

Executive Director's Report

Submitted to the Executive Committee

February 28, 2024

Arts & Culture

At the end of January, MAPC engaged in a series of events to promote arts and culture as a foundation of community building across the Commonwealth and the nation.

Arts Advocacy Week

From January 22-26, MAPC was excited to co-host Arts Advocacy Week with [MASSCreative](#), bringing attention to the [Creative Space Preservation Act](#) and the [PLACE Bill](#), two of our legislative priorities this session and key pillars for preserving creative workspace and funding for public art. At the Day of Celebration event in the State House on January 24, I helped deliver the day's call to action with tips for attendees to maximize the impact of their meetings with elected officials. Notably, Gov. Healey started the program off by announcing a proposal of \$25.5 million for the [Mass Cultural Council](#) in the FY25 Budget, increasing the previous fiscal year's budget.

White House Conference on the Arts

On January 30, Director of Arts & Culture Annis Sengupta and I joined arts leaders from across Massachusetts and the country in Washington, DC, at the White House Domestic Policy Council and the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) joint summit "Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in our Communities." The program featured Boston Mayor Michelle Wu talking about Boston's many arts, culture and planning initiatives and the launch of an EPA [artist-in-residence program](#) in seven watersheds nationally, including our own Mystic River Watershed. The conference featured numerous luminaries from the music and film world (beyond Annis and me, that is), although Lady Gaga sent her regrets.

Municipal Public Art Commissions

MAPC continued its support for inclusive and impactful municipal public art commissions through technical assistance and training in January and February. In partnership with the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA), MAPC's Arts & Culture Department launched a new curriculum for the 2024 [Making It Public for Municipalities](#) series of public art training workshops. The cohort of eight communities across Massachusetts – Belchertown, Chelmsford, Clinton, Everett, Montague, Peabody, Somerville, and Southbridge – have completed their first two workshop sessions and are in the process of generating calls for art.

Meanwhile, in Lexington, the selection committee for the Battle of Lexington Memorial public art process reviewed 35 applications from local, national and international artists on February 1, and the town will fund four artist teams to develop full proposals. Artist concepts are due March 1 and will be presented for public feedback on March 13.

Clean Energy

Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP)

On March 1, MAPC will submit a [Priority Climate Action Plan](#) to EPA as part of the federal Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program.

MAPC has been leading the development of the region's first climate action plan focused on municipal and regional strategies to mitigate GHG emissions in the Greater Boston Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes 167 communities in eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. As part of this effort, MAPC is collaborating with six Regional Planning Agencies in both states and has convened a Municipal Advisory Group and a Justice40 Advisory Group to provide input on strategy development. The Municipal Advisory Group includes 29 municipalities, including 11 from federally-designated Justice40 communities and 25 representatives from community-based organizations across the MSA focused on serving frontline populations. Completing the PCAP is the first step of the planning process, which will continue through August 2025 and culminate with a Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP) for the region.

The PCAP includes an inventory of the region's GHG emissions and 11 priority GHG emissions reduction measures across the buildings, transportation, energy generation, and waste sectors.

Once the PCAP is complete, MAPC and participating municipalities will be able to apply for implementation grants. MAPC is working with Boston, Chelsea, and Lowell to pursue funding to decarbonize public housing buildings in those three cities, and to establish a regional community of practice and provide technical assistance grants to help decarbonize residential structures throughout the region.

