

Executive Director's Report
Submitted to the Executive Committee
May 28, 2024

Arts & Culture

MAPC Arts & Culture Fellow Archana Menon shared draft **creative placemaking strategy plans** with the towns of **Holliston and Acton**. The plans synthesized findings from community engagement activities and creative placemaking workshops held in Fall 2023 and recommended strategies to strengthen connections between trails and downtown commercial areas and increase a sense of welcoming and belonging on the trails. Archana and other members of the Arts & Culture Department facilitated two meetings with stakeholders in Holliston to translate these findings into a call for temporary public art, which will be released in June. These meetings provided training on how to use a grant agreement process to commission public art, and the town is already planning to apply these learnings to upcoming art projects.

On May 17, Director of Arts and Culture Annis Sengupta and Regional Arts and Culture Planner II Abbey Judd led a breakout session at the inaugural **MASSCreative Creative Advocacy Institute** held in Lowell. Their session attracted a large audience and provided artists and creatives with an orientation to strategies for engaging with cities and towns to increase creativity in their communities. The session concluded with a lively discussion about the needs of the creative sector and how cities and towns can better support those needs.

On May 21, MAPC hosted the [Eastern Mass Historical Commission Coalition](#) over Zoom, with 60 live attendees and almost 110 registrants. The session covered methodologies for researching and representing underrepresented communities in historical narratives. Dr. Kabria Baumgartner (Northeastern University) discussed collaboration models between city planners, historical commissions, and academic historians to enrich urban historical contexts. Dr. Donna Seger (Salem State University) emphasized broadening community stories beyond well-known narratives, and Ken Turino (Historic New England) explored integrating LGBTQ+ history into local frameworks.

Clean Energy

Mass Save Three-Year Plan Engagement

On April 1, the Mass Save Program Administrators published a [draft of the 2025-2027 Three-Year Plan](#), which outlines how the utilities propose to spend \$4.99 billion on energy efficiency and decarbonization programs. MAPC represents Massachusetts municipalities on the state's Energy Efficiency Advisory Council (the [EEAC](#) is a stakeholder body that guides the plan development process) and co-chairs the EEAC's Equity Working Group, which works to identify barriers, propose strategies, and monitor progress to increase equitable access and participation in energy efficiency programs among underserved customers. Throughout the plan development process in summer and fall 2023, MAPC held listening sessions and provided opportunities for cities and towns and community-based organizations to share their priorities for the 2025-2027 plan.

Over the past couple of months, MAPC carefully reviewed the draft plan and published a [blog post](#) summarizing how the plan aligns with the priorities MAPC heard from cities and towns last summer and fall. The blog highlights promising proposed changes – including increased support for renters and moderate-income customers, more funding for Mass Save's Community First Partnership program, and special new decarbonization offerings for schools – as well as several concerns, including that the plan doesn't go far enough to address long-standing programmatic inequities (e.g., market-rate customers have received 82% of incentives, but comprised only 54% of the state's population). MAPC also hosted an initial listening session on the draft plan in May. MAPC will use the input received at this and additional meetings to be hosted this

summer to develop a memo to Mass Save Program Administrators and the EEAC outlining key proposed changes to ensure the plan charts a path for a more equitable and effective Mass Save.

Peabody Receives its Green Communities Designation

In April, Peabody [received the Commonwealth's Green Communities Designation](#). To earn Green Communities status, a municipality must update zoning to encourage renewable energy siting, expedite permitting for renewable energy, adopt a fuel-efficient vehicle policy, adopt the stretch code, and develop an energy reduction plan. Throughout fall 2023, MAPC supported the final step of Peabody's designation process by developing a 5-Year Energy Reduction Plan to reduce energy consumption by 20% in Peabody's municipal buildings. MAPC identified gaps in the city's existing energy inventory, helped to identify missing data, and, working with an energy auditor, highlighted key actions the city can take in the short- and long-term to reduce energy consumption in some of its largest buildings, such as the city's high school. The plan identifies actions that would reduce energy use by 22,702 MMBtu over the 5-year period. As a result of this work, the city is now eligible for \$271,560 towards weatherization, mechanical, and lighting projects.

