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S T R A T E G Y O N E

# Implemented Coordinated Plans

## Summary

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Adopted in 2008, MetroFuture is Greater Boston's long term regional plan. The foundation of the plan is a well-defined vision<sup>1</sup> for the region. Thirteen implementation strategies were included to support progress towards the vision. An extensive community engagement process ensured that MAPC constructed the vision and strategies from the hopes and dreams of the region. In anticipation of an update to the regional plan, MAPC is evaluating the extent to which regional actors, either intentionally or unintentionally, implemented these strategies. The authors gathered the information that follows through conversations with MAPC staff and content experts.

Strategy #1, [Implement Coordinated Plans](#), sought to coordinate state, regional, and local plans that promoted equity and sustainability. Local planning departments in 2008 varied quite significantly both in regards to the existence of recent planning documents and in staff capacity. The Implement Coordinated Plans strategy offered recommendations to increase the capacity and coordination of planners and to reduce redundancy, contradictory efforts, and conflict.

The Commonwealth supported plan coordination, creating a number of state policies and programs to encourage collaboration between state, regional, and municipal entities. Examples include the state-sponsored Land Use Priority Plans (2013), which identified priority areas for development and for preservation, and followed these plans with investments. The state also sought to coordinate sustainable policies and programs. The MassWorks Infrastructure Program (2011), which consolidated six former grant programs into one to fund multi-family housing development, economic development in distressed areas, mixed-use development, and transportation improvements. While important initiatives, progress was somewhat piecemeal and advocates are asking that the state be more deliberate in coordinating future plans.

Regional initiatives offered training and tools to increase the capacity of municipal planning staff and to inspire more consistent planning and decision making. The Institute for Leadership and Equity in Development (ILEAD), created by MAPC and community-based partners, trains community members around creating policy change. Action for Regional Equity and the Mel King Institute train new civic leaders from under-represented communities to participate in decisions that will affect their neighborhoods. Efforts led by Citizen Planner Training Collaborative teach planners and volunteers the value of planning

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<sup>1</sup> MetroFuture's vision for a Greater Boston Region comprises a constellation of unique cities and towns, full of character and rich in culture. A regionally-minded population will make decisions based on informed civic engagement, political leadership, and proactive planning. The region will see growing regional diversity as an asset that can make the lives of all groups richer, and the region more attractive. The region will have more housing options that meet the diverse needs, especially those of seniors and families. Great schools in every community will help to create an educated populace, to provide opportunity, and to drive the economy. All people will live in healthy and safe communities, with local governments that have the resources they need to provide the services people expect. The region will retain its special landscape, unique to New England, and its environmental integrity, with healthy water, clean air, working farms, quiet forests, and beautiful coastlines. The region's economy will be strong, supported by a well maintained transportation system that provides people with different ways to get around. Communities work together to find common solutions for common problems.

tools and planning coordination. MAPC created a suite of tools for planners to use including Local Access Score and Mass Builds. MAPC, and other non-profits, also provided technical assistance to municipalities and state agencies and in doing so championed a regional perspective.

The extent to which municipalities have embraced coordinated planning varies. Due to the power of home rule, municipalities are not obligated to think regionally and therefore mainly focus within their borders. In regards to municipal planning capacity, MAPC planners report that municipal planning staff size and resources have largely stayed the same. Many municipalities continue to under-resource their planning departments and while the majority of municipalities embraced modern planning tools, others continue to use outdated or inefficient tools.

## **Sub-Strategy Review**

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### **Sub-Strategy A: Increase municipal planning capacity**

#### **EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS**

- The [Citizen Planner Training Collaborative](#) continues to be a critical resource for local planning and zoning officials. MAPC sub-regions host three sessions a year and train a variety of planners and citizens in smart growth planning strategies. MAPC also supports the annual spring CPTC training conference.
- MAPC's [Institute on Leadership in Equity and Development](#) began in 2012. To date, MAPC has conducted three ILEAD trainings where residents learn how to identify and solve sustainable and equitable development issues in communities, especially under-served communities.
- In 2018, the Massachusetts [Housing Choice Initiative](#) will also provide technical assistance funds for planning for housing production.
- Funding has increased to various pools of money that support developing municipal planning capacity in Metro Boston. Increases to District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA), assessment funds for MAPC, Community Compact and Energy and Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grants Program, mean that more municipalities have access to technical assistance.
- The [Mel King Institute](#), created in 2009, trains professional practitioners and volunteer leaders in community development to ensure that the field stays on the cutting edge of new information and practice.