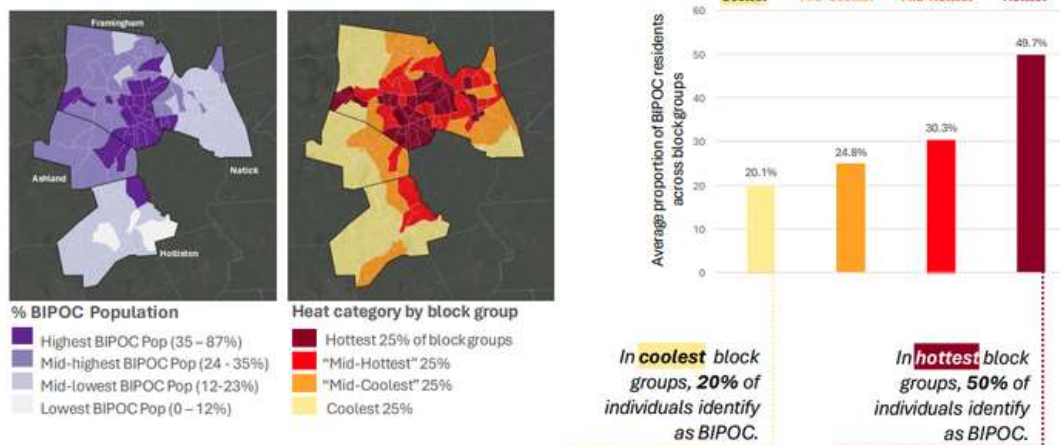
Heat Mapping

As part of 16 campaigns selected by NOAA, MAPC's Clean Energy and Data Services departments partnered with the McAuliffe Center for Integrated Science Learning, the City of Framingham, and the Towns of Natick, Ashland, and Holliston to launch a citizen science heat mapping event in July 2023. Volunteers drove seven routes at three different times of the day in four communities to collect local heat data with sensors.

Earlier this month, MAPC hosted an event to explore the data collected and discuss potential heat mitigation solutions with the municipalities, partners, and volunteer data scientists. MAPC created maps and an interactive tool with the collected data to understand heat "hot spots" in MetroWest and explore Environmental Justice disparities. This data was overlaid with land use maps and demographic data to uncover what land cover patterns exist and who lives in the coolest and hottest areas. Recommendations were made, including a call for increased cooling in public spaces, increased communication with people vulnerable to extreme heat, and ways to mitigate urban heat island effects. Explore the tool at capabilities.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d0c988a52bf141c2bd47fcf59b36b07d.

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Population

The hottest areas have **3 times** the Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) population compared to the coolest areas.



Demographic data was overlaid with the collected data to show the racial disparities in who resides in the hottest census block groups in the four communities.

Communications

The Communications Team released the 2023 Annual Report in digital format this month, celebrating MAPC's 60th year and marking our progress toward MetroCommon goals. The online report can be viewed at <http://2023.mapc.org>. Don't miss the special section on "MAPC in the News" to see highlights of our media coverage from 2023: <https://2023.mapc.org/2023-media-coverage-highlights>.

The Department will also be supporting outreach, event logistics, and media coverage of several upcoming events, including Henry Grabar's MetroCommon speaker event on parking policy on March 19, the Winter Council Meeting with EOHL Secretary Ed Augustus, the launch of MAPC's Language Access Guide, the 3A Analysis Tool Webinar, and the Shannon Community Safety Day on the Hill in April.

Community Engagement

Norfolk Master Plan: Completed the latest phase of public engagement focused on community feedback on the draft Master Plan Vision Statement and Goals; 242 comments gathered.

Stow Housing Production Plan (HPP): Completed three focus groups with parents, seniors, and renters. Thirteen individuals participated. In addition, a steering committee meeting was held to discuss HPP goals and strategies.

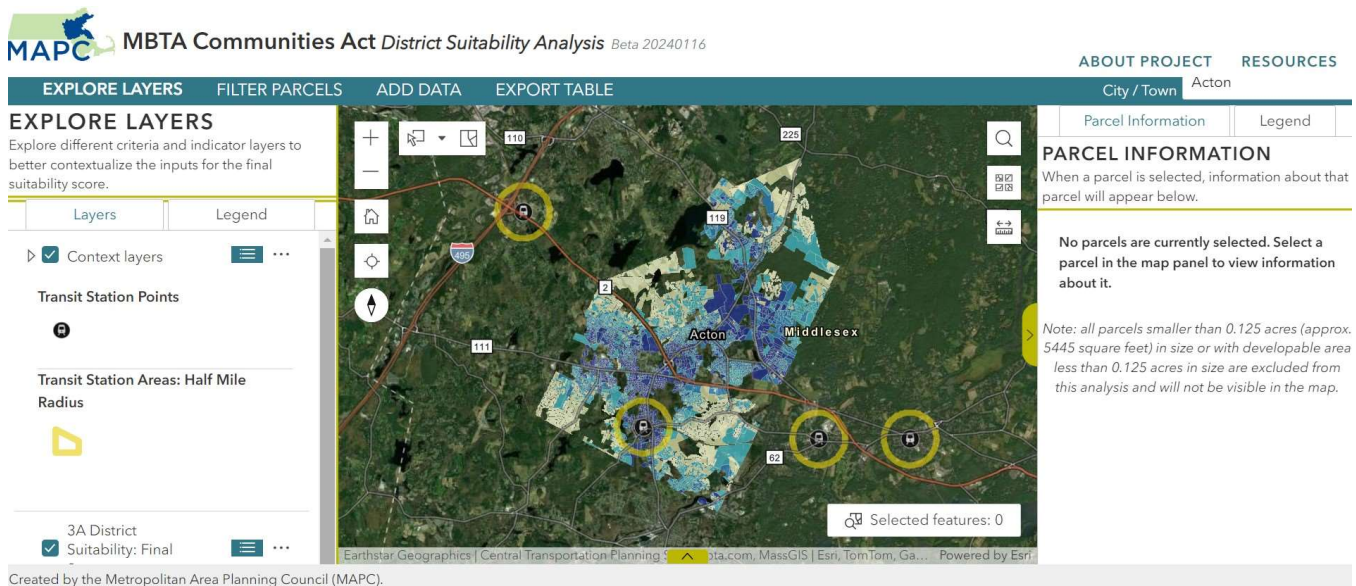
Everett Housing Production Plan (HPP): In partnership with La Comunidad and Everett Haitian Community Center, 34 individuals participated in focus groups. Participants included Spanish speakers, seniors, and Haitian Creole speakers.