Framingham and Natick Multifamily Property Owner Outreach

Clean Energy hosted a focus group on April 29 for owners of multifamily properties in Framingham and Natick to explore opportunities to connect landlords and renters with the Mass Save program and other resources to support energy retrofits. Seven property owners attended the focus group along with representatives from Mass Save Program Administrator Eversource and Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), which runs the low-income programs for multifamily buildings. Eversource and ABCD provided overviews of their program offerings and then Framingham Sustainability Coordinator Shawn Luz and Natick Sustainability Director Jillian Wilson-Martin led a discussion in which property owners provided valuable input about their experiences with the programs, barriers to accessing the programs, and strategies for reaching other property owners to connect them to these programs.

Communications

Communications staff are busy supporting both state budget advocacy and end-of-fiscal year project tasks, from design to social media and press. Outreach looks strong for next week's Annual Council Meeting with Secretary Rebecca Tepper; registration is still open at www.mapc.org.

On the press front, the team announced \$500,000 awarded to [22 TAP projects](#), and the 11 communities selected for the latest [REACH cohort](#). We are also working to place opinion pieces on critical items moving in the Legislature this month; so far, we have published a letter touting [municipal officials' support](#) for the affordable housing transfer fee, and successfully placed an op-ed in [Commonwealth Beacon](#) on behalf of the Mayor Nicholson of Lynn and Mayor Pangallo of Salem, calling for more local financial tools to boost affordable housing production. We are working to place a piece co-authored by Executive Director Marc Draisen and Adam Chapdelaine of MMA on the Municipal Empowerment Act. Next up will be a series of transportation finance white papers in June.

Coming up in events, we are hosting a [webinar](#) with Government Affairs on the Inflation Reduction Act Direct Pay program, to help cities and towns claim energy tax credits, and collaborating with Transportation on a summer-long series of walks and bike rides throughout the region. Learn more at www.mapc.org/resource-library/2024-greenway-ride-series.

Community Engagement

Community Engagement staff participated in three community events to gather feedback on the **Everett Housing Production Plan (HPP)** goals and strategies, including the Eliot Center's community baby shower, the CHA's Community Health Advisory Committee, and a meeting of the Everett Community Growers. We reached over 60 individuals, including community leaders, local organizers, expecting parents, and other residents.

Members of the Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Coalition attended the Inner Core Subregion Legislative Breakfast, along with recently elected local officers who will take their seats in July. The DEI Coalition is a group of professional DEI practitioners employed by cities and towns, supported by MAPC staff. At bi-monthly meetings, group members share experiences, compare best practices, and support each other through common challenges.

On the **Boston to Blue Hills Project**, the team continued to engage with youth development partners who will work to conduct outreach and recruitment.

On the **Milford Comprehensive Plan**, Community Engagement staff led a community conversation with 15 business leaders to promote the first town Comprehensive Plan.

Data Services

Urban Institute National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership Emerging Opportunities Fund Award

The Emerging Opportunities Fund of the Urban Institute has awarded MAPC \$50,000 to study the networks of Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) ownership. This research will build on findings from MAPC's [Homes for Profit](#) research and will allow for more accurate classification of residential real estate investor portfolios. The Data Services Department will conduct this research in partnership with MAPC's Housing team, Dr. Patrice Williams, Assistant Research Professor of Participatory Action Research and Provost Impact Fellow at Northeastern University, and the [Healthy Neighborhoods Research Consortium](#). The funds for the Emerging Opportunities Fund are provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Somerville Digital Equity Plan Published & Approved

After a full year of working with the City of Somerville to assess existing conditions, conduct outreach and engagement, and develop findings and recommendations to address the digital divide, MAPC has completed and published Somerville's first official Digital Equity Plan. The Mass Broadband Institute (MBI) officially approved the plan as part of their Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program on May 23.