- MAPC trains municipalities in various planning tools. Some examples include:
  - [CommunityViz](#), which allows planners to envision planning alternatives and understand their potential impacts
  - [Local Access Score](#), developed by MAPC, which helps prioritize sidewalk and bike route improvements.
  - MAPC's sub-regional meetings offer planners from across the region the opportunity to learn from MAPC and from each other. Sub-regional partnerships produced several multi-municipality planning initiatives, including:
    - MAPC's [North Suburban mobility study](#)
    - MAPC's [MetroWest Open Space Connectivity Plan](#)

## BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Some municipalities still don't fully value, or have the funding to support a local, professional planner. In some municipalities, planners are viewed as political appointments and therefore change when the administrations change.
- State government and municipal government does not provide enough dedicated planning funds to significantly impact planning capacity. Long-term planning suffers as planning staff are occupied with development reviews.
- Too frequently municipal planning does not account for issues that spill over town and city boundaries.

## Sub-Strategy B: Modernize planning and development tools

### EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- [Chapter 43E Expedited State Permitting Program](#) (2006) and [Chapter 43D Expedited Local Permitting Program](#) (2006) promotes a streamlined and time sensitive review process, which makes development more predictable and therefore more attractive to developers.
  - According to state data<sup>2</sup>, the number of sites using 43D dropped from an average of fifty-five per year between 2007 and 2009 to an average of three per year since (See Figure 5). The state website notes fourteen 43 E sites.
  - Within the MAPC catchment area, twenty-three municipalities have adopted sixty-two 43D sites, the majority of which occurred between 2007 and 2009.
- The [Mass Smart Growth Alliance](#), in partnership with MAPC, launched the [Great Neighborhoods Campaign](#) to urge Legislature to reform and modernize the Commonwealth's planning, zoning, and permitting laws.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mass.gov/hed/economic/eohed/pro/zoning-and-permitting/43d/chapter-43d-communities.html>

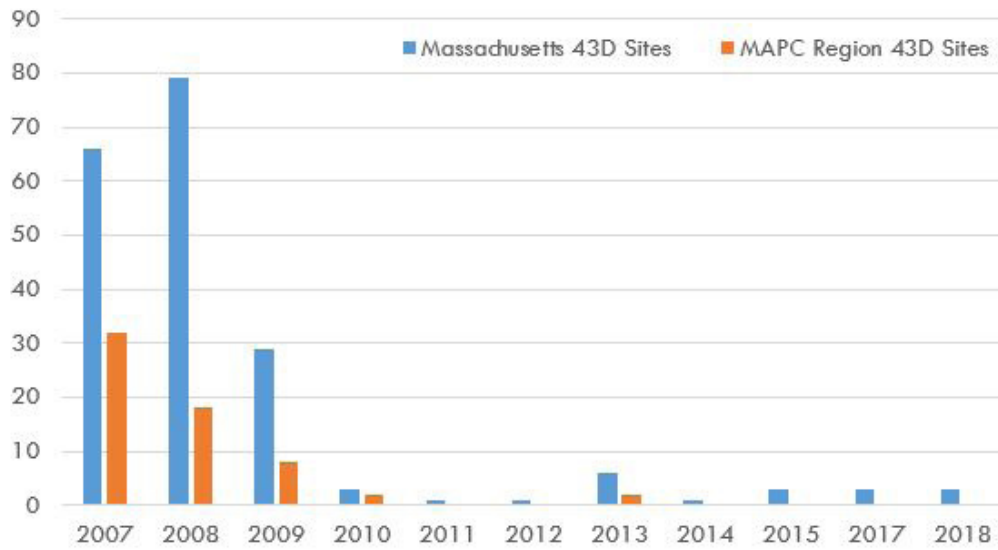


Figure 1: 43D Sites in Massachusetts and MAPC Region 2007 to 2018  
 Source: [www.mass.gov/service-details/chapter-43d-communities](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/chapter-43d-communities)

- MAPC produced a variety of tools to help planners make sustainable planning decisions, some MassBuilds and Local Access Score were already mentioned, others include:
  - Parking utilization studies to help advocate for “right size” parking standards
  - The Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA), which includes MAPC, prepared “[A Best Practices Model for Streamlined Local Permitting](#)” in late 2007, and promotes these practices through presentations, as well as in recommendations to municipalities.

## BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- MetroFuture recommended that Massachusetts change the legislation that authorizes Transfer of Development Rights, which work to preserve rural areas and transfer their development rights to denser areas. The limited impact of the tool is partially due to the difficulties of inter-municipal transfers and partially due to the requirement for transfers to include density bonuses. MAPC is promoting a Revolving Loan Fund that would remove the timing barrier and make it easier for municipalities to purchase and hold development rights for future sale to increase development density in designated areas.

## Sub-Strategy C: Establish consistency of plans across all levels

### EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- In 2013 the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) partnered with municipalities north of Boston and MAPC to align, prioritize and fund Priority Development Areas (PDA) and Priority Preservation Areas (PPA). Prioritizing growth and preservation in specific areas advanced the Sustainable Development Principles, Governor Patrick's statewide housing goal, MassDOT's mode shift goal, and MetroFuture goals.
- Since [Priority Development Areas](#) and [Priority Preservation Areas](#) planning began, MAPC has participated in planning around South Coast Rail, the I-495 region, the North Suburban Subregion and parts of the North Shore in addition to the MetroNorth study. These plans identify local, regional, and state-level land use and transportation priorities.
- The [MassWorks](#) grants program, established in 2011 by combining a number of state grant programs, provides awards to municipalities to prepare for long-term strength and sustainability, with particular emphasis on projects that support multi-family housing development, economic development in distressed areas, mixed-use development, and transportation improvements. Regional planning agencies review MassWorks applications for consistency with regional plan priorities.
- MAPC helped 10 cities and towns produce Master Plans that update and integrate previous local planning efforts as well as state and regional priorities and, as of March 2018, 5 master plans are in progress.
- In 2017 the [Metro Mayors Coalition](#) launched a regional housing initiative that established a regional housing production goal and strategy for achieving the goal over time.
- MAPC, through its subregions, encourages unified subregional comments on priorities for the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Regional Transportation Plan, and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).
- MAPC uses MetroFuture to assess projects under [Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act](#) (MEPA) reviews.
- MAPC undertakes a review of all draft open space and recreations plans submitted in the region and encourages the municipalities undertaking these plans to include discussion of regional resources and cross-municipal issues.

### BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- Because there is no statutory requirement for plan consistency, coordination depends on willing collaboration between levels of government. As administrations change, previous priorities may not be observed. For example, the Land Use Priority Plans have not continued under the Baker Administration.

- There is no mechanism to measure the consistency of plans across all levels, which is something MetroFuture called for.
- The strength of home-rule and the lack of a county level of government has made consistency of plans across levels difficult to organize, much less implement.
- Municipal finance is largely dependent on raising local revenues, which can result in municipalities competing amongst themselves for new revenues.
- There is no incentive for adjacent municipalities to coordinate their planning efforts even for parcels at or straddling their borders.

### **Sub-Strategy D: Coordinate sustainable state policies and programs**

#### **EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:**

- The Sustainable Water Management Initiative (SWMI) passed, overhauling water permit issuance, restricting overuse of certain stream flows, and using larger scale models that encompass a larger impact area, which MetroFuture called for.
- Since the Romney Administration, there has been some degree of high-level state agency coordination on development and preservation issues. With Romney, the state established the Office for Commonwealth Development that was a “super-secretariat”, which included economic development, housing, transportation, and environmental agencies.
- Commonwealth Community Compact, established in 2016, champions municipal interests across all executive secretariats and agencies, and develops, in consultation with cities and towns, mutual standards and best practices for both the state and municipalities. As of September 2017, 300 signed Compacts are in place representing over 600 best practices.
- Since MetroFuture was adopted, 116 towns in the state have completed Housing Production Plans (HPPs) in Massachusetts and 48 within MAPC’s region. MAPC consulted on twenty plans, all of which advocate for diverse housing production that takes local and regional housing supply into account. Examples of outcomes of those HPPs include stronger inclusionary zoning policies and more liberal accessory dwelling unit ordinances, but plan implementation is inconsistent.
- In 2017, MAPC worked with the state to prepare guidance for how municipalities should undertake the 40B 1.5% land area calculation. This will bring consistency to a process that has long been contentious and undertaken in an inconsistent manner.

