely low income residents, there is a scarcity of three-bedroom affordable units because these developments need deeper subsidies to be economically viable. Beyond economics, it can be politically challenging to propose developments with units that include more than two bedrooms because of the perception that households living in such units are more likely to have school-age children and require additional municipal services. Because of these challenges, state resources, including those programmed through the state's Qualifies Allocation Plan and other discretionary grant programs, should require new developments to provide a reasonable number of units with three or more bedrooms.

- The state should leverage and prioritize other state investments, such as for infrastructure, in these priority locations.

For example, the MassWorks program aims to spend 67% of its funds in TOD locations. Other grant and loan programs should be similarly refocused to support TOD investments in streets, sidewalks, water and wastewater, green space and parks, economic development, and other critical components of creating a vibrant and sustainable TOD neighborhood.

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<sup>9</sup> Source: CHAS Table 15C, based on the 2005 – 2009 American Community Survey. HUD defines very-low as households earning up to 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI) and extremely-low as households earning up to 30% AMI.

- Municipalities should allow lower off-street parking ratios for developments well-served by transit, and should require the cost of parking to be unbundled from the rent or purchase price of the unit.

Requiring developers to build large amounts of off-street parking increases the cost of the development, and reduces the square footage available for housing. This increases the cost of housing for everyone, even families that do not own a car. Where off-street parking is provided, charging renters or buyers separately for parking will make these units significantly more affordable for families that own fewer cars.

Such policy changes will be challenging for many municipalities to implement, although some are already beginning to do so. MAPC can assist in “pilot” efforts and provide educational support to municipalities. This effort will begin with our conference on parking strategies, scheduled for April 8, 2014.

- Change the regulatory and permit landscape to encourage private development of inexpensive market rate housing near transit.

Local, state, and federal governments can also lay the groundwork so it is easy and advantageous for private developers to develop inexpensive market housing. This housing should be particularly encouraged near current or planned transit, where families can keep their overall costs low by paying combined housing and transportation costs they can afford.

- The state should provide incentives for municipalities to strengthen local policies and zoning that encourage housing production, such as awarding preference for competitive funding requests to such municipalities.

The state should use the power of its investments to encourage local actions consistent with the state’s Sustainable Development Principles, including expanding housing choices. Municipalities that take concrete actions to ensure that opportunities will exist for all its residents to find homes that are affordable should be rewarded with additional investments, and municipalities that fail to provide such opportunities should not be rewarded with discretionary state funding. This system operated during the Dukakis Administration under Executive Order 215, but has been largely abandoned by more recent governors. It’s time to restore this principle.

- The Legislature should enact zoning reform that encourages communities to plan ahead and zone for higher-density housing and economic development districts.

If designed properly, higher densities can help to moderate housing prices, provide more choice in housing types, and increase the supply of affordable units through density bonuses and other measures. In addition, allowing multi-family housing to be built “by-right” provides predictability to developers and can stimulate additional housing production. The zoning reform legislation (House Bill 1859) provides

incentives for communities to designate districts where housing is allowed to be built at higher densities without requiring a Special Permit (a discretionary permit). Within a new state zoning framework, more municipalities would be likely to create new opportunities for higher-density housing.

- The state should tighten Chapter 40R location criteria to emphasize and/or target TOD sites with high quality and frequent transit service.

MGL Chapter 40R Smart Growth Housing Districts have successfully produced mixed-income, multi-family housing developments across the Commonwealth. While stimulating new unit creation is important, some of these developments have followed a lower-density model that could not truly be called “smart growth,” creating somewhat isolated and auto-dependent developments. By tightening the location criteria (or providing incentives for TOD-focused 40R districts), the residents of new 40R districts would benefit from transportation choice and no longer require painfully long bus commutes or car ownership.

- Require that new affordable homeownership or rental units built with state or local support be affirmatively marketed.

To ensure that affordable housing options in all parts of the region are available to residents in “protected classes” (e.g., people with disabilities or minority households), the state must ensure wherever possible that developers proactively market affordable units to all residents of the region. Adjustments like those required for Chapter 40B units under DHCD guidelines should be utilized whenever there are imbalances between the families on a waiting list or in occupancy and the fair housing characteristics of eligible households in the region. Standards for marketing should apply to all forms of assisted housing, including public housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, Chapter 40B and 40R housing, privately owned subsidized housing and housing financed with local, state or federal affordable housing and community development funds, such as HOME, CDBG and Community Preservation Act assistance.

- Allocate additional state and federal resources for regional fair housing enforcement audits that include a focus on discriminatory home mortgage lending practices.

Despite strong legislation, ongoing discriminatory practices continue to produce residential segregation that limit protected classes’ access to housing choice, jobs, and educational opportunities. Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data continues to depict persistent differences in home mortgage denial rates in Greater Boston based on race. For example, in 2011 black applicants seeking home loans were denied at twice the rate of white applicants. Latino and Asian applicants also experienced disparate levels of loan denials. The Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston and the Housing Discrimination Testing Program (a partnership of Suffolk University Law School, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Boston Fair Housing Commission) conduct fair housing enforcement audits to identify and

remedy acts of discrimination in housing activities including mortgage lending practices. Additional funds are needed to ensure fair housing laws are being effectively enforced.

### **Improve urban air quality.**

Vulnerable populations such as seniors, children, and people with respiratory conditions are particularly at risk to air contaminants from mobile sources such as highways and stationary sources such as power plants. Lower-income neighborhoods are often exposed to higher concentrations of air pollution, resulting in disproportionate rates of asthma and other health problems. Massachusetts has made significant strides in improving air quality, but we continue to suffer from pollution generated by our transportation, electric utility and manufacturing sectors, as well as by Midwestern power plants. Many of the improvements in air quality depend on federal actions such as regulating power plants and motor vehicle fuel efficiency, but there is a role for state and local actions that would reduce and mitigate air pollution.

#### **Implementation Steps:**

- Reduce air pollution and mitigate the impact of air pollution on development near its sources.