Digital Equity Planning Implementation Grants

And there's more digital equity news! MBI has awarded MAPC \$18,000 to support Somerville and Quincy in proposing and implementing project interventions that align with recommendations from their digital equity plans, both developed with support from MAPC. Each community is eligible to receive \$70 - \$100,000 from MBI to implement proposed projects.

Environment

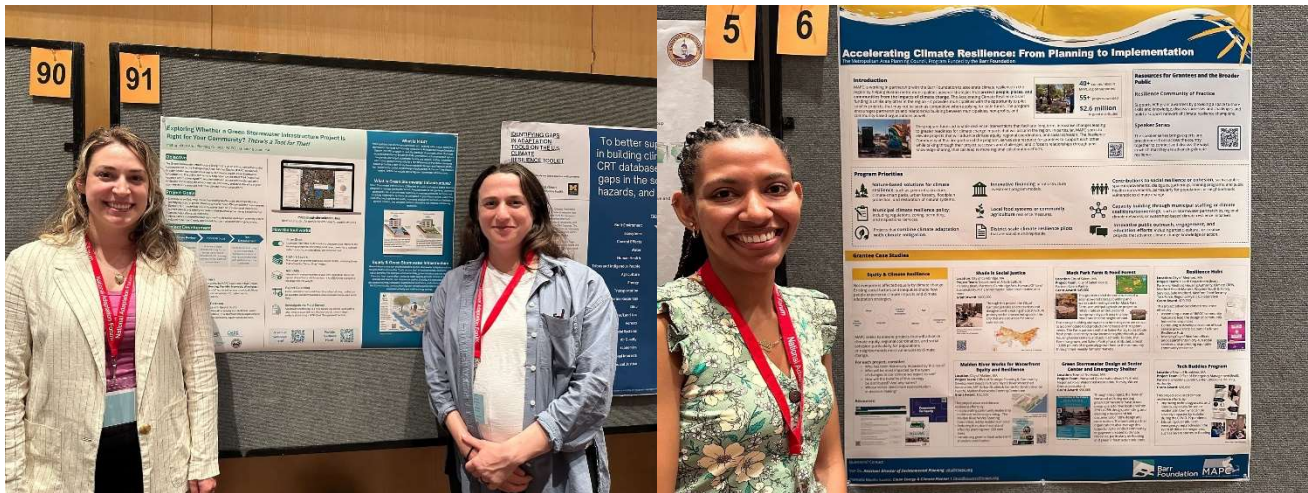
Neponset Watershed Climate Collaborative

During the past few months, the Environment Department, in coordination with project partners on the Neponset Regional MVP Action Grant Project, hosted two additional Community Advisory Group Meetings as well as a Flood Model Advisory Committee. In April, the Environment Department organized and led a Technical Assistance Workshop focused on Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) and a municipal staff-focused

discussion of regulatory options, funding and permitting strategies, and staff-shared lessons learned regarding the challenges and successes of implementing GSI initiatives. In the remainder of FY24, the team will assist in hosting the first meeting of the newly formed Neponset Climate Collaborative Steering Committee as well as a public meeting to share information about the regional climate resilience goals and opportunities.

National Adaptation Forum

MAPC staff attended the National Adaptation Forum in St. Paul, Minnesota from May 14-16. MAPC staff showcased three projects at the poster session. This session brought together planners, CBOs, state agencies, and others from across the country, all working in the climate adaptation and resilience space. The projects featured were: MAPC's Accelerating Climate Resilience program, MAPC's Green Stormwater Infrastructure Siting Tool, and the in-progress MAPC Climate Resilience Playbook, MAPC's work was well received and generated much interest from forum attendees from around the nation.



Medway and Marlborough 2024 Hazard Mitigation Plans

This year, MAPC is updating eight Hazard Mitigation Plans, more than we have done annually in over a decade. This Spring, three plans were completed and approved by FEMA, for Medway, Norfolk, and Marlborough. With approval by FEMA, communities are eligible for FEMA grants through the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program. Eligible projects funded by BRIC include measures to mitigate the impacts of multiple natural hazards, including those related to climate change. Other FY24 Hazard Mitigation Plans being prepared by MAPC include Essex, Hull, Littleton, Norwood, and Sharon, which will be completed and submitted to MEMA by June.

