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MBTA COMMUNITIES (SECTION 3A)
DISTRICT SUITABILITY ANALYSIS TOOL

Webinar | February 27, 2024
Welcome & Introductions
MBTA Communities Law Overview
District Suitability Analysis Tool Demo
Tool Q&A
Practical Applications
Applicability Q&A
DISTRICT SUITABILITY ANALYSIS TOOL
INTRODUCTIONS

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Manager of Housing & Neighborhood Development

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Analytical Services Manager

Casey Williams
Regional Housing & Land Use Planner II
Who is in the room today? Please identify your role within the Section 3A planning process.

- Municipal staff member
- Local board/committee member
- Interested resident
- State agency staff member
- RPA staff member
- Other
What stage in the Section 3A planning process is your municipality at?

- Reviewing existing plans, study area, and context
- Engaging community through visioning
- Conducting compliance analysis
- Developing recommendations
- Drafting and adopting local zoning
- Other
- I’m not sure
DISTRICT SUITABILITY

MBTA

COMMUNITIES

LAW OVERVIEW
• All MBTA Communities must have at least one zoning district that permits multifamily housing by-right

• Mandates a minimum gross density of 15 units/acre (can vary by subdistrict)

• Part of zoning district must be located with a half-mile of the transit station (if applicable)

• District must be a “reasonable size”
• Zoning district must be feasible for development: land that is not suitable, such as wetlands or conservation land, is excluded from minimum district size

• District must meet a minimum unit capacity set by EOHLC (measures the total number of units that could be built under zoning; not a production mandate)

• Cannot contain age restrictions

• Must be suitable for families with children (no bedroom limits)

• Site plan review and design standards are allowed

• Inclusionary zoning is allowed: can require up to 10% of units to be deed-restricted affordable to incomes at 80% AMI (option for more affordability if financial feasibility analysis provided)
### PURPOSE/GOALS

#### DISTRICT SUITABILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Background</strong></th>
<th>Good district siting is paramount to positive outcomes from Section 3A rezoning, and Section 3A Guidelines provide flexibility on location.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>&gt; Create a decision-support tool that uses data to help MBTA municipalities identify locations for 3A zoning districts that advance regional goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; Highlight areas where increased housing density will best advance equity and sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Considerations</strong></td>
<td>Evaluate locations based on a set of criteria related to transportation, accessibility, development feasibility, residential capacity, and climate risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Output</strong></td>
<td>Suitability analysis where, based on considerations above, for every MBTA community in MAPC, each parcel receives a score from 0 (least suitable for 3A district siting) to 100 (most suitable for 3A district siting).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limitations</strong></td>
<td>Not meant to replace community knowledge, robust and equitable planning processes. Does not build considerations of equity into analysis itself.</td>
</tr>
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DISTRICT SUITABILITY

TOOL DEMO
Deliverable

Interactive, public web app that shows the results of a district suitability analysis.

For every MBTA community in MAPC, each parcel receives a score from 0 (least suitable) to 100 (most suitable).

Clusters of parcels/sites with higher scores are strong candidates for 3A zoning districts.
but how did we get here?
DISTRICT SUITABILITY

DEFINING TERMS
Suitability analysis is a way of evaluating and comparing sites for a particular use or purpose. Suitability analyses typically seek to answer a question like, “Where is the best location for ____?”

Examples include finding the best location for:
• A new solar farm
• A community garden
• A multifamily zoning district

The results of a suitability analysis are often displayed on a map that is used to highlight areas from high to low suitability.
Criteria are the various physical, cultural, or economic factors that are important for determining suitability. They are the broader principles by which the sites are evaluated. Criteria seek to answer a question like, “What qualities will our preferred location for this use possess?”

Criteria are established at the beginning of the suitability analysis and are derived from many sources, including academic literature and planning documents.
**Indicators** are the different data layers that are selected to represent the chosen criteria. Indicators are the response to the question: *How will we know the location fulfills the established criteria?*

Indicators may be physical characteristics of the site – such as exceeding a certain size or having steep slopes – or other qualities – such as land value, presence within a historic district, or distance to certain amenities.

Criteria scores are derived from indicator scores, often as a sum or weighted average.
Some analyses will include criteria describing where the use should never be located, regardless of how many other positive characteristics are present. Sites possessing these qualities are referred to as screened or excluded.
The relative importance of criteria and their supporting indicators is established through weighting.