In addition to moving to renewable and clean energy sources, overall land use development patterns affect vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and the corresponding level of pollution created by the transportation sector. Creating walkable and bikeable neighborhoods and reinvesting in existing urban and town centers is a key strategy for reducing the need for vehicle trips. State agencies that invest in infrastructure should target these investments to areas where people already live, work, play, go to school, and shop. Zoning codes should steer new development to these smart growth areas, while limiting development in natural and working landscapes. Passing meaningful zoning reform at the state level would also provide incentives for cities and towns to update their zoning to encourage more walkable, healthy neighborhoods.

However, living near major highways correlates with higher levels of air pollutants and respiratory conditions and incidents of hospitalization. While denser development means that more people might end up living near major highways, there are steps they should take to mitigate the impact of air pollution. Residents living, working, or attending school within 300 – 500 feet of major roadways should be educated on how to reduce their exposure, including steps like leaving the windows closed and using air conditioning on warm days or using HEPA filters and other technologies to reduce the infiltration of contaminants inside homes and buildings. Developers and builders should also be educated and encouraged about how to build healthy buildings.

- Perform Health Impact Assessments for new laws, policies, or major developments under consideration and ensure that these are as healthy and “green” as possible.

Another tool is using a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to analyze the impacts of a development's location. Indoor air quality is also affected by paints, solvents, glues, carpets and other building materials and furnishings. Municipalities and state programs can encourage using "green building practices," such as LEED, when applicants apply for permits or funding. State agencies that help to fund public and low-income housing should require or prioritize developments that use best practices for indoor air quality, such as LEED certification.

- Encourage smoke-free housing throughout the region.

Rates of both smoking and diseases like asthma that result from poor air quality are much higher in the region's minority group populations. Encouraging existing multifamily housing to go smoke-free and new multifamily housing to be developed as explicitly smoke-free would help to protect these populations and have major public health impacts. Currently, making privately owned multifamily housing smoke-free is entirely at the discretion of the property owner, and public housing can be made smoke-free at the discretion of the Local Housing Authority.

To expand the prevalence of smoke-free multifamily housing, there are a number of state-level activities that should be explored. These should provide incentives for both Local Housing Authorities and private owners to go smoke-free, and provide them with information on how to do so.

- The Department of Housing and Community should develop guidance on smoke-free housing for both public and subsidized developments (MAPC is working with DHCD to accomplish this goal by the end of calendar 2013.)
- The Insurance Commissioner should take steps to encourage property owners to implement smoke-free housing or commercial spaces. At this point, there is no statewide incentive program that rewards smoke-free policies so there may be an opportunity to have large statewide impact with such an initiative. Individual insurance companies have been offering discounts for smoke-free policies and landlords have responded favorably to these incentives
- The Commonwealth should support additional education to landlords  
There are number of healthy homes initiatives across the state. Emphasizing smoke-free housing as part of an overall healthy homes initiative could encourage more landlords to participate as well as encourage more tenant engagement by addressing a broader array of healthy housing issues rather than singling out smoking alone.

## **Plan for climate change with vulnerable populations<sup>10</sup> in mind.**

As climate change begins to have tangible impacts around the region, the Commonwealth, and the world, many communities such as low-income households, racial/ethnic minorities, or people with disabilities are facing major new threats. Because climate change will likely have disproportionate impacts on those with the least resources to adapt, planning for climate change must grapple not only with the differences in physical vulnerability of the built environment across various geographical locations but also the differences in social vulnerability of different populations. These two types of vulnerability must be evaluated independently as well as together to understand how they might interact across the region.

Disadvantaged populations (i.e., minorities, foreign-born, people with illnesses or disabilities, or low-income households) have fewer resources to adapt to new realities, by, for example, buying and running air conditioners as summers grow hotter and hotter. They are also less able to weather increased energy costs, as well as increased costs of many products that depend on energy, including food. Many communities of color also reside in urban areas, which have their own unique challenges in facing climate change, like the urban heat island effect or higher levels of air pollution. Vulnerable communities also can be more at risk when climate related disasters occur, particularly if language, mobility, and other challenges impede their ability to get help or get to safety.

### **Implementation Steps:**

- Climate change vulnerability analyses in the region should be informed by social vulnerability indices.

Climate change adaptation is an emerging field with best practices still evolving. While consensus has been established that a climate adaptation plan should begin with a vulnerability assessment, such efforts often focus on the physical dimensions of vulnerability and yet the social dimensions deserve equal attention. A social vulnerability index will show locations within a region where populations have the least capacity to prepare for, cope with, and respond to climate change impacts. The data for climate hazards and social vulnerability taken together can reveal “hotspots” – places where both high levels of social vulnerability and high risk for hazardous climate events overlap. Identifying and classifying hotspots is one way to prioritize and target strategies to increase resilience in places where they would be most effective.

- All levels of government should plan for climate change adaptation, engaging vulnerable populations throughout planning processes.

State and regional planning are needed to establish a policy framework, implement legislative and regulatory changes, and provide resources, technical assistance, model local

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<sup>10</sup> The term “vulnerable populations” is a specific term used in climate adaptation that refers to populations that are the most vulnerable to climate change, whether based on their social or economic standing in society, their geographic location, or some other concern.

implementation measures, etc. in support of local planning across the state. Towards these ends, the State passed its Massachusetts Global Warming Solutions Act in 2008 and MAPC's Regional Climate Change Adaptation Strategy is currently underway. The state should pass legislation to take the next step in statewide implementation by developing a statewide climate adaption management plan. Local planning (and resources supporting this planning) is also needed because of the strong "home rule" role of municipalities and the need to address particular local conditions as well as local populations. There are a variety of ways to incorporate climate adaptation planning within other local planning processes such as hazard mitigation plans, capital improvement plans, open space plans, and master plans. Ensuring that vulnerable populations are themselves included in planning and decision making around climate change is essential at all levels of planning.