Government Affairs

Shannon Day and State Budget Advocacy

On April 24, MAPC brought together partners, including more than 50 young people, at the State House to advocate for the Shannon Community Safety Program in the FY25 Budget. The program was increased to \$12.9 M in the House and Senate budget proposals; the bill is now before a Conference Committee.

Affordable Homes Act Advocacy

With the bill now in House Ways and Means Committee, MAPC's support for the bill has included: several press releases, supporting an op-ed that ran in Commonwealth Beacon Magazine, a literature drop to legislators, and collaborating on a virtual briefing in support of the Local Option Transfer Fee, among other activities.

Land Use

Maynard Powder Mill Corridor Initiative - MBTA Communities Zoning Adopted

Maynard residents passed zoning that is intended to comply with Section 3A at the Annual Town Meeting on May 20. Support for the zoning was overwhelming, with 120 people voting in favor and only 5 voting against. MAPC has been working with the town, as well as Acton in a joint-planning effort, since 2020 as part of the Powder Mill Road Corridor initiative to develop zoning recommendations grounded in community goals for a more walkable, mixed-use neighborhood with safe, multimodal transportation options and greater access to the Assabet River. After the passage of the new 3A state law, the town asked MAPC to help them achieve compliance with the law through zoning developed for a portion of the study area.

Norfolk Master Plan

After an 18-month process, the [draft Norfolk Master Plan 2035](#) is complete. Norfolk community members are invited to provide comments on the plan through June 20. The MAPC team will be present at the Norfolk Farmer's Market on June 5 to share the draft plan. Over 1,100 Norfolk community members participated in the process by attending forums, discussing ideas with neighbors at workshops, and responding to community surveys. The Master Plan highlights continuing efforts to strengthen Norfolk Town Center and concentrate activity there. transform circulation by incrementally building toward a multi-modal network, remediate contaminated properties through redevelopment and economic revitalization, enhance existing neighborhoods, and preserve natural resources, agricultural areas, and outlying residential areas.

South Acton Vision & Action Plan - MBTA Communities Zoning Adopted

The South Acton Vision & Action Plan is an effort to establish a community vision for South Acton Village and make zoning and design recommendations that can best achieve that vision. Over the last several months, MAPC worked with the town to craft thoughtful zoning language to enable 3A compliance and make other updates to encourage additional residential and commercial development in South Acton Village. On May 7, Acton passed their 3A zoning by a wide margin of 69% and adopted the other zoning updates for South Acton by 82%. This long-range planning project will be wrapping up in mid-June with the release of the final South Acton Vision & Action Plan document.

Municipal Collaboration

The Northeast Homeland Security Regional Advisory Council (NERAC)

MAPC Staff completed the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) to learn the foundational principles of exercise programs and the common approaches to exercise program management, design and development, conduct, evaluation, and improvement planning. This knowledge will aid NERAC in incorporating a whole community approach to develop, execute, and evaluate exercises that address the preparedness priorities in the region.

Metropolitan Mayors Coalition Shannon CSI

Over 50 youth, prevention leaders, law enforcement, and legislators gathered at the State House for the annual Community Safety Day on the Hill event in support of the Senator Charles E. Shannon Community Safety Initiative (Shannon CSI) and the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI). The Community Safety Day is an advocacy event that helps to uplift and secure additional funding for Shannon CSI and SSYI programs, which work to reduce violence against youth across the Commonwealth. This event was an opportunity to hear directly from legislators, the statewide research partner, law enforcement partners, and Shannon participants about the importance of funding these critical programs.

Public Health

Boston Urban Agriculture Strategy

The Public Health Department completed the Boston Urban Agriculture Strategy project in April 2024. Working in partnership with GrowBoston (the Office of Urban Agriculture of the City of Boston), the team, led by Heidi Stucker and Jessika Brenin, facilitated a 16-month planning process to equitably advance opportunities for more urban agriculture in the City of Boston.

