Planning for Section 3A Success:
Leveraging the District Suitability Analysis Tool
February 27, 2024

<u>Webinar Q&A</u>

The following questions were asked during the February 27 live webinar. Not all questions could be answered in real time, so a collective set of responses has been gathered here. If you would like to view the recording of the webinar, <u>click here</u>. Additional questions not covered by this Q&A may be directed to: <u>dataservices@mapc.org</u> (Rachel Bowers, Lily Perkins-High) or <u>ebattaglia@mapc.org</u> (Emma Battaglia).

1. **How is this different or complimentary to <u>https://residensity.mhp.net/</u> and other tools?**

Residensity estimates the number of homes at the parcel or lot level to help you visualize different densities. MAPC's 3A District Suitability Analysis Tool evaluates locations based on a set of criteria related to transportation, accessibility, development feasibility, residential capacity, and climate vulnerability, scoring each land parcel from 0 (least suitable) to 100 (most suitable).

2. **Can this tool also be used outside of 3A analysis? I am concerned that towns not proximate to the MBTA are not participating in addressing the housing crisis.**

Yes, we hope this will be a useful tool for planning, both during 3A work and beyond! Examples of other uses for the tool include identifying sites for a Housing Production Plan that offer potential for new residential development or areas where residents of naturally occurring affordable housing may be at risk of displacement because of high redevelopment potential.

3. **What is the geographic area that this tool was run for? Is it just MAPC or was it run for all municipalities in the MBTA district?**

For now, the tool only includes the MBTA Communities in the MAPC region, but we hope to expand the geography in the future.

4. **Are the weighted values for each criterion adjustable by the user, or fully predetermined?**

The weight values for the criterion in the tool are fully pre-determined based on the percentage of land that must be within the station area, but we'd love to hear if there are alternative weighting schemes you'd like to see.

5. **Where does a municipality with a requirement for 75% of the minimum acreage to be within the station area (½-mile radius), for example, land in the criteria weighting scheme?**

In this example, Station Area would account for 37.5%, Transit Accessibility for 12.5%, Local Accessibility for 18.8%, Development Feasibility for 15.6%, Residential Capacity for 9.4% and Flood Risk would account for 6.3%.

Information on weighting is available in the Resources menu, under Technical Documentation. You can also view the weights applicable to a parcels' score by clicking on that parcel and scrolling down to Criteria Weights in the Parcel Information panel on the right side of the screen.

6. What about a municipality with a requirement for 40% of the minimum acreage to be within the station area?

In this example, Station Area would account for 20%, Transit Accessibility for 16%, Local Accessibility for 24%, Development Feasibility for 20%, Residential Capacity for 12% and Flood Risk would account for 8%.

Information on weighting is available in the Resources menu, under Technical Documentation. You can also view the weights applicable to a parcels' score by clicking on that parcel and scrolling down to Criteria Weights in the Parcel Information panel on the right side of the screen.

7. Can district boundary exports be imported into the HLC compliance model?

No, it is unfortunately not possible to export district boundaries drawn in the tool to a shapefile file format for use in the EOHLC compliance model.

8. How do you see the selection results and details of a drawn area on the map?

Using the "Draw a polygon," "Draw a rectangle," or "Draw a circle" feature will only allow you to draw on the map, it won't select the parcels within. To select multiple parcels, you will want to use the "Selection tool" (see screenshot below). Instructions for selecting parcels are available in the Resources menu, under "Using the Tool."
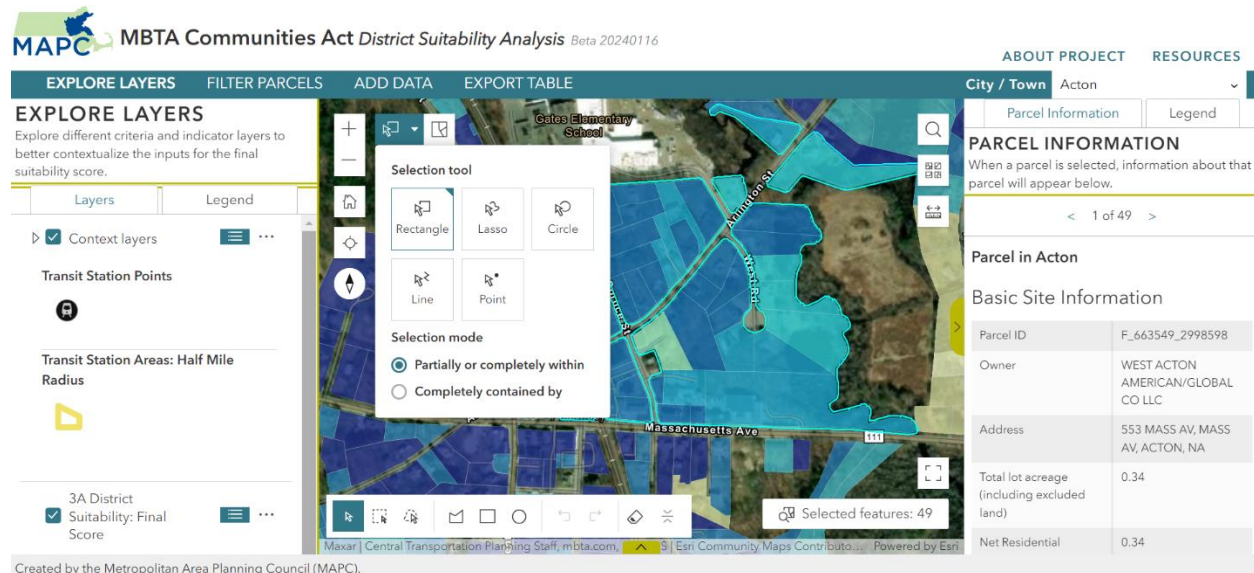
9. Is there a way to quantify the number of parcels by selected area, and to export parcel info (area) of those?