- Municipalities should ensure that vulnerable populations are prepared for and able to react to disasters.

In some cases, resources exist, but information about these resources is not disseminated widely or effectively enough. Similarly, a lack of connections between local governments and vulnerable populations may make it more difficult to aid them in times of disaster. Proactively disseminating information and building strategic relationships in communities that are particularly vulnerable are essential steps that local governments must take in advance of any disasters.

- Municipalities should ensure that disaster preparedness materials are translated and disseminated widely.
- Municipalities should proactively identify and develop relationships with the partners that will be able to mobilize to serve vulnerable populations in times of emergencies.
- Municipalities and their partners should conduct public outreach campaigns in multiple languages to help vulnerable populations learn of local resources (such as cooling centers, emergency alerts, shelters, evacuation plans, etc.) available to them to prepare for and respond to disasters.
- Municipalities, states, and/or regions should have the necessary equipment on hand that will specifically enable vulnerable residents to evacuate when needed, or to withstand a disaster at home, along with specific procedures to handle communications during the disaster itself.



## **Design and retrofit municipalities to ensure resilience.**

The built environment is where the majority of the environmental impacts of climate change will intersect with vulnerable populations and so is an essential place to focus on climate change adaptation measures. Infrastructure can be “grey” (development-based) or “green” (nature-based), but whether it is streets, buildings, sewage systems, bridges, industrial plants or green spaces, it can be designed to better protect populations against climate events of all kinds. Streets, for example, can be designed in ways that better channel and filter water and so are less likely to flood and include innovative stormwater facilities to handle large volumes of water and move water off of roads more efficiently. Buildings can be built or retrofitted to protect occupants better against heat, cold, wind and water with measures such as super insulation, stronger materials, or elevated mechanical systems. Distributed generation, such as solar, wind, and co-generation, is more resilient than traditional power distribution infrastructure. Places learning to live with new climate threats can learn a great deal from places that have long had large disaster risks, such as cities located along fault lines or in areas of frequent flooding. Over time, many such cities have evolved their built environment to blunt some of the impacts brought by earthquakes or floods with innovative materials, designs and techniques that better resist natural forces.

- Municipalities should invest in green infrastructure in areas with concentrations of vulnerable populations and require or encourage green infrastructure to be incorporated into private developments.

Green infrastructure is a method of harnessing natural processes to manage water and provide a buffer from development impacts. Some examples include: urban tree canopies, rain gardens, green roofs, vegetated filter strips, swales, green parking lots, constructed wetlands, porous pavers, green corridors and buffer areas. Commonly, the neighborhoods that are home to vulnerable populations have the least amount of green spaces, natural areas, and other forms of urban greening such as street trees. Providing green infrastructure to these areas can help protect against flooding, reduce polluted runoff, lessen heat impacts, and provide green space for recreation and community gardens. Investments in green infrastructure will be a community asset whether or not a neighborhood endures the most extreme impacts of climate change. New, expanded, and improved parks and other green, open spaces that meet residents’ needs are co-benefits of green infrastructure investments.

- Governments and affordable housing financiers should work to ensure that housing occupied by low-income households is “climate-proof.”

Climate-proofing measures may include elevating utility panels and equipment, pervious landscaping, adding more insulation to keep buildings cool or warm during power outages, installation of back-up or alternative energy generation, and “hardening measures” such as hurricane proof roofs.

- Municipalities and affordable housing financiers should provide financial assistance (low interest loans or grants) to owners of properties where vulnerable populations

reside to perform climate proofing measures.

- The state should modernize and retrofit state-owned affordable housing in vulnerable areas.
- Municipalities or the State should create financial and technical assistance programs to help low-income households acquire, install and run high-efficiency air conditioning units.

Increasing heat island effects punctuated by more instances of life-threatening heat waves make air conditioning less of a luxury and more of a public safety necessity than in previous times, especially for elderly, children with asthma, and those with other health issues. There are a number of ways for how programs could be structured, from bulk procurement of air conditioning units, to the provision of grants or low-interest loans to households in need, to direct assistance installing units in buildings. We must overcome the long-standing bias against providing air conditioning in public and subsidized housing, and recognize that it is increasingly a necessity for good health.

- The State should require sites harboring toxic chemicals to do a climate change vulnerability assessment and a site specific climate preparedness plan.

Historically, the neighborhoods of vulnerable populations have borne a disproportionate share of land uses with adverse human health and environmental effects. As a result, many such neighborhoods still have industrial and other uses that could be particularly dangerous in a storm or flooding event. Inventorying where high risk toxic release sites are in relation to vulnerable populations and enhanced climate risks and requiring the sites posing the most risks to make acceptable preparations is essential to protecting vulnerable populations. Failure to prepare for such emergencies could carry significant public health risks.

### **Address the economic threats of climate change to the livelihoods of at-risk populations.**

While climate change brings enormous risks to people's health and safety, it can also have large economic consequences. This comes not just from the initial destruction that may occur, but from the prolonged economic disruptions that may follow a climate event. These economic tolls will be more difficult to bear for those already struggling economically and with the least resources to use for recovery efforts. Loss of property is only one such effect of major climate threats. Another effect is the potential impact on the jobs of low income workers. This may be in the form of short term job hiatuses for hourly wage earners which are very harmful to those living from paycheck to paycheck. In addition, there may be long-term job losses as a local economy struggles to rebound from a larger event such as Hurricane Katrina or Superstorm Sandy. The economic damage also extends to businesses that serve as local employers as well as providers of vital goods and services to low income communities. Small farms are also vulnerable to economic loss due to climate changes.

- Governments should work with small and medium sized local businesses in communities with concentrations of vulnerable populations to help them prepare for climate related threats.

Local business owners are less likely to have the resources to prepare for and rebound from adverse climate events and so there is a role for government to help either with financial assistance or providing information and guidance. An example of this would be offering technical assistance, grants, or low interest loans for retrofitting buildings.