Fenway Cares and Fenway Community Development Corporation: Led a workshop on the foundations of Community Engagement, including topics on the Identification of Problems, Asset Mapping, and Stakeholder Analysis. Eighteen individuals participated, including Boston City Councilor Sharon Durkan and a representative from City Councilor Tania Fernandes Anderson's Office.

Data Services

Webinar: Planning for Section 3A Success: Leveraging the District Suitability Analysis Tool

On February 27 at noon, MAPC launched our interactive MBTA Communities Multifamily Zoning Requirement (Section 3A) [District Suitability Analysis Tool](#). This tool can help municipalities within the MAPC region identify locations for 3A zoning districts that also advance regional and local goals. On the webinar, MAPC staff provided an overview of the tool's use and showcased how it may be applied, in tandem with stakeholder-driven processes, to facilitate conversations around areas suitable for new housing production. The tool takes in 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 considered strong candidates for 3A zoning districts. 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.



Somerville Digital Equity Plan

On February 21, MAPC [presented project updates and initial findings](#) from our work with the [City of Somerville Digital Bridge Initiative](#). The meeting marks the culmination of research, data collection, and engagement efforts that have spanned the better part of a year, and marks a major milestone as MAPC prepares to publish our first municipal Digital Equity Plan under the [Mass Broadband Institute's Municipal Digital Equity Planning program](#) sometime in March.

National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) Names MAPC 2023 "Digital Inclusion Trailblazer"

NDIA named MAPC as a [2023 Digital Inclusion Trailblazer](#), recognizing the agency's efforts to close the digital divide. This award recognizes the work that MAPC's Municipal Collaboration, Data Services, and Community Engagement Departments have done to provide digital equity planning to municipalities across the Greater Boston region and apartment wifi procurement technical assistance to affordable housing providers across the Commonwealth. This year, MAPC joins a record number of Digital Inclusion Trailblazers, with 47 total awardees, including the cities of Boston, Quincy, Randolph, and Somerville in the region, representing municipal, county, and regional governments paving the way for digitally inclusive communities across the US. Congratulations to the entire team!



MAPC Digital Equity Team receives “Trailblazer” award at National Digital Inclusion Alliance’s Net Inclusion conference in Philadelphia.

Environment

Neponset Watershed Climate Collaborative

MAPC is partnering with the Neponset River Watershed Association and Weston & Sampson Engineers to convene and support the Neponset Watershed Climate Collaborative, a 10-town initiative to coordinate climate resiliency efforts. On February 20, the Environment Department, in coordination with the project partners, convened the second Community Advisory Group Meeting. Participants included citizen activists, representatives of local CBOs and business, and municipal committee volunteers. The meeting’s primary topic was Green Infrastructure, which was addressed by a guest speaker, Kate England, the City of Boston’s Director of Green Infrastructure. Committee members followed up the presentation with questions and discussion with the speaker, who provided numerous resources and references for further research and discussion.

