MAPC's 3A Analytical Toolbox | *District Suitability*
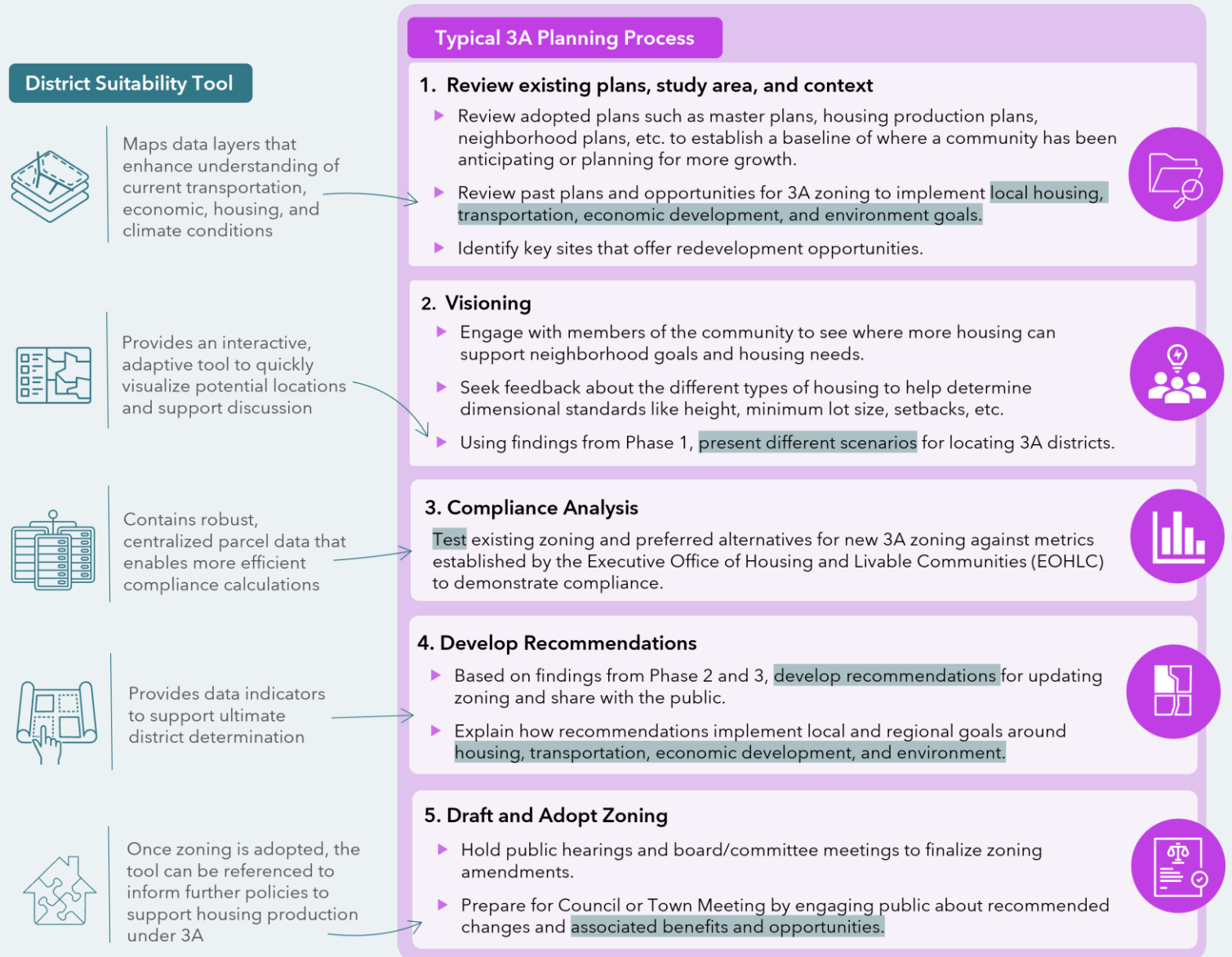

mapc.ma/3a-district-suitability

The MBTA Communities Multifamily Zoning Requirement, or Section 3A of the Zoning Act, is a new state law requiring each municipality in the MBTA service district - 177 in total - to zone for by-right multifamily housing near transit and other smart growth locations. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council's (MAPC) interactive District Suitability Analysis Tool is a decision-support tool that uses data to help municipalities within MAPC's region identify locations for 3A districts that advance regional and local goals.

The tool analyzes factors related to transportation, accessibility, development feasibility, residential capacity, and climate risk to highlight areas where increased housing density will best advance equity and sustainability. Clusters of parcels/sites with higher suitability are potentially strong candidates for 3A zoning districts.

How does the District Suitability Tool fit into the 3A Planning Process?

The District Suitability Tool is intended to complement stakeholder-driven processes to plan for more housing through new 3A zoning districts. The tool can be referenced at different points in the planning process to help facilitate conversations around areas suitable for new housing production.

District Suitability Tool

Maps data layers that enhance understanding of current transportation, economic, housing, and climate conditions

Provides an interactive, adaptive tool to quickly visualize potential locations and support discussion

Contains robust, centralized parcel data that enables more efficient compliance calculations

Provides data indicators to support ultimate district determination

Once zoning is adopted, the tool can be referenced to inform further policies to support housing production under 3A

Typical 3A Planning Process

1. Review existing plans, study area, and context
▶ Review adopted plans such as master plans, housing production plans, neighborhood plans, etc. to establish a baseline of where a community has been anticipating or planning for more growth.
▶ Review past plans and opportunities for 3A zoning to implement local housing, transportation, economic development, and environment goals.
▶ Identify key sites that offer redevelopment opportunities.

2. Visioning
▶ Engage with members of the community to see where more housing can support neighborhood goals and housing needs.
▶ Seek feedback about the different types of housing to help determine dimensional standards like height, minimum lot size, setbacks, etc.
▶ Using findings from Phase 1, present different scenarios for locating 3A districts.

3. Compliance Analysis
Test existing zoning and preferred alternatives for new 3A zoning against metrics established by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to demonstrate compliance.

4. Develop Recommendations
▶ Based on findings from Phase 2 and 3, develop recommendations for updating zoning and share with the public.
▶ Explain how recommendations implement local and regional goals around housing, transportation, economic development, and environment.

5. Draft and Adopt Zoning
▶ Hold public hearings and board/committee meetings to finalize zoning amendments.
▶ Prepare for Council or Town Meeting by engaging public about recommended changes and associated benefits and opportunities.

More information and resources at mapc.ma/3a-district-suitability