- The State and municipalities should create policies and programs to address issues faced by laborers that will be most affected by extreme weather events.

Physical labor under extremely high temperatures or excessive wind or rainfall has severe health implications for those who are forced to work, either by their employer, or by their own financial need. Weather extremes can also significantly reduce income if work days are curtailed due to dangerous working conditions or the inability to get to work due to transportation shut-downs.

- The State should create guidelines to protect non-essential workers in both the private and public sectors from being required to work during high heat conditions, flooding, and other extreme weather conditions.
- Municipal boards of health and local emergency managers should play a larger role in providing guidance to employers on worker safety during climate events, such as issuing advisories during storms or heat waves. These could contain specific recommendations such as limiting heavy manual labor in a heat wave.
- The State should create programs such as an unemployment style fund that provides low income workers with paycheck insurance when work is curtailed by extreme weather events.
- The local public transportation authority should have contingency plans in place for components of their systems most relied upon by vulnerable populations to make sure there are as few service disruptions as possible during and after weather events as safety allows.
- Efforts should be made to bring health insurers and workplace safety officials into a dialogue regarding special provisions to confront the special workplace issues that may result from climate change, especially during condition of extreme heat, flooding, or storm events.

## Invest in the Region's People

The region's plans are, ultimately, designed in service of its people. Investing in the people who live and work in the region – regardless of where they live and work – is an essential way the region will achieve its goals.

### Expand access to high-quality education.

Education is one of the major pathways to opportunity for children of all backgrounds and income levels. Getting a high-quality education prepares a child for the job market, as well as providing other social and health benefits. Education is a particular concern when discussing equity in the region, as the educational achievement gap is one of the major equity issues the region (and the country) faces. This achievement gap carries across many measures of educational success: test scores, graduation and dropout rates, and educational attainment, among others. It is particularly notable between White students and African American and Latino students, and between higher-income and lower-income students.

Gaps in school quality, which range from teacher/administrator quality and years of experience to computers and other educational resources, including the length of the school day available for students, do not explain the entirety of the achievement gap, but they do play a major role in predicting the different educational outcomes of children. Ensuring that all of the region's children have access to high-quality schools from early childhood education through higher education or job training would have a major impact on improving the state of equity in the region. Extended day learning and more effective after-school programming can help close the achievement gap. Providing students with nutritious meals and time for physical fitness are also important components of preparing children to learn and to live healthy lives. Additional support is also needed to help ensure English language learners and students with special needs succeed in our public schools.

### Implementation Steps:

- Educational efforts and additional resources should be directed to programs that provide education to low-income parents and caregivers for children up to three years of age on the long-term benefits of child-directed communication.

A growing body of research has revealed that birth to three years old is a critical age for learning and the number of words a toddler hears correlates strongly with future educational performance. Low-income children typically hear far fewer words per day than middle-class or wealthy children. By age three, a typical child from a low-income family would have heard 30

### Invest in the Region's People

#### *Recommendations at a Glance*

Expand access to high-quality education.

Facilitate statewide violence prevention programs.

Reduce health disparities.

Ensure that all the region's residents earn sufficient income.

million fewer words than a child from a higher-income family<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, researchers Hart and Risley found that children from families on welfare heard, on average, 600 words per hour, working-class children heard 1,200 words per hour, and children from professional families, 2,100 words. This results in an achievement gap that persists throughout a child's education and beyond. Early interventions that provide strategies and support for parents and caregivers can limit this gap and better ensure that all children enter school with a similar knowledge base. Training programs should be replicated based on efforts such as the Thirty Million Words Project out of the University of Chicago and Providence Talks, which uses the home visits by the Nurse-Family Partnership to assess, teach, and reinforce strategies for effective and frequent communication with children. Community health practitioners and pediatric medical professionals should also communicate with parents about the benefits that accrue to children from hearing many words in a day.

- The Legislature should increase funding to ensure greater access to high-quality preschool education.

High quality early childhood education has been proven to be a major way of both increasing educational and economic outcomes. It has this effect in two ways: first, by improving the cognitive and social readiness of children to attend school, which has lifelong impacts; and second, by providing childcare that enables parents to work<sup>12</sup>. Of particular note, children of low-income families tend to benefit the most from high-quality early education, and it has been shown to narrow the achievement gap between low-income and higher-income children.

Although the benefits of high-quality early education are becoming more and more clearly established over time, the state's budget for early care has actually declined by 28% since its high point in 2001<sup>13</sup>. A primary way that the Commonwealth expands access to early childhood education is through a voucher program for low-income families, but there is now a waiting list of 30,000 families for the program. Fully funding the program to completely eliminate the waiting list is an important part of improving equity in educational and economic attainment. This investment would require approximately \$115million. Additionally, funding for the program should be at levels to support an increase in the size of the vouchers that families receive, which has not increased in six years. In this area, Massachusetts lags behind the national average, and far behind states like Florida and Oklahoma, which were the first states in the country to offer universal preschool, and which each have attendance rates of four-year-olds in preschool of around 75%<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Hart and Risley, "Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children", 1995.

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see the recent report "Early Childhood Education as an Essential Component of Economic Development With Reference to the New England States," by the Political Economy Research Institute at the UMass Amherst, available at [http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/published\\_study/ECE\\_MacEwan\\_PERI\\_Jan8.pdf](http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/published_study/ECE_MacEwan_PERI_Jan8.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed analysis of early education in the MA state budget, see: [http://www.massbudget.org/report\\_window.php?loc=early\\_ed\\_overview.html](http://www.massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=early_ed_overview.html)

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/02/13/education/State-Financed-Preschool-Access-In-the-US.html> for a quick summary of where the states stand.

- Researchers, advocates, and educational leaders should seek strategies to eliminate the relationship between residential segregation and unequal educational opportunities.