Equal weighting across all criteria and all indicators means every data layer in the analysis is equally important; higher weights assigned to certain criteria or indicators means these parameters are more important to identifying preferred sites than others.
DISTRICT SUITABILITY

CRITERIA
In the District Suitability Analysis, all parcels smaller than \( \frac{1}{8} \) (0.125) acre in size or with developable area less than \( \frac{1}{8} \) acre in size are screened from the analysis.

Developable area on each parcel was calculated by subtracting EOHLC’s Excluded Land layer* from the total parcel area. This definition of excluded land is from the Section 3A District Compliance Guidelines.

*The Excluded Land layer represents hydrography, additional wetlands, Title V and Surface Water Protection Zone A, and Wellhead Zone 1, undevelopable public land, protected open space and recreational land, rights of way, and institutionally-owned land.
### DISTRICT SUITABILITY ANALYSIS

#### CRITERIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Station Area *</td>
<td>Locations are within the half-mile radius around a transit station (as required by Section 3A compliance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit Accessibility</td>
<td>Locations have access to transit options, so current and/or future residents could rely less on personal vehicles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Accessibility</td>
<td>Locations are in more pedestrian-friendly areas, so current and/or future residents would require fewer trips in personal vehicles for access to jobs and amenities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flood Risk</td>
<td>Locations are less exposed to flood risk, so current and/or future residents would be less exposed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Feasibility</td>
<td>Locations have fewer barriers to develop or redevelop as housing, so would be more likely to see actual housing construction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Residential Capacity</td>
<td>Locations would yield more housing units if developed or redeveloped as housing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: this criteria only applies to municipalities that have a requirement to have a defined portion of their district within the transit station area.*
For all parcels in each municipality:

1. Calculate individual metrics for each indicator and rescale to 0-1
2. Calculate a weighted average of the criterion’s indicator values
3. Use weighted averages to calculate a percentile ranking, assigning each parcel a value of 0 to 1
   - For each criterion, parcels are scored relative to one another within the municipality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria Score</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 0.2</td>
<td>Lowest suitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2 - 0.4</td>
<td>Moderately low suitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4 - 0.6</td>
<td>Moderate suitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6 - 0.8</td>
<td>Moderately high suitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.8 - 1</td>
<td>Highest suitability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CRITERIA

TRANSIT STATION AREA

Locations are within the half-mile radius around a transit station.

*Note: this criteria only applies to municipalities that have a requirement to have a defined portion of their district within the transit station area.*

**Indicators**

Parcels receive higher scores when they:

1. Are within the transit station area (½ buffer around transit stations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria Score</th>
<th>Transit Station Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 (Not in station area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (In station area)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Locations nearer to transit, so current and/or future residents could rely less on personal vehicles.

Indicators

Parcels receive higher scores when they:

1. Are nearer to transit stations or bus stops, up to 1 mile
2. Are in a half mile walkshed from commuter rail stations
3. Have a larger number of jobs within 45 minutes by transit
4. Have a higher share of non-auto commuters

Criteria Score | Transit Accessibility

- 0.8 – 1.0 (Highest suitability)
- 0.6 – 0.8 (Moderately high suitability)
- 0.4 – 0.6 (Moderate suitability)
- 0.2 – 0.4 (Moderately low suitability)
- 0 – 0.2 (Lowest suitability)
Locations are in denser, more pedestrian-friendly areas, so current and/or future residents would require fewer trips in personal vehicles.

**Criteria Score | Local Accessibility**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.8 – 1.0</td>
<td>Highest suitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6 – 0.8</td>
<td>Moderately high suitability</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.4 – 0.6</td>
<td>Moderate suitability</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.2 – 0.4</td>
<td>Moderately low suitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 0.2</td>
<td>Lowest suitability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicators**

Parcels receive higher scores when they:

1. Are within school walksheds
2. Have a higher WalkScore
3. Are within or nearer to a town center
Parcels receive higher scores when they:

1. Are not in FEMA 1% or 0.2% chance flood zones
2. Are not in flood extents of the MA Coastal Flood Risk Model

Locations are less exposed to flood risk, so current and/or future residents would be less vulnerable.
Locations have fewer barriers to develop or redevelop as housing, so would be more likely to see actual housing construction.