Flood Vulnerability Assessment for EJ Communities

The Environment Department led a team of three other partners to submit a \$400,000 proposal to EEA, and on January 24 the contract was awarded to our team. The project will engage communities statewide to assess flood vulnerability, with an emphasis on the state’s 26 Gateway Cities and the 182 communities that include EJ populations. The 18-month project will be supported by our partners Weston & Sampson Engineers, R.E.G. Solutions, and Planning Communities. MAPC’s Community Engagement and Data Services departments will also play a large role in this project. The project is statewide in scope and is the largest project in the Environment Department since the 495/MetroWest Water Resources Strategy nearly 20 years ago. To provide outreach to Gateway Cities and EJ communities beyond our region, MAPC will coordinate with the other RPAs. The MAPC-led team held the first project coordination meeting with EEA on February 14.

Land Use

Concord Age-Friendly Businesses Initiative

MAPC and Concord have launched an age-friendly businesses initiative to foster the inclusivity of Concord businesses to older residents and visitors. In February, we held a hybrid kickoff meeting in which 16 engaged members of organizations such as Concord After 60 and the Disabilities Commission participated. Equipped with their feedback, the MAPC Economic Development Team and municipal partner launched a survey for Concord residents over 60 to obtain their input on what businesses are doing well and what they can improve upon to be age-friendly, such as having large text on menus, patient staff, and no tripping hazards. Once the project team analyzes survey results, it will develop materials to educate and engage businesses on these age-friendly practices. The project will help to reverse the restrictions in access to goods, services, and the privileges of society often experienced by elders.

Housing Work Highlighted at NARC Conference

Andrea Harris-Long, Manager of Housing & Neighborhood Development, shared how MAPC is working with state and local partners to address housing challenges at the February legislative conference of the National Association of Regional Councils. Andrea was on a housing panel alongside housing professionals from the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, Metro Washington Council of Governments, and Urban Institute.

Economic Feasibility Analyses for MBTA Communities

MAPC staff have been working with several municipalities, including Rapid Transit Communities, to provide Economic Feasibility Analyses (EFAs) as part of their compliance with Section 3A. If a municipality has an inclusionary zoning policy requiring that more than 10% of new multifamily units be affordable and/or that the units must be affordable to households earning less than 80% of the area median income, the municipality must complete an EFA to apply its inclusionary policy in its 3A district. This is to ensure that the inclusionary requirements are financially feasible and will not constrain new development in the district. To complete this work, staff developed an Excel-based tool specifically tailored to meet state requirements and streamline our analysis. MAPC has completed four EFAs to date, with six more in progress or upcoming. All of these will be an important part of ensuring that new development in our region's 3A districts is equitable and accessible to households with a range of incomes.

Municipal Collaboration

Region 3 Health and Medical Coordinating Coalition

On January 23, MAPC staff, on behalf of the Region 3 local public health departments, held the second of four Equity Workshops on inclusion and planning, with a focus on Public Education, Personal Preparedness, and Outreach. The speakers were Eileen Davis, Vice President of MASS 211 and Director of Call2Talk, Natasha Soolkin, Executive Director of the New American Association of Massachusetts, and Sharifa Trotman, Senior Disaster Program Manager of the American Red Cross of Massachusetts. About 55 people attended.

Plymouth County Fire Vehicle Maintenance Study

The Municipal Collaboration team completed a yearlong study into the rising costs of maintaining fire vehicles and equipment. The study examined the practices of 14 communities in Plymouth County and provided recommendations for how the communities can address their shared challenges through enhanced collaboration. The study also included lessons and experiences from across the U.S. provided by large county maintenance facilities in Alabama, Pennsylvania, and California.