One of the key findings of the Indicators Report was the high level of residential segregation in the region, particularly among our children. White children and children in minority groups very rarely grow up in the same neighborhoods, a fact that has major implications for, among other things, the schools they attend. Children of color are particularly concentrated in high poverty Inner Core neighborhoods, which are the neighborhoods with the most consistently under-performing schools.

Perceived or actual low school quality is also a reason why many higher-income young families, who would prefer to remain in denser, diverse urban areas, choose to move out of the Inner Core. Demographics of schools are often used as a proxy for “quality,” so schools with high concentrations of minority or low-income students can be misinterpreted as a signal for prospective homebuyers or renters to stay away from a given neighborhood, thus perpetuating residential segregation. The relationship is self-reinforcing, and must be addressed on both the school quality and housing integration fronts.

While all neighborhoods should have high-quality schools, and contain housing at a wide variety of affordability levels, both of these are politically challenging endeavors. In the meantime, efforts must be made to reduce school segregation or mitigate its impacts should be undertaken. These could include:

- Expanding the funding and reach of METCO, the voluntary busing program between Boston and its suburbs. The program needs both to increase the number of students who are able to participate, and the number of suburban municipalities that participate. This would help provide access for more Boston students to many high-quality schools in the Boston suburbs.
- Investigating alternate models of school funding that limit or eliminate it from reliance on local property taxes. Changing the school finance structure would reduce some of the resource disparities between schools located in wealthy communities and those located in poorer communities. In addition, new sources of funding for special needs education should be identified as municipalities spend widely disparate amounts on special needs education.

### **Reduce health disparities.**

The Regional Indicators report identifies disparate health outcomes by race, ethnicity, geography, and incomes. One particularly troubling finding is the disparities in low birth weights by race. The largest disparities in low birth weight are found comparing the experiences of college educated White women (fewer than 4% of all newborns are under 5.5 pounds) to Black/African American women without a high school education (more than 11% of all newborns are under 5.5 pounds). Shockingly, although education is a crucial factor correlated with birth weight, a Black/African

American woman with a college degree is still more likely to have an underweight baby than a White woman with a high school education in Greater Boston.

The Boston Public Health Commission has prioritized reducing these disparities in Boston through a number of programs. Their Boston Healthy Start Initiative and their Healthy Baby Healthy Child program take a holistic approach involving public health nurses, case managers, and community-based agencies to provide education, services, and referrals to pregnant and new mothers. In addition, they offer targeted resources to pregnant Black women in six specific neighborhoods with significant disparities in birth weights.

Implementation Step:

- Provide additional resources to programs like Boston's Healthy Baby Healthy Child and replicate successful approaches like this to reduce birth weight disparities in other communities that experience these disparities.

#### **Facilitate statewide violence prevention programs.**

Since 2006, the Commonwealth has used the Senator Charles E. Shannon, Jr. Community Safety Initiative to combat youth violence, gang violence, and substance abuse through regional, multi-disciplinary efforts. Communication across municipal lines and coordination between public safety officers and social service agencies is what sets Shannon Grants apart from other efforts to fund local law enforcement or prevention programs. No other program takes this concerted approach across jurisdictions and across disciplines.

Shannon Grant funds have been used to support regional law enforcement operations, to hire outreach workers, to fund job training programs, and to support after school programs in many cities and towns that are struggling with youth violence. Over 40 communities and more than 100 agencies have benefited from this program over the last five years, and in that time regional coordination between law enforcement and social and human services agencies has increased substantially.

In addition to Shannon, other critical programs require funding, such as those that can support school resource officers, community/street workers, and training regarding child abuse and domestic abuse prevention.

Implementation Steps:

- Fully fund the Shannon Grant program.

From a high of \$13 million in FY09, funding for the Shannon Grant program declined to \$6.25 million in FY13. These reductions in funds have forced both law enforcement and non-profit partners to scale back efforts to keep communities safe and provide resources to at-risk youth. The FY14 program has been increased slightly, to \$7 million. The Shannon Grant should be funded at levels at least comparable to those in FY09.

- Target funding to other programs that help to prevent violence in vulnerable communities.

Funding that supports violence prevention efforts in the schools, social and youth workers on the streets, and domestic abuse prevention are scattered through numerous programs and often suffer cutbacks during difficult economic times. Yet, this web of programs is essential for violence prevention in vulnerable communities, and must be safeguarded and increased.

### **Ensure that all the region's residents earn sufficient income.**

Researchers are increasingly finding that children raised in poverty experience lingering impacts on social, health, and economic well-being throughout life. Poverty is associated with higher stress, which also substantially impacts mental and physical health. Over the long-term, educational attainment is the most effective strategy to reduce poverty. But in the meantime, it is important to focus on income security. While many of the region's residents are unemployed or under-employed, far more work full-time and simply do not take home enough money to make ends meet. To raise these residents out of poverty, both public and private sector interventions are necessary to increase the amount of money they take home in each paycheck.

#### **Implementation Steps:**

- Massachusetts should raise the statewide minimum wage and index it to inflation.

While historically Massachusetts has had among the highest minimum wages in the country, the Commonwealth has not adjusted it since 2008. This is a particular issue when the real purchasing power of the minimum wage is compared to the high and rising cost of living in the Metro Boston region. According to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, there are nearly half a million workers in the Commonwealth who earn the minimum wage or close to it<sup>15</sup>. This means that nearly one in six Massachusetts workers makes far from enough to meet their basic needs, not to mention to save enough money to prepare for an emergency or to acquire assets. It also is creating a large and growing gap between the wealthiest and the poorest in the Commonwealth.

Raising the minimum wage from its current level of \$8 an hour would have a dramatic effect on the workers at the bottom end of the income distribution, increasing the wages of hundreds of thousands of employees across the Commonwealth. The Crittenton Women's Union estimates nationally that, in the average family of two adults and two children, both adults would need to earn \$17.67 per hour to meet the family's basic needs<sup>16</sup>. This figure is almost certainly higher in the Metro Boston region. While it is impractical to recommend that the minimum wage more than double, even an increase to \$11 per hour, as proposed in a bill

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<sup>15</sup> The Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center has an extensive analysis of the purchasing power of the minimum wage and who is affected by it here: [http://massbudget.org/report\\_window.php?loc=whatsitworth.html](http://massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=whatsitworth.html).