Strategic Initiatives

Strategic Plan/DEI Assessment Update

For the Strategic Plan, we have assembled work teams to build out the goals and strategies for each of the five topical priorities. These inter-departmental teams have worked over the past month to develop these goals and strategies. We are holding a ½ day Directors' retreat on June 6 to review the draft goals and strategies and to discuss changes we'll need to make to advance the Strategic Plan.

We are awaiting receipt of the final DEIA, and we have planned report-out meetings to the Advisory Committee, Equity Team, and staff leadership this Thursday.

AARP Age-Friendly Region Designation

On May 17, MAPC was awarded AARP's age-friendly designation by national Executive V.P. Nancy Leamond. Lizzi Weyant and Eric Hove accepted the designation on behalf of the agency. MetroCommon 2050 outlines the importance of working with our aging population, which continues to grow as a percentage of the population. MAPC has worked on a number of projects with an age-friendly lens and is committing to increase our focus on this growing and important demographic.

Transportation

Grant Proposal to Assess EV Charging Needs through Non-Grid Tied EV Charging

MAPC has applied for the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center's Accelerating Clean Transportation (ACT) for All Round 2 grant program. The proposal, "*Assessing EV Charging Needs through Non-Grid Tied EVSE Deployment*," aims to pilot innovative electric vehicle (EV) charging solutions, which are not reliant on the electrical grid. This includes options like solar-powered EV charging, battery-operated charging, and charging-as-a-service, that would be placed at various municipal and housing authority sites along with deploying electric vehicles through car-sharing partners.

The primary goal of this pilot is to demonstrate and establish a replicable model for municipalities and housing authorities to generate interest and awareness of electric vehicles and charging infrastructure in underserved communities. It will also assess the use of sites using non-grid tied charging and EV carsharing, with the aim of informing decisions about installing permanent charging solutions. MAPC is partnering with three housing authorities (Boston, Chelsea, and Somerville) and three municipalities (Framingham, Natick, and Quincy) to identify suitable locations for car-sharing and non-grid tied charging.

Re-Launch of the Lower Mystic Regional Working Group

After a multi-year process that resulted in the publication of the Lower Mystic Study in 2019, MAPC has re-launched the Lower Mystic Regional Working Group with a slightly revised membership and focus to reflect the current context, which has seen many recommendations from the study become reality. The momentum for reconvening the group stemmed from the collaborative effort among municipalities and agencies in the Lower Mystic region, led by MAPC, to provide collective feedback and advocacy on the environmental permitting process for Encore Casino's Phase 2 development. This collaboration successfully led to significant improvements to the final MEPA permit requirements, namely regarding parking and investment in transit.

Currently, members of the group, including representatives from Everett, Somerville, Chelsea, Boston, Cambridge, the MBTA, MassDOT, and Encore, are determining project and policy priorities on which to focus coordination efforts going forward.

Parking Forum in Lexington

On April 25 at Lexington's Cary Hall, MAPC Senior Transportation Planner Adi Nochur joined an event with Paved Paradise author Henry Grabar to discuss parking, transportation, and housing issues. The event was co-organized by the Town of Lexington and the Lexington League of Women Voters. Following a talk from Grabar (who previously provided the keynote at MAPC's March 19 "Finding the Fit" MetroCommon 2050 Speaker Series), Nochur kicked off a panel discussion with a brief overview of MAPC's Perfect Fit Parking work and opportunities for sustainable parking reform on a local level. Municipal panelists from Acton, Needham, and Watertown, as well as a representative from AARP Massachusetts, followed Nochur's presentation by describing the work they are doing to advance forward-thinking parking and zoning changes in their communities. After the panel, a robust Q&A and discussion ensued with the 50 event attendees from Lexington and surrounding cities and towns. The event (video recording available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLOB4wX8W-c&t=2182>) highlighted how parking reform is increasingly gaining traction in suburban communities throughout the MAPC region.