Yes, as you can see in the screenshot above, the tool will provide a count of selected parcels in the lower right of the map ("Selected features: 49") and in the Parcel Information panel ("1 of

49"). Selected parcels can be exported from the "Export Table" page. For further instructions, please refer to the Using the Tool document, which is available under Resources.

10. Looking at my town, the "most suitable" areas for residential development would take away our few business zones. How does this equate with the state's model?

This is a good example of where the tool can support broader planning conversations - for instance, could those business zones better support mixed-use to allow some residential or what local actions could help expand suitability beyond business zones.

11. Does the tool consider constraints such as wetlands or if an area is in an aquifer/resource protection district? What about access to town services (water, sewer)?

The tool excludes land based on EOHLC's definition of excluded land, which includes surface water bodies, wetland resources and Title V buffer zones, Zone I wellhead protection areas, Zone A surface water supply protection areas, and more. The definition and examples of excluded land is explained in more detail here: https://www.mass.gov/doc/section-3a-land-maps-sources-and-methods/download

Access to town services is not included in the analysis, but you can upload shapefiles that depict town services (such as a sewer line) for visualization on the map.

12. Why were the small parcels excluded from the database? Many times, smaller lots are in common ownership and can be developed.

All parcels smaller than ⅛ acre (5,445 square feet) in size or with developable area less than ⅛ acre in size are screened from the analysis. MAPC chose to eliminate these parcels because they are less likely to be redeveloped and, if redeveloped, would produce very few housing units. There is unfortunately not a good way for us to consider parcel consolidation based on ownership when working at the regional scale.

13. Many communities may have base zoning with districts with lot minimum of 5,000 square feet. Is there a reason 5,445 square feet was used to screen parcel layers?

We chose 5,445 square feet because it was relative to an acre. Based on feedback, we intend to update the model in the next few weeks to include parcels of at least 5,000 square feet in size.

14. Why are not all parcels included in the analysis?

Our analysis was designed to be generally consistent with the Section 3A Compliance Guidelines, where housing units are not placed on excluded land. In addition to the examples referenced in **#11**, other parcels classified as excluded land include undevelopable public land, protected open space and recreational land, rights of way, and institutionally-owned parcels. Please refer to the answer for **#12** regarding the elimination of small parcels.

15. I thought a compliant district could include institutionally-owned parcels, even though they aren't developable, so why exclude them? Often inclusion is needed for required contiguity.

A compliant district can certainly include parcels that aren't developable. However, they won't count towards your minimum unit capacity, which is why we have chosen to not include them in the analysis (along with all the other examples of excluded land).

16. What about historic districts?

Historic districts are not factored into the analysis, but sites that appear in the National Register of Historic Places are. The presence of historic sites is a part of the Development Feasibility criteria. Parcels without a historic site are scored higher because it is assumed that properties with historic buildings are less likely to be developed. To compare the location of suitable parcels with local historic districts, we recommend using the "Add Data" feature to upload a shapefile of the historic districts in your municipality.

17. I've loaded the tool and am viewing the half mile area district around the transit station. Many parcels are purple and clickable. Many parcels are not and are not clickable. Is this because they have been deemed unsuitable parcels? It would still be useful to be able to click on them to determine size and ownership.