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.liveworkthrive.org/site/assets/docs/MASS%20INDEX%20FINALWEB.pdf>



currently being debated on Beacon Hill<sup>17</sup>, would have substantial beneficial impacts on the well-being of those families struggling to make ends meet.

Indexing the minimum wage to inflation would ensure that the minimum wage does not begin to lose its buying power as soon as it has been raised. The ability of earners at the bottom end of the income scale should not be dependent on a political process to update the minimum wage to reflect inflation. The Legislature should make the process automatic, as it is in ten states – Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Vermont and Washington – already.

- Massachusetts should provide sick time to all employees.

Nearly one third of Massachusetts workers receive no paid sick time at their jobs. This puts them at risk of losing their jobs if they need to take time off to care for themselves or a sick family member. This is not only a threat to the economic stability of many low-income families, but it is also a public health concern, as workers who are contagiously ill but lack paid sick time are more likely to come to work and infect others. The Commonwealth should require all employers to provide basic paid sick time, a move that would eliminate or dramatically reduce these financial and health concerns. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, providing universal paid sick time would generate a \$26 million annual net benefit for employers in Massachusetts by reducing turnover, lost productivity, and illness<sup>18</sup>.

- The state should make its income tax structure more progressive.

As it currently stands, the Commonwealth imposes a greater tax burden on its poorer citizens, which is known as a regressive tax structure. Those in the most precarious financial positions spend relatively more of their annual earnings on taxes and have less left over for basic necessities, while those in the strongest financial positions keep a greater share of their income. Such a system can prevent families from building wealth and helping themselves out of poverty, as they are unable to invest or save the income they must spend on taxes.

While the Commonwealth has a constitutional provision that mandates a flat income tax rate across all brackets, there are ways to make the tax burden more progressive across the income spectrum. Raising the overall tax rate, even modestly, while at the same time increasing the personal exemption, is the most straightforward of these ways. Raising the personal exemption would reduce the amount of income that is subject to tax, a move that would provide the greatest benefit to lower-income families. The current 5.25% income tax rate places the state

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<sup>17</sup> An Act to improve the Commonwealth's economy with a strong minimum wage. The text of the Senate version of the bill, SB 878, is available at <https://malegislature.gov/Document/Bill/188/Senate/S878.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/valuing-good-health-in-massachusetts-the-costs-and-benefits-of-paid-sick-days-2> for the full report.

28<sup>th</sup> in the nation in personal income tax rates, in the bottom half of states.

- The state and the federal government should expand and simplify some tax credits.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Retirement Savings Contributions Credit (Saver's Credit), Child and Dependent Care tax credit, and other tax benefits provide important anti-poverty benefits, but do not go far enough. The Commonwealth should join the 24 states and the District of Columbia that have added their own additional EITC on top of the federal credit, thus ensuring that the working poor take home as much of their incomes as possible.

This should be supplemented by expansion of both the Federal Child Tax Credit and the State Child and Disabled Dependent Care Tax Credit. At both the state and the federal level, these tax credits should be made refundable, so the IRS will refund the balance if the credits exceed the amount of income tax an individual or family owes. This would make them of use to all households, not simply those whose incomes are high enough to have a tax liability.

Finally, tax credits should be designed to incentivize saving, including an expansion of the Federal Savers' Credit. Currently, as with the Child Tax Credit, the Savers' Credit is only available to households with incomes large enough to have tax liabilities. This should be remedied, and the complicated structure of the Credit should be streamlined. On the state level, contributions to a 529 plan, which offers tax benefits for saving for college, should be tax-deductible. Some states, like Louisiana, provide doubled tax deductions for low-income households; others, like Maine and Rhode Island, are piloting programs where the state matches contributions to the college savings funds of low-income households.

- The state should increase funding for workforce training programs and continue to examine potential reforms for community colleges.

In 2012 as part of the Economic Development Act, the State Legislature and Governor Patrick recapitalized the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (WCTF) with \$5 million and directed Commonwealth Corporation to grant awards to address the "middle skills gap." This gap refers to the lack of workers with more than a high school diploma but less than a four year degree, a group sought after by employers, but in short supply in the Commonwealth. This gap has left 100,000 jobs unfilled despite the 240,000 unemployed residents in Massachusetts.<sup>19</sup> The program required that applicants form "industry cluster partnerships" that included an educational institution. In 2006, the fund was originally capitalized with \$18 million, which enabled programs to provide training to over 6,700 workers. Additional funding would allow the Trust Fund to continue its work over a number of years and to reach more residents, building on previously successful efforts.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.bostonfoundation.org/subsites/content.aspx?id=19266>

In addition, community colleges are often key partners in providing education and training for careers in the “middle skills.” With research and advocacy from The Boston Foundation and the Coalition FOR Community Colleges, the Patrick Administration and Legislature have passed a variety of reforms to improve the accountability, funding parity, and strategic alignment with industry cluster. The Commonwealth should continue to push for additional alignment of curricula, a system-wide strategic mission, and more accountability and resources to ensure that more residents can receive the needed skills that would qualify them for better paying and in-demand jobs.

- The state and federal government should increase funding for youth jobs.

The current summer employment rate for teens is 36%, down from 67% in 1999<sup>20</sup>. State funding for youth jobs programs is highly variable, ranging from \$7 million to \$33 million per year over recent years, and \$18 million in Fiscal Year 2013<sup>21</sup>. As was often the case, funding experienced deep cuts during the last recession, which brings with it a double impact because youth have an especially difficult time finding jobs in tight economies, and many of the jobs include staffing youth summer camps.