Carlisle Shared Services Study

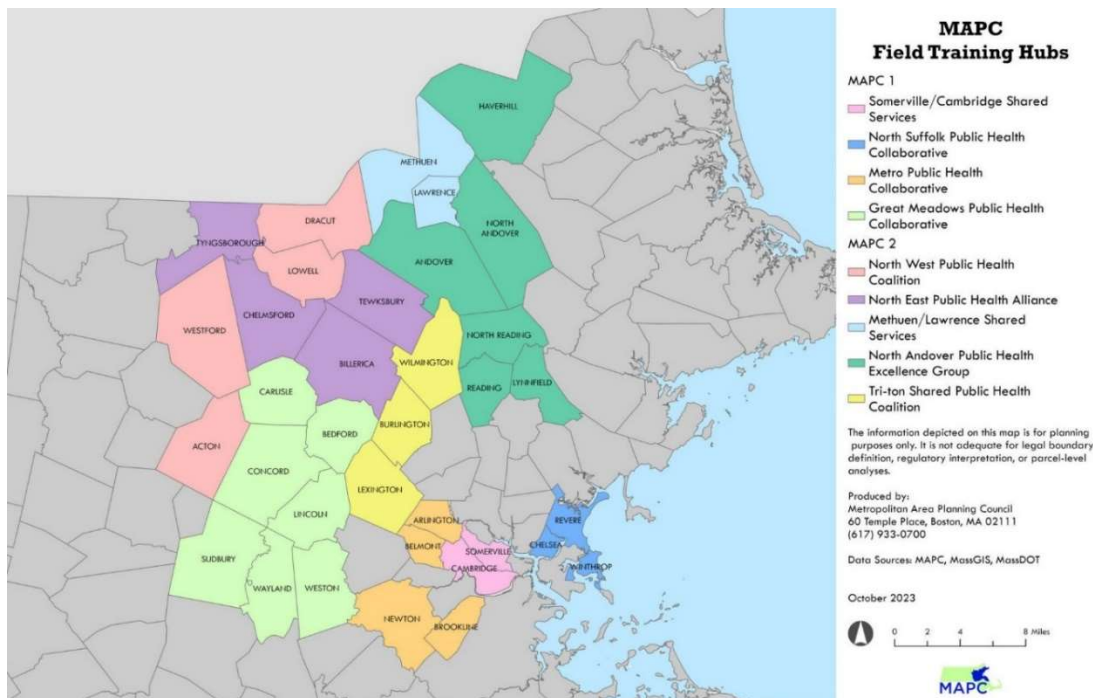
The Municipal Collaboration Team completed a DLTA-funded study for Carlisle that assessed municipal operations in 12 different departments and provided a list of opportunities to explore and strengthen service sharing opportunities with neighbouring communities. The study was presented to the Carlisle Select Board on January 23.

Those interested in the Plymouth County or Carlisle studies can reach out directly to Municipal Services Manager Brian Luther at bluther@mapc.org.

Public Health

Eastern Massachusetts Field Training Hub

The Public Health team is contributing to state efforts to strengthen the public health workforce that serves cities and towns, local businesses, and residents. The team recently welcomed our Lead Field Trainer, Elsa Zhao, who will direct and support training offered to nearly 40 municipalities covered by our [training region](#). To date, Elsa has met with coordinators from eight out of the nine Shared Public Health groups in the Hub's region, which has recently been named the Eastern Massachusetts Field Training Hub. Elsa has also supported training of recently hired local public health staff and worked closely with DPH and other training hubs to update training programs related to housing and food inspections.



Map of Eastern Massachusetts Field Training Hub based at MAPC.

Dedham Health and Human Services Enhancement

The Public Health team completed recommendations for Dedham's Public Health Department as the culmination of a TAP project aimed at strengthening the town's social service programming. The team's work includes primary and secondary data collection, including 11 key informant interviews with municipal leaders,

civil servants, and volunteers who form the bedrock of Dedham’s social service network. The team also identified key assets and constraints in Dedham’s current human services delivery, particularly for those who currently experience barriers accessing existing services. Key recommendations included: centralize Health and Human Service coordination within the Health Department; increase language access through translation and interpretation tools and services; engage cultural brokers; maintain a Town of Dedham Relief Fund; and establish a Town of Dedham Transportation Fund.

Strategic Initiatives

Strategic Plan/DEI Assessment Update

TDC worked with the Directors on the Strategic Framework, which will provide the mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities for the agency. The second draft will now be reviewed by the Advisory Committee, MAPC Departments, the Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director. We are in the process of scheduling an Executive Committee meeting that will be devoted to the Strategic Plan, likely in late March. Some of the challenges that we are working through include:

- Elevating priorities that all departments can play a role in advancing;
- Updating the concept and terminology of smart growth to reflect the evolution of the field;
- Succinctly and clearly communicating the various approaches MAPC takes to our work; and
- Striking the right balance between inspirational and realistic.

We look forward to your guidance and perspectives on these issues.