Provided the "3A District Suitability: Final Score" layer is checked, all scored parcels should be clickable. Unscored parcels will not have an associated color, just aerial imagery.

18. Can you tell us what the source year of ownership and assessor's data is?

The parcel boundaries in the tool are sourced from EOHLC's "Basic land records files" on the [MBTA Communities Compliance Model & Components page](#). According to their [sources and methods document](#), the parcel data is from MassGIS and includes, "...the most recently submitted data from each municipality in the Commonwealth, but the effective date of the information for each municipality varies based on the last time the community submitted information."

MAPC combined the basic land records files with the MAPC Land Parcel Database to add attributes that were not present, such as "Building value per square foot." The MAPC Land Parcel Database pulls from the most recent MassGIS [Property Tax Parcels](#) layer. Assessment year for each municipality can be found on [this map](#). More information about data sources in the tool is present in our [technical documentation,](#) available under Resources.

19. How does zoning come into play? If one wanted to not zone single-family residential areas for 3A, could one select only for commercial or mixed use or village center zoning, for instance?

Local zoning regulations are not factored into the analysis, but spatial data for zoning could be added into the tool for viewing using the "Add Data" feature. You can also visit [MAPC's Zoning Atlas](#) for a collaborative inventory and interpretation of municipal zoning data in Massachusetts.

20. Does the "Add Data" feature allow you to add data about local zoning?

Yes! You can use that feature to upload shapefiles of local zoning districts.

21. Can you literally export to CSV or Excel? I don't see that as an option under Actions.

Yes, please refer to the [Using the Tool](#) document, which is available under Resources.

22. Is the background information in your platform going to be updated to reflect real changes to parcels?

We don't have firm plans for an update but will consider one if/when HLC updates the data the tool references (i.e., EOHLC Communities Land Records Files, EOHLC Transit Station Areas, EOHLC Transit Station Points, and EOHLC Excluded Land).

23. Is it possible to print the maps/layers that are created with the tool?

We recommend taking screenshots and then printing those.

24. What's the ability for a regular town resident to save or print a proposed zoning area to pass on to the Town officials?

Anybody can use the District Suitability Analysis Tool, including residents. As mentioned in **#23**, we recommend users take screenshots and then print those out to pass on to Town officials.

25. Who at MAPC can we speak with for additional questions? Contact info?

If you have questions about the District Suitability Analysis Tool, please contact dataservices@mapc.org to reach Rachel Bowers, Data Analyst II, and Lily Perkins-High, Analytical Services Manager. If you have questions about how to use the tool in your 3A planning process, please contact Emma Battaglia, Senior Housing & Land Use Planner, at ebattaglia@mapc.org.

26. Where will this webinar recording and slide deck be available online for people not able to attend today?

The webinar recording and slide deck is available online at www.mapc.org/mbta-multifamily-zoning. On that webpage, you can also access explainers about the tool, learn how MAPC is helping municipalities comply with Section 3A, find opportunities for technical assistance, read through FAQs about Section 3A, and more!

27. Is this tool completely free of charge?

Yes! It is free of charge for all users.

28. Can the tool provide a layer that test-fits a potential development shape and height?

No, that's unfortunately outside the scope of the tool.

29. What exactly is HLC?

HLC is a shortened abbreviation for the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC), the state agency tasked with issuing the compliance guidelines and approving compliant zoning districts.

30. Please define by-right zoning in this context. Does by-right bypass local Zoning Board of Appeals process, and go directly to build?

By-right is defined as a zoning approval that doesn't require a special permit, variance, or other discretionary and subjective review process. Site Plan Review is considered by-right as defined by EOHLC. Whether or not a project can bypass local ZBAs and go directly to build depends on how the local ordinance or bylaw stipulates the development review process.

31. Can a municipality have, say, four different 3A compliant districts that are each under 50 acres, but combined, total over 50 acres (not contiguous)?

Yes! Municipalities are allowed to include multiple subdistricts with acreage, that combined, equals the minimum land area. In rapid transit communities, commuter rail communities, and adjacent communities, the minimum land area of the zoning district(s) is 50 acres, or 1.5% of the developable land in the community, whichever is less (there is no minimum acreage for adjacent small towns). Subdistricts must be at least 5 acres each and at least half of the minimum land area should be contiguous.

32. Our community is adjacent and has no land within a half-mile of a station. The tool shows it as such. Does our town need to comply with 3A?

We recommend referring to the EOHLC's website to check whether or not you are an MBTA Community under the law: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/multi-family-zoning-requirement-for-mbta-communities.