Black and Hispanic teens, especially low-income ones, have the most trouble finding summer employment. Studies have shown that a lack of exposure to the workforce inhibits the ability of young people to gain valuable employability and occupational skills. Both the state and federal governments provide funding to local youth employment programs, and this funding should be increased, particularly in the current economic setting. Furthermore, youth programs that include an intensive combination of skill building, networking, and internship placement should be encouraged and replicated. Continued outreach to employers to encourage their participation is also essential.

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<sup>20</sup> “The Summer Employment Experiences and the Personal/ Social Behaviors of Youth Violence Prevention Employment Program Participants and Those of a Comparison Group.” Center for Labor Market Studies. <http://www.northeastern.edu/clms/wp-content/uploads/CLMS-Executive-Summary.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.massbudget.org/report\\_window.php?loc=youth\\_employment\\_gov\\_14.html](http://www.massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=youth_employment_gov_14.html), December 9, 2013

## Build More Equitable Public Systems

Equitable outcomes in the region depend in large part on equitable systems of decision-making and political representation. This means that the people who are impacted by a decision must be involved in making it, from the election of representatives down to leadership in local development decisions. To do this, governments at all levels must encourage greater and more diverse participation in planning and electoral processes, along with access to the data and information necessary to informed participation.

### Build More Equitable Public Systems

#### *Recommendations at a Glance*

Broaden public participation in planning processes.

Improve voter registration and participation rates, particularly among underrepresented groups.

Gather and use data to advance equity goals.

#### **Broaden public participation in planning processes.**

More inclusive and broader planning and decision-making processes produce plans and policies that are more likely to meet the needs of the people impacted by them, and to have the buy in of the communities that will be involved in implementation. Broad participation starts locally in discussions about land use, education, transportation, safety, schools, and other planning topics that directly impact people's daily lives.

Through the Sustainable Communities Consortium, MAPC and its allies have increased relationship building and community engagement in communities traditionally under-involved in planning processes: immigrants, low-income communities, racial and ethnic minority groups, youth, people with disabilities, and others. While this work was an important start for MAPC and some of its allies, there is still far more to be done. In particular, it is critical to establish robust community engagement as the standard practice in planning. It is also critical to measure the results of community-based planning and to report on those results as a way of building accountability and keeping people involved over the long term.

#### Implementation Steps:

- Municipalities, Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs), and state agencies should expand their capacity for community engagement and use the best available practices.

The Commonwealth's RPAs, as well as their allies and member municipalities, need to deepen their understanding and capacity to use effective community engagement. MAPC's Community Engagement Guide for local and regional planners can be a useful guide in this effect, and workshops should be established to assist municipal officials, subregional councils, community-based organizations, and others. These workshops would provide a platform for communities to discuss their community engagement needs and challenges, as well as support in developing and testing new approaches.

Both MAPC and municipalities need additional capacity to engage in more open and inclusive planning. Capacity in this case could mean dedicated staff, financial resources, strategic partnerships, improving the knowledge of existing staff, or other creative approaches. Meaningful public engagement that focused on the needs of multiple stakeholders – local residents, whole cities and towns, and the region – can be difficult, time-consuming, and expensive work. Nevertheless, it is essential work. It is particularly important to find innovative and effective ways to engage hard-to-reach or disillusioned populations, including small businesses, low/moderate income families, single parents, young people, and people with disabilities.

Shaping meetings for the most diverse participation can take a number of forms, from reaching out to community leaders early in planning processes to shaping meetings to meet community needs. Some effective participation formats that are an alternative to the typical presentation followed by Q & A include: open houses, charettes, small breakouts, site walks, and providing the opportunity to participate through websites and other technologies. Numerous aspects of meeting structure can be equally important, include translation services, interactive materials, scheduling meetings to consider the time constraints of the target participants, providing food and beverages for meetings that span mealtimes, providing childcare, and so on. Finally, planners should remember that large public meetings are not the only mechanism for engaging community residents.

- Provide ongoing support and funding to community partners to organize and manage community engagement for local projects.

Community organizations and nonprofits are uniquely positioned to bring under-represented residents and stakeholders into planning and development discussions. Frequently these organizations are under-resourced and some lack the capacity to carry out this role effectively. Foundations and grants such as Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant have provided resources to community partners to augment their organizing and engagement work. Additional investments in this type of community building are vital to increase community engagement that will ultimately lead to stronger neighborhoods and better development outcomes that benefits all residents.

### **Improve voter registration and participation rates, particularly among underrepresented groups.**

Voter participation rates reflect the degree to which people feel empowered to participate in the political process, and whether they feel they are able to exercise their individual choices to produce community leaders and collectively to influence policies and laws. However, voter participation rates vary by racial/ethnic group, age, and a number of other factors. Certain changes at the state and local level have the potential to make it easier both to register to vote and to vote. Improving the ease and access of voting has been shown particularly to increase voter participation among historically underrepresented groups.

## Implementation Steps:

- The Secretary of State should adopt online voter registration.

Adopting online voter registration both makes it easier for citizens to register and ultimately saves government time and money. Citizens without regular access to a car or with long work hours may not be able to easily pick up or deliver voter registration forms, a problem that particularly impacts lower-income individuals. The Commonwealth currently allows mail-in voting registration; allowing online registration for anyone with a signature on file in the Registry of Motor Vehicle (RMV) database will make it far easier for these citizens to register, and far more convenient for youth, who are generally more comfortable with the Internet, to do so.

- The Commonwealth should adopt legislation that makes it easier to vote, including authorizing election-day registration, early voting, and pre-registering 17-year-olds.

There are a variety of legislative changes that could be made to make it easier and more convenient for all of the Commonwealth's citizens to vote. Three of these changes are highlighted below.