Presentation to Federal Funds and Infrastructure Congressional Briefing

Assistant Director of Transportation Julia Wallerce and Senior Transportation Planner Marah Holland joined the Government Affairs team for the monthly Federal Funds and Infrastructure Congressional staff briefing to give a presentation about their recently submitted "LINKUP Boston" proposal to the FHWA's Congestion Relief grant program. The goal of these meetings is to bring congressional offices up to speed on Massachusetts requests for federal funding, and point to opportunities for them to send letters of support or engage in other advocacy. In this case, Julia and Marah highlighted how DLTA funds enable the transportation team to dedicate significant time in a short window to prepare an application to bring over \$22 million in federal funds to Greater Boston for expansion of the Bluebikes Bikeshare system and creation of a new first/last mile neighborhood shuttle program.

Building Out The LandLine: MAPC's Vision for a Safe and Connected Greenway Network

On May 13, staff participated in a ribbon cutting for the [Commonwealth Ave Carriage Road bi-directional bicycle lane](#) in Newton, hosted by Mayor Fuller. This improvement has long been championed by MAPC. The project will redesign, reconstruct, and restore a critical compromised segment of the Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway from Lyons Field to the Charles River Bridge, in the process creating new green space and adding a continuous walking and bicycle path by rerouting vehicular traffic to the south side of the median. The project will increase the overall amount of green space, link myriad trail networks, increase visibility and access to the historic boathouse on the Charles River, and improve transit access in the area by upgrading bus stops.

On May 15, staff also participated in a road safety audit (RSA) for one of the busiest intersections in Boston, at Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street. This intersection serves an MBTA station (Hynes Convention Center), Berklee College of Music, and significant new development over I-90. During the peak hour, thousands of pedestrians and hundreds of cyclists pass through the intersection. The bridge deck over the highway will be replaced in a few years. The RSA was performed to identify problems and propose solutions for the re-design of this intersection, which is at the beginning phase.

Finally, staff is working with [Bike to the Sea](#), a CBO working to connect communities to the Northern Strand Trail north of Boston, the office of State Senator Jason Lewis, and the municipalities of Malden, Melrose, Wakefield, Stoneham, and Reading to put in street signage identifying the route of the [Mystic Highlands Greenway](#), which is a mostly on-road bike corridor connecting the Northern Strand Trail, Malden River paths, Tri-Community Greenway, Lynn Fells Parkway, Wakefield/Lynnfield Rail Trail, and Lake Quannapowitt in Wakefield.

Subregions

The TRIC, SSC, SWAP, MAGIC, and ICC subregions hosted Legislative Breakfasts, discussing the Municipal Empowerment Act, the Affordable Housing Act, and key priorities for municipalities and legislators in their communities. Each breakfast welcomed between 20 and 40 attendees and included robust discussion.

The MWRC Subregion conducted elections and has a full Executive Committee for the upcoming fiscal year.

Congratulations to the new and returning Executive Committee Members:

- Chair: Yolanda Greaves, Ashland
- Vice Chair: Amanda Loomis, Natick
- Clerk: Laurie Bent, Weston
- At-Large Member: Katie Robey, Marlborough
- At-Large Member: Rick McKenna, Framingham

The ICC and TRIC received funding for regional TAP projects. The ICC will be focusing on an Affordable Housing Toolkit, and the TRIC subregion will be looking at how to establish Language Access in their communities.

Human Resources

New Staff

Samantha (Sam) Berlus joined MAPC in April as a Community Engagement Specialist. In this role, Sam will be implementing community engagement strategies to assist with outreach activities for planning projects and public events. Holding a Master's Degree in Public Policy, Sam has experience in creating racial equity initiatives and DEI policy recommendations.

Saoussane Bettal joined MAPC as the new Operations Assistant as an official full-time employee in May, after covering many of the role responsibilities as a temporary employee since January. In this role, Saoussane will be assisting with general office operations, supporting staff, and facilitating MAPC digital workflows. Saoussane joins MAPC with an administrative background in event planning and operations.