**Indicators**

Parcels receive higher scores when they:

1. Have a lower ratio of improvement to land value
2. Have a low building value per square foot
3. Do not have a historic site located on them
5. Are not a condominium
6. Are vacant
7. Are a retail strip with high redevelopment potential (MAPC analysis)
Locations would yield more housing units if developed or redeveloped as housing.

**Indicators**

Parcels receive higher scores when they:

1. Have a smaller existing Floor Area Ratio
2. Have fewer existing Development Units per Acre
3. Are larger (unconstrained land area)

**Criteria Score | Residential Capacity**

- 0.8 – 1.0 (Highest suitability)
- 0.6 – 0.8 (Moderately high suitability)
- 0.4 – 0.6 (Moderate suitability)
- 0.2 – 0.4 (Moderately low suitability)
- 0 – 0.2 (Lowest suitability)
The weighting scheme for the District Suitability Model is **dynamic**, reflecting each municipality's unique Station Area Requirement for the portion of the district that must be within a transit station area.

**Scenario 1** | Muni with 0% station area requirement

**Scenario 2** | Muni with 50% station area requirement

**Scenario 3** | Muni with 90% station area requirement
Based on criteria, each land parcel receives a score from 0 (least suitable) to 100 (most suitable). Clusters of parcels/sites with higher scores are strong candidates for 3A zoning districts.

Salem: 40% of districts must be in station area
Analysis visually represents the combination of ~13 regional or statewide datasets

- Offers insight into spatial trends across a community
- But…only as good as underlying, input datasets
  - Intended to complement on-the-ground experience, knowledge
  - Best used as one input of many for district siting
DISTRICT SUITABILITY

ONLINE TOOL
DISTRICT SUITABILITY TOOL Q&A
DISTRICT SUITABILITY

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS
The District Suitability Tool is intended to complement stakeholder-driven processes to plan for more housing through new 3A-compliant zoning districts.

The following slides show how the tool can be referenced at different points in the 3A planning process and beyond to help facilitate conversations around areas suitable for new housing production.
Elements of a typical 3A planning process:

1. Review existing plans, study area, and context
2. Engage community through visioning
3. Conduct compliance analysis
4. Develop recommendations
5. Draft and adopt local zoning
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

District Suitability Tool

Maps data layers that enhance understanding of current transportation, economic, housing, and climate conditions
MBTA Communities Act District Suitability Analysis

Public Water Supply Sources (Feature Service)

- PWS Type
  - Community Groundwater Well
  - Surface Water Intake
  - Emergency Surface Water Intake
  - Non-Community Groundwater Well
  - Proposed Well

Massachusetts Water Features

- Major Lakes and Ponds
- Major Rivers and Streams

Created by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC).
Engage community through 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

District Suitability Tool

Provides an interactive, adaptive tool to quickly visualize potential locations and support discussion.
Conduct 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.
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
This parcel is more suitable than 99% of all parcels in Acton, meaning it has very high suitability for a 3A District.

Criteria Scores for this Parcel:

- **Within Station Area:** 100/100 (within station area (higher suitability))
- **Transit Accessibility:** 96.6/100 (very high suitability)
- **Local Accessibility:** 45.1/100 (moderate suitability)
- **Development Feasibility:** 73.5/100 (moderately high suitability)
- **Residential Capacity:** 94.7/100 (very high suitability)
- **Flood Risk:** 100/100 (Not in FEMA or MC-FRM flood extent. Very high suitability)
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

District Suitability Tool

Once zoning is adopted, the tool can be referenced to inform further policies to support housing production under 3A
How can the District Suitability Analysis Tool be utilized beyond 3A planning?

• Identifying potential development locations to include in local Housing Production Plans
• Identifying potential sites to acquire/dispose of for Affordable Housing purposes
• Identifying areas where residents may be at risk of displacement
How likely are you to use the District Suitability Analysis Tool for your Section 3A planning process?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely
DISTRICT SUITABILITY

APPLICABILITY

Q&A
DISTRICT SUITABILITY

NEXT STEPS
Access the District Suitability Analysis Tool at: mapc.ma/3a-district-suitability

Visit www.mapc.org/mbta-multifamily-zoning to 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!
Questions about the data tool? Contact: dataservices@mapc.org

Questions about how to use this in your 3A planning processes? Contact Emma Battaglia, Senior Housing & Land Use Planner, at: ebattaglia@mapc.org
DISTRICT SUITABILITY

THANK YOU!