- Allowing citizens with valid identification to register and vote on Election Day is an important way to make the election process more convenient for those who lack free time or easy transportation options. According to Project Vote, a national nonprofit that works to increase the participation of historically underrepresented voter groups, Election Day registration has proven to be a significant boost to voter participation in the 13 states that have adopted it. In those states, average turnout rates are 10-12 percentage points higher than national averages<sup>22</sup>.
- Another method for improving voter turnout is to increase flexibility and voter education regarding techniques for early voting, which can be conducted through mail-in absentee ballots or "Early In-Person" (EIP) ballots, and permits any registered voter to cast an early ballot. This allows those without the time or flexibility on Election Day to cast their vote at a time that is more convenient for them.
- Finally, allowing youth to pre-register to vote and educating them about the importance of voting are important tools to reduce the gap between youth voter participation rates and those of the older population. According to research by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, the 2012 voter turnout rate for youth ages 18-24 was 41.2%, compared to a turnout rate of 64.8% for adults 25 and over<sup>23</sup>. Pre-registration programs, when coupled with education and outreach, have been shown to increase voting rates for young people dramatically, particularly among members of minority groups.

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<sup>22</sup>See Election Day registration facts at: <http://www.projectvote.org/same-day-reg.html>

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/> for more information.

## Gather and use data to advance equity goals.

Currently, decision-makers and stakeholders often lack timely and complete access to the data they need, and often do not have the capacity to interpret the data and use it to advance regional equity. More significantly, critical data on pressing policy issues are simply not available because the information is not collected consistently.

### Implementation Steps:

- MAPC should help to build the capacity of community-based organizations to use technology and data analysis.

Technology advances have made data collection, processing and analysis more user-friendly and accessible to people from a range of backgrounds. Data has increasingly become an important way to convey ideas and information, and to engage different groups, especially youth and young adults, who are often early adopters of rapidly changing technology. People with very little training in data analysis can use streamlined and interactive websites to explore and answer questions relevant to their agendas. As progress continues to push data into the public realm, efforts need to ensure equitable access and capacity-building support for potential users so that they can work with and interpret large datasets. These efforts should take many forms, including the following activities:

- Expand capacity of community-based organizations to utilize mapping, data, and decision support tools.

Effective advocacy can often involve mapping, visualization, data analysis, and research built on existing datasets. However, these activities often require technology and skills outside of many groups' core competencies. Multiple strategies are needed to expand this capacity: free training events like MAPC's Data Day conference; access to free or low-cost data analysis and visualization software, such as MAPC's MetroBoston DataCommon, the Boston Foundation's Boston Indicators Project, and the free training that MAPC offers for its use; skilled intermediaries that can provide free or low-cost data and services; and creative outreach to supporters to identify monetary, technology and capacity building resources.

- Build capacity for community groups to use audits, surveys, and crowd-sourcing techniques to create new datasets.

Community groups can use several techniques to create and analyze their own datasets, including the following:

**Audits** involve the systematic collection of data about physical assets or environmental features. A community may, for example, be interested in conducting an audit of vacant lots in their neighborhood, or an audit of parking space utilization.

**Surveys** are the systematic collection of demographic, informational, or opinion data from community members. These are used widely by community organizations or project groups to collect demographic information about their members and to assess public opinion on specific projects or initiatives.

**Crowd-sourcing** uses large groups of people to compile or process information that would be otherwise too difficult for an individual to collect or process alone.

These categories sometimes overlap and connect, and there are a number of new and emerging tools available with multiple functionalities for communities to collect data, contribute to local datasets, and use digital information for local analysis. Some of these tools are free and open for public use, some require a paid subscription, and some offer limited functionality for free and a paid subscription for more features. Available tools also range in ease of use from easy, requiring little to no training, to more complex, requiring professional training. Some examples include:

	Free	Open Source	Training Required	Crowdsourcing	Brainstorming	Survey	Physical Audit	Mapping	Statistical Analysis	Gaming
CrowdMap / Ushahidi	Y	Y	N	•				•		
IdeaScale	Y*	N	N	•	•					
UserVoice	Y*	N	N	•	•					
Survey Monkey	Y*	N	N			•			•	
Lime Survey	Y	Y	N			•			•	
Survs	Y*	N	N			•			•	
AllOurIdeas	Y	Y	N	•	•	•			•	
LocalData	N	N	Y	•		•	•	•		
Community PlanIt	N	N	Y							•
MBDC	Y	Y	Y					•	•	
Citizens Connect	Y	N	N	•	•			•		
Google Platforms	Y*	N	N	•	•	•		•	•	
*Tools offer limited functionality for free										

These tools are just a few examples of the many digital innovations that are streamlining information collection processes, making data more engaging, and integrating crowd-sourcing strategies into traditional planning methods. Planners and communities have to continue to invest in digital capacity building.

- Collect datasets critical to analyzing regional trends, such as the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) dataset.

The LEHD results from a voluntary federal-state partnership whose purpose is to merge data from workers with data from employers to produce publicly available information at the local level. Massachusetts is the only state that does not yet have public-use data, though it has recently joined the partnership and its data production is currently pending.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For more information see the LEHD website [http://lehd.ces.census.gov/state\\_partners/](http://lehd.ces.census.gov/state_partners/)



# Conclusion

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The recommendations contained in this report are certainly not exhaustive, and creating a truly equitable region will require far more substantial changes than those outlined here. However, MAPC has looked to the incredible work being done by equity advocates in the region and around the country, talked to hundreds of the region's residents about what they see as the region's equity priorities, and compiled a list of equity recommendations that we believe is an important roadmap for our and our allies' work. Many of these activities are already underway, but we are adding our voice to the chorus calling out their importance. Hopefully, in working on these first activities, we all will lay the groundwork for the next policy agenda, and our work will continue toward building the region we want to see.

As we learned from the State of Equity in Metro Boston Indicators Report, the gap we as a region face between our goals and our reality is large. However, we – the region – have a clear vision for the kind of place we want to create, and a good sense of the first steps we need to take to get there. We have a long road to travel, but we also have a long history of rising to challenges presented to us. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.” Many of the region's residents and leaders are already hard at work bending that arc a little more quickly, and it is MAPC's hope that this agenda will serve to lift up and advance their work.