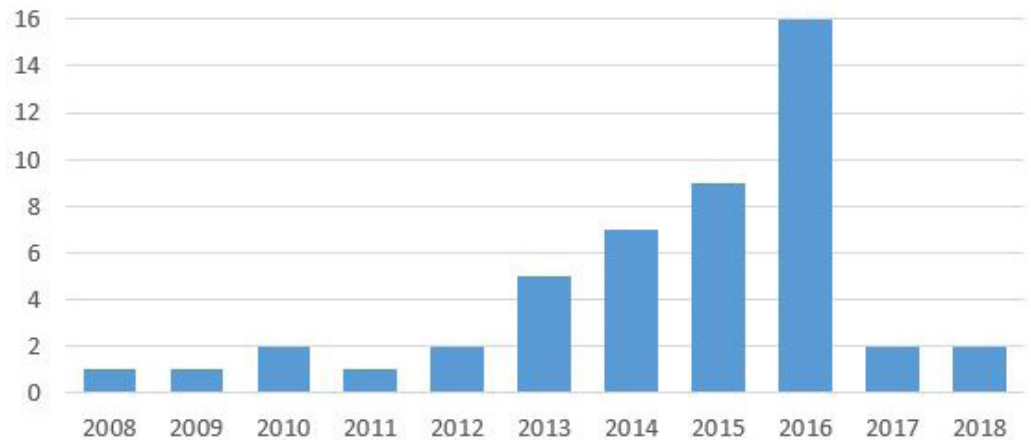


Figure 2: HPPs Adopted in MAPC Region since 2008

Source: "HPPPlansApprovalExpiration.doc" downloaded from <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/chapter-40-b-housing-production-plan5/1/2018>

## BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:

- The [Massachusetts Water Resources Authority](#) (MWRA) resisted considering land use regulations as part of determining new water service because they did not believe land use planning and development was within their mission.
- Legislative improvements to agencies like MEPA or laws like Chapter 40B may indeed increase sustainability and coordination, but once changes are possible, there will be an equal if not stronger push against coordination and sustainability, and all that was previously gained will be at risk.

## Sub-strategy E: Foster private sector demand for sustainable development

### EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS:

- Cities and towns, on the advice of MAPC and other planning firms, are using Chapter 43D designations to streamline permitting requirements and making permitting by right where available. From 2009 to the present there have been 9 additional 43D communities.
- MAPC convened a Developers Roundtable in 2016 and 2017 where local developers learned about MetroFuture's vision for the region and discussed barriers the industry faced in creating mixed-use and higher density developments in smart growth locations.
- In 2016 and 2017, the U.S. Green Building Council named Massachusetts the top state for LEED development in the country.



- A Better City, a diverse group of business leaders working to enhance the region's economy and quality of life, works with many private sector partners to implement and track sustainable building technologies and management practices.
- TOD plans, developed by MAPC and others, help cities and towns plan for growth around transit, which is a sustainable method for growth.

## **BARRIERS TO PROGRESS:**

- Zoning is antiquated in many municipalities. In order to promote redevelopment in downtowns and other smart growth locations, updated zoning is needed (e.g. by-right permitting, density, expanded uses). The governor's Housing Choice bill (introduced 2017) would have reduced zoning adoption votes to a simple majority, but it failed to pass in the legislative session that ended summer 2018.
- Beyond the metroBoston area, municipalities have begun to change downtown zoning to encourage sustainable development, but developers have been slow to respond in some locations.

## **Emergent Themes**

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- MAPC encourages municipalities to incorporate more than just traditional plans into their portfolio of coordinated plans. Health plans, arts and culture plans, clean energy plans are all important aspects of a sustainable and desirable municipality and MAPC now includes this type of planning within their more traditional Master Plans, Economic Development Plans, and Transit Oriented Development plans.