Transportation

MetroWest School Fleet Electrification Study

MAPC’s Transportation and Clean Energy Departments are undertaking a MetroWest School Fleet Electrification Study looking at pathways towards school bus electrification for 22 school districts, primarily in MetroWest. The focus of this effort will identify opportunities for funding and regional collaboration. Strategies will center on operations, logistics, and equitable access. As part of this study, MAPC is hosting a series of monthly workshops with the participating school districts. The February workshop focused on the benefits of electric school buses and business models and featured expert speakers from the World Resources Institute’s Electric School Bus Initiative. Additionally, the workshop agenda included a “fireside chat” where Beverly, Cohasset, and Concord shared their experiences with electric school bus adoption. Future monthly workshop topics will address conducting fleet assessments, charging infrastructure and site selection, funding and financing, and procurement. The project will conclude in the summer with a School Bus Electrification Roadmap, providing the participating school districts with guidance on transitioning to electric school fleets.

MAPC’s Regional Electric Vehicle Strategy Group

Over the past several years, MAPC has been hosting bi-monthly Regional EV Strategy Calls to provide a space to foster innovative solutions to the opportunities and challenges posed by increasing adoption of EVs across Greater Boston. The February meeting delved into on-street EV charging and featured guest speakers from the New York City Department of Transportation, who discussed the city’s On-Street Charging and Evaluation Program. The City of Boston provided an overview of two upcoming on-street charging programs with one of their partners, Better Together Brain Trust, a minority and women-owned business enterprise (MWBE) that brings clean energy workforce training, job opportunities, and beneficial electrification to underserved communities. The strategy call concluded with MassCEC outlining an upcoming program that will assist municipalities in expanding access to EV charging for residents with limited access to home charging,

particularly in environmental justice and urban communities. Slide presentations from previous EV Strategy calls can be accessed on MAPC's Electric Vehicle website: [Electric Vehicles – MAPC](#)

MBTA Low-Income Fare

The MBTA will implement a Low-Income Fare program in the summer or fall of this year. The program will offer half-priced fares on every MBTA service – including commuter rail and The RIDE paratransit services – for riders who verify that their earnings are lower than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In the Boston region, that eligibility income level would be \$29,160 for a single-person household, or \$60,000 for a household of four.

MAPC has long advocated for a Low-Income Fare program, meeting numerous times with MBTA staff and advocates to discuss details of the program over the past two years. In addition, MAPC is actively supporting the City of Somerville to pilot a free monthly Link pass program for low-income families in the school system and low-income individuals, funded with federal ARPA dollars. MAPC is helping Somerville to evaluate the program and recently met with MBTA staff to share evaluation materials and lessons learned to date.

Contract Awarded for Boston to Blue Hills Project

The route between Boston's southern neighborhoods and the Blue Hills is on its way to becoming safer, more accessible, and more enjoyable for those not traveling in a vehicle, thanks to the Boston to Blue Hills project, which recently kicked off phase two focusing on design and engineering. MAPC and the Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA) have spent the last year conducting various community engagement activities to hear from the local community in Mattapan, Milton, and Quincy about their interest and ideas for a walking, biking, and rolling route from Boston to the Blue Hills.

MAPC has hired Nitsch Engineering to lead this phase of the project focusing on Blue Hills Parkway, Unquity Road, and sections of Hillside Street and Chickatawbut Road from Houghton's Pond to Route 28. We are continuing to partner with Boston, Milton, and DCR and will continue to engage the community through stakeholder meetings, public meetings, site visits, youth events, and more. Check out our [blog post](#) on this project.

Ashland Upper Charles Trail

Staff are supporting Ashland to advance the Upper Charles Trail, a shared use cycling and walking path on a former rail bed. When complete, it will link 24 miles of trail through Milford, Ashland, Sherborn, Holliston, Hopkinton and Framingham. The Upper Charles Trail will eventually connect to the Bruce Freeman Trail in Framingham, which continues north all the way to Lowell. Staff have led several site visits with town officials over the past few months, evaluated different trail alignments, and helped town staff apply for a MassTrails grant to acquire property for the trail route.

Human Resources

Medora Champagne joined MAPC in January as Counsel II in the Legal Department. In this role, she will provide support to staff on for legal tasks and issues. Previously, Medora has practiced general litigation, specializing in worker's compensation, human resources, and administrative law. Additionally, Medora has a unique perspective and understanding of municipal law, having served as an Associate Member of the Norfolk Zoning Board of Appeals and an elected member of the Norfolk School Committee.

Avanti Krovi joined MAPC at the end of January as the Senior Regional Land Use Planner with the Land Use Department. In this role, she will be a part of the Land Use Generalist team and will be leading several planning projects. Avanti received her master's degree in planning from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and

bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University in Economics and Sociology. Avanti comes to MAPC with work experience at the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA).