



Zoning for Livable Communities: MBTA Communities Law as a Catalyst for Municipal Opportunity

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Tufts
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Zoning for Livable Communities: *MBTA Communities Law as a Catalyst for Municipal Opportunity*

Michelle de Lima
Timothy Dowling
Emily Li
Grant Perry
Emily Thibault

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Tufts University Land Acknowledgment

Tufts University’s Medford/Somerville campus resides on the colonized homelands of the Massachusetts tribe, whose name describes the place visible from the Great Hill, today referred to as the Blue Hills that lie south of Boston. The Massachusetts came into contact with the Nipmuc to the west, the Pawtucket to the north, and Wampanoag to the south, related peoples who shared mutually intelligible languages. As an institution that benefits from the ownership of land once inhabited and cared for by Indigenous communities, Tufts has a responsibility to recognize this history and cultivate relationships with the descendants and nations who represent the original peoples of what is now eastern Massachusetts.

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- Green Building:** the practice of creating structures and using processes that are environmentally responsible and resource-efficient throughout a building’s life cycle from siting to design, construction, operation, maintenance, renovation, and deconstruction.
- Green Code:** using zoning and planning to create a healthy, sustainable, and prosperous community.
- Green infrastructure:** Vegetation, soils, and other elements and practices used to restore natural processes required to manage water and create healthier urban environments including green roofs, rainwater harvesting, bioswales, permeable pavement, and more.
- Green roof:** a layer of vegetation planted over a waterproofing system that is installed on top of a flat or slightly sloped roof. Also known as vegetative or eco-roofs.
- Greenhouse gas (GHG):** Gases in the atmosphere that absorb and re-emit heat, and thereby keep the planet’s atmosphere warmer than it otherwise would be. Those most commonly accounted for are carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O).
- HVAC:** heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. Refers to systems that regulate and move heated and cooled air throughout residential and commercial buildings.
- Level-of-Service (LOS):** a qualitative measure used to relate the quality of motor vehicle traffic service, analyzing roadways and intersections by categorizing traffic flow and assigning quality levels of traffic based on performance measures such as vehicle speed, density, congestion, etc.
- Low Impact Development:** systems and practices that use or mimic natural processes that result in the infiltration, evapotranspiration, or use of stormwater to protect water quality and associated aquatic habitat.
- MAPC:** the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the regional planning agency serving the 101 cities and towns in Metro Boston.
- MBTA:** the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. The public agency responsible for operating most public transportation services in MetropolitanGreater Boston.
- MBTA Communities Law:** requires MBTA communities to have at least one zoning district of reasonable size in which multifamily housing is permitted as of right within 0.5 miles of a commuter rail station, has a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre, has no age restrictions, and is suitable for families with children. Also known as 3A zoning.

Glossary

MHP: Massachusetts Housing Partnership. Works with communities to create innovative policy and financing solutions that provide affordable homes.

Mixed Use Zoning: combines commercial, residential, and industrial units under one standard zoning category.

Mixed Income Zoning: housing that is priced based on a range of incomes.

Multi-Modal Mobility: Using a combination of transportation modes (i.e. walking, biking, driving a car, taking public transit) from start to end of a trip

Net-zero: building or community of buildings for which annual basis all GHG emissions resulting from building ops are offset by carbon-free energy production.

Overlay District or Zone: a zoning district which is applied over one or more previously established zoning districts, establishing additional or stricter standards and criteria for covered properties in addition to those of the underlying zoning district.

Paper Compliance: Abiding by a law or policy without taking meaningful action to realize its objectives. In the context of Section 3A, the term usually refers to municipalities drawing districts that legalize their existing multifamily housing without allowing for new development. It can also refer to creating multifamily zoning districts with no intention of supporting new housing development.

Parking Cash Out: a parking management strategy that can be used by employers offering free or subsidized parking. Employees opting to walk, bike or take transit to work and therefore not using a parking spot are provided a cash payment from the employer.

Parking Minimum: requirements as dictated by a municipality’s zoning ordinance for all new developments to provide a set number of off-street parking spots.

Passive House: A rigorous, voluntary standard for energy efficiency in a building, which reduces the building’s ecological footprint and results in ultra-low energy buildings that require little energy for space heating or cooling.

Renewable Energy: energy collected from resources naturally replenished on a human timescale, such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, waves, and geothermal heat.

Resilience Hubs: community-serving facilities augmented to support residents and coordinate resource distribution and services before, during, or after a natural hazard event.

Right-of-Way: the legal right, established by grant from a landowner or long usage to pass along a specific route through property belonging to another.

Single-Family Zoning: a legal classification that restricts development in an area to single-family, detached homes.

Social-Ecological-Technological Framework: connects components and interrelations from three domains: socio-economic-demographic, ecological, and technological to capture a whole system view.

Stormwater Management: focuses on reducing runoff and improving water quality to maintain natural hydrologic cycles through site grading, vegetation, soils, and natural processes that absorb and filter stormwater onsite.

Stormwater Runoff: rainfall that flows over the ground surface. Created when rain falls on roads, driveways, parking lots, rooftops, and other paved surfaces that do not allow water to soak into the ground. Runoff also picks up and carries different pollutants found on paved surfaces such as sediment, nitrogen, phosphorous, bacteria, oil and grease, trash, pesticides, and metals.

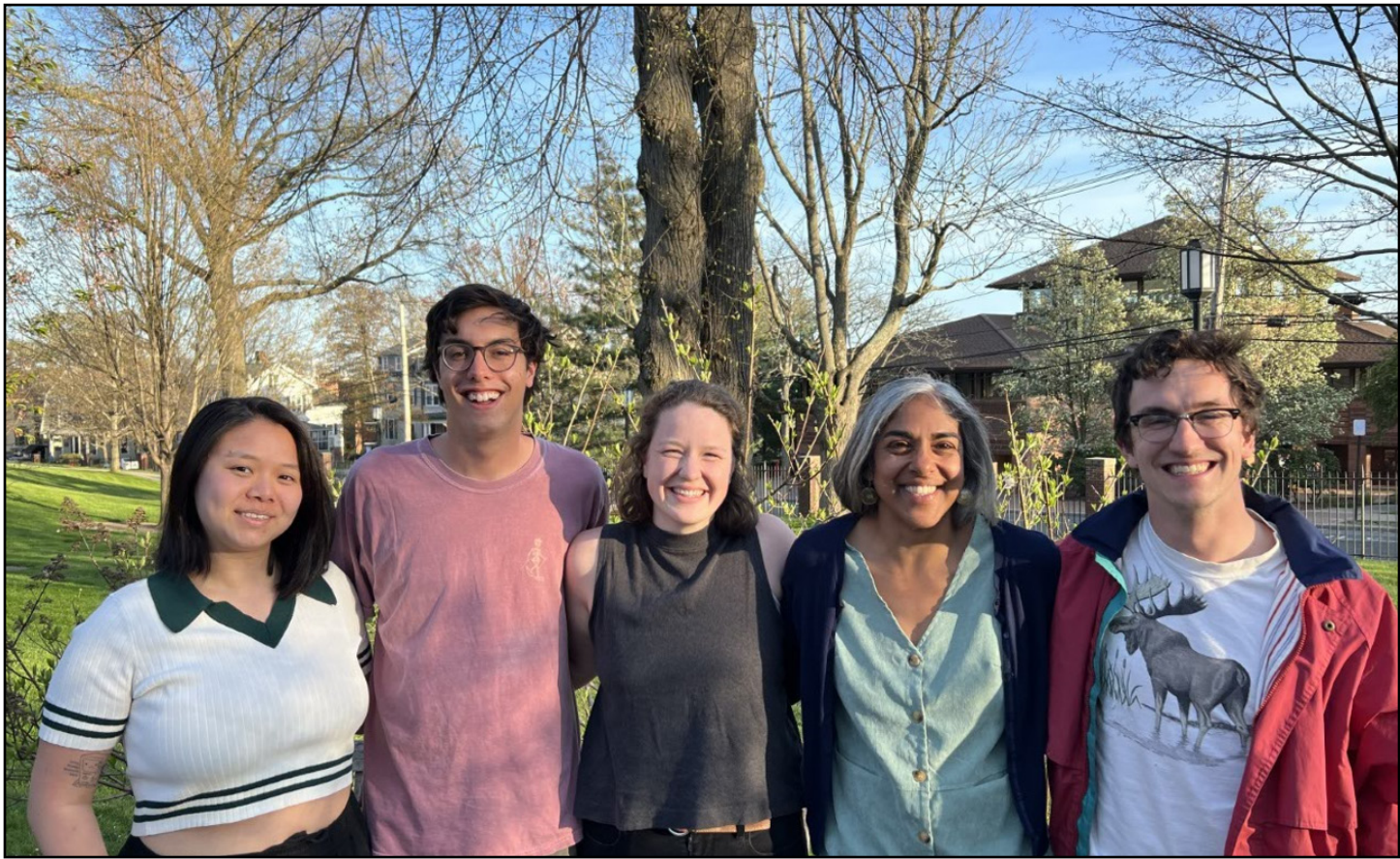
Traffic Generation: a model of traffic flows.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD): a planning and design strategy that consists in promoting urban development that is compact, mixed-use, pedestrian and bicycle friendly, and closely integrated with mass transit by clustering jobs, housing, services, and amenities around public transport stations.

Urban Heat Island Effect: built-up areas that are hotter than nearby rural areas.

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT): measures the amount of travel for all vehicles in a geographic region over a given period, typically a one-year period. Calculated as the sum of the number of miles traveled by each vehicle.

Meet the Team



Left to right: Emily Li (She/Her, M.A.), Grant Perry (He/Him, M.S.), Emily Thibault (She/Her, M.S.), Michella de Lima (She/Her, M.A.), Timothy Dowling (He/Him, M.A.).

Executive Summary

This report profiles four municipalities in different stages of adopting Section 3A zoning under Massachusetts’ MBTA Communities Law. The four case study communities, Framingham, Lexington, Salem, and Scituate, represent a range of geographic locations, population sizes, demographic characteristics, types of MBTA service, potential for active mobility, and status of climate and mobility planning.

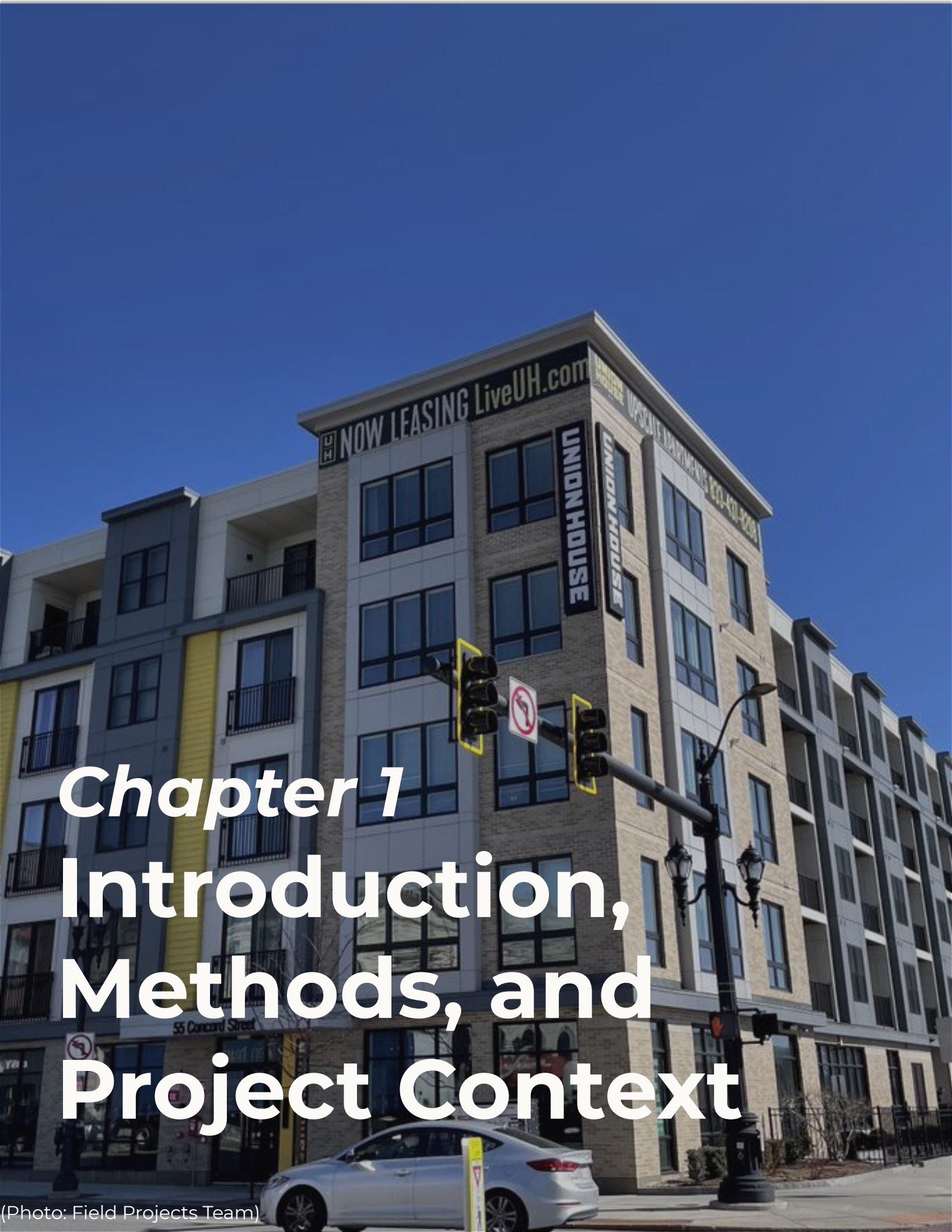
We include key findings and recommendations for other municipalities in the process of implementing 3A zoning to help them develop their multifamily districts into sustainable, connected neighborhoods. Adding to the work of our project partner, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), our report facilitates information sharing and best Practices across MBTA commuter rail and adjacent communities.

Our research question is as follows:

After adopting multifamily zoning districts under Section 3A, what transit, climate, and equity policies can municipalities use to develop their districts into sustainable, connected neighborhoods?

The MAPC region consists of 101 cities and towns in Metropolitan Boston falling within the 177 municipalities under the MBTA Communities Law, categorized into rapid transit, commuter rail, and adjacent. Our scope narrows to the 84 commuter rail and adjacent municipalities within the MAPC region to evaluate and recommend relevant climate and transit measures to implement after 3A adoption. We chose four municipalities that capture the diversity of towns and cities in the region, each with notable climate, affordability, transportation, or mixed-use development efforts. Our methodology utilizes the following approaches: a literature review, stakeholder interviews, geospatial analysis, and qualitative data analysis to inform our case studies and recommendations.

Our recommendations fall under four categories: complete streets and active mobility; parking reform; clean energy and climate resilience; and affordability and anti-displacement. They include specific examples from our case study communities and other Metropolitan Boston municipalities, as well as potential sources of funding and resources for implementation.



Chapter 1 Introduction, Methods, and Project Context

(Photo: Field Projects Team)

Introduction

PROJECT PARTNER: METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is a Regional Planning Agency serving the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston. The agency's mission is to promote smart growth and regional collaboration, and its work is increasingly focused on climate change and racial equity. They provide technical assistance and research on a diverse range of topics, including transportation, economic development, clean energy, arts and culture, and more.

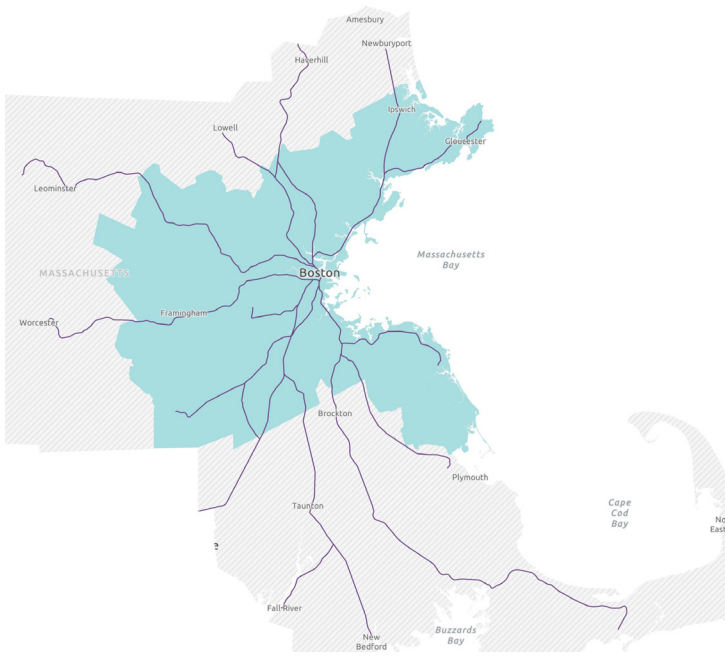


Figure 1. MAPC Region (Source: Field Projects Team).

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In January 2021, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a new law that altered the state's zoning through the Housing Choice legislation. That law created Section 3A of the Zoning Act, which sought to address the Commonwealth's housing shortage by requiring all communities with or adjacent to MBTA

commuter rail and rapid transit stops to create new zoning districts that allow for multi-family housing by-right. Commuter rail and adjacent communities across Greater Boston are currently in various stages of drafting and adopting new zoning to comply with the MBTA Communities Law. Leveraging their expertise in different planning areas, MAPC sees 3A as an opportunity to ensure these districts are positioned to grow into complete transit-oriented, resilient neighborhoods with mobility options and greater access to open space, jobs, and community.

PROJECT GOALS

This project integrates MAPC's regional goals of "Inclusive Growth & Mobility" and "Climate Change Mitigation & Resiliency" to incorporate multi-modal mobility, climate mitigation, and community resilience strategies into newly zoned multifamily districts to become sustainable, connected communities. We find complementary planning strategies that municipalities can pursue after 3A adoption to promote accessible, transit-oriented development, and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. We focus on policies and incentives that can be enacted and funded at the municipal level, by developers, or through existing state and federal programs.

RESEARCH QUESTION

After adopting multifamily zoning districts under Section 3A, what transit, climate, and equity policies can municipalities use to develop their districts into sustainable, connected neighborhoods?

INTRODUCTION

To answer our research question, we used the following methods: a literature review, stakeholder interviews, geospatial analysis, and qualitative data analysis to inform our case studies and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides valuable background information on two broad topics: transportation - including multi-modal mobility, transit demand management, complete streets, and parking policies; and climate mitigation and resilience - including building energy codes, floodplain overlays, and community resilience. This research identifies best practices for municipalities to integrate local transportation options and climate mitigation and resilience into their 3A zones.

CASE STUDIES

In-depth case studies of four diverse communities in the study area were determined by a geospatial analysis of the commuter rail and adjacent communities within the MAPC region (see map). The case study communities are Framingham, Lexington, Salem, and Scituate. We conducted a content analysis of each municipality's policies and plans, and interviews of their planning staff focused on transportation and climate strategies.

CASE STUDY SELECTION PROCESS We used geospatial and statistical data analysis of the commuter rail and adjacent communities to create a basic overview of each community in the study area, capturing key socioeconomic conditions, transportation metrics, and environmental conditions. Working in

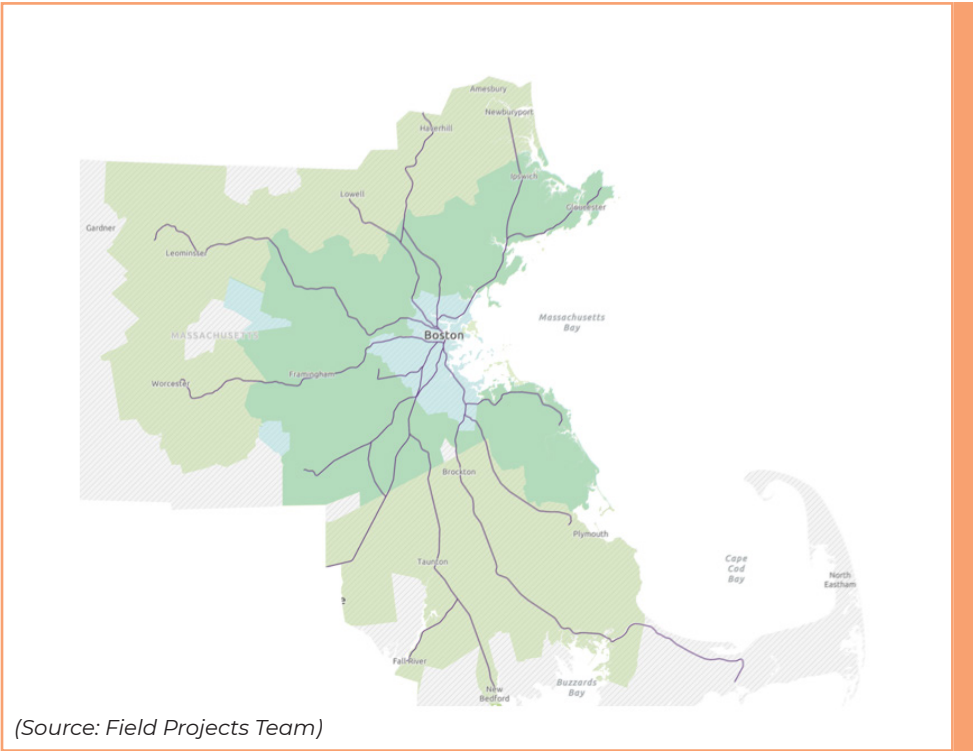
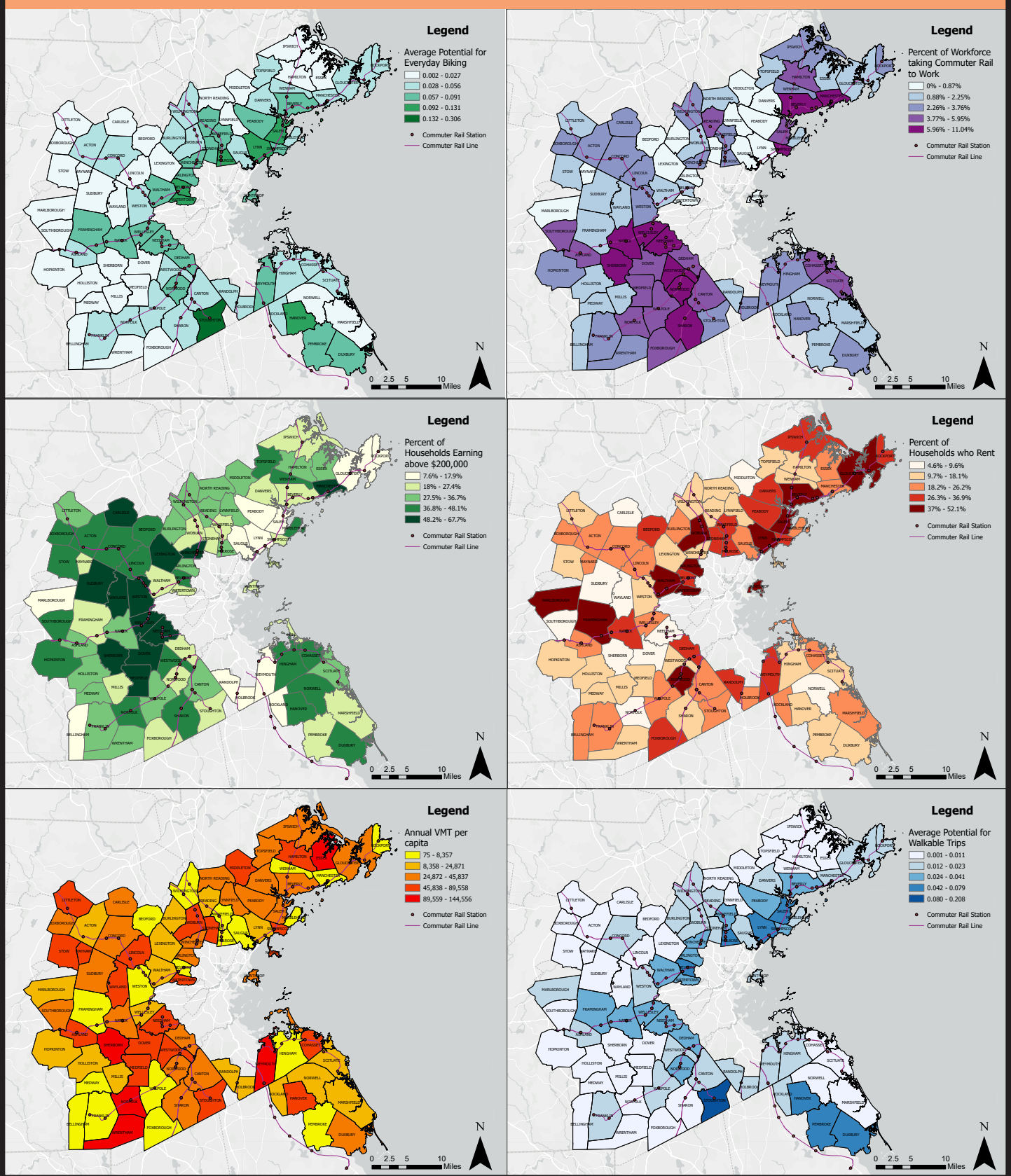


Figure 2. Context map of Study Area.

This map shows the study area for case study selection. Areas in light green represent cities and towns within the MBTA Communities Law, not including rapid transit communities. The areas in blue represent the MAPC region not included within the MBTA Communities Law, excluding rapid transit communities. The area in dark green represents the project study area.

Figure 3. Case Study Selection Methodology Maps (Source: Field Projects Team).



consultation with our partners at MAPC, we narrowed down the list until we arrived at four communities covering a range of geographic location, population size and demographic characteristics, type of MBTA service, potential for active mobility, and status of climate and mobility planning and 3A zoning adoption.

PLANNER INTERVIEWS

We interviewed planners from the four case study communities working on housing, transportation, and climate resilience and mitigation to inform our case studies. The interview questions focused on existing and anticipated opportunities, challenges, and best practices related to integrating policies on transportation/mobility, green buildings, climate resilience, and affordability within their 3A zoning districts and the municipality as a whole. The questions are listed in Appendix B. We coded the interview transcripts, using a grounded theory lens to identify emergent themes. Grounded theory is a qualitative analysis method using inductive reasoning to analyze, synthesize, and explain data to identify patterns and relationships. As an initial guide for coding, we chose the following categories: transportation, climate, and community, each containing specific categories as seen in Appendix C.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PLANS, POLICIES, AND INTERVIEWS

We used a qualitative content analysis to highlight transportation, climate, and community planning goals and mechanisms that may complement 3A zoning. For our case study communities,

we analyzed recent plans and policies related to housing, transportation, and climate. Guided by input from MAPC housing and transportation staff, we identified relevant policies from other Massachusetts communities to supplement our recommendations.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY IN GREATER BOSTON

The scarcity of affordable housing in the US generally and Massachusetts specifically is severe and well-documented. Despite increasing over the last decade, per capita housing production in Massachusetts remains 40-50% below the national average, perpetuating low vacancy rates (2% rental vacancy rate and 0.7% homeowner vacancy) and upward pressure on housing costs (City of Boston 2018). Housing pressure and displacement within Boston is amongst the worst in the nation, compared to the industry standard of 6% vacancy for a healthy housing market (TBF 2023). The state consistently ranks as one of the five most expensive in the nation for buyers and renters. In the Greater Boston area, only one-third of families earn the income needed to afford the median single-family home (Arsenault 2023), and fewer than one third of renters make the yearly salary needed to afford market-rate rent in Boston without being cost-burdened (DataTown n.d.; Olsen 2024). Black and Latino households are significantly more likely to be cost-burdened, whether they rent or own (TBF 2023). Housing pressure and prices in the inner core directly influence the greater metropolitan area, requiring a region-wide approach to address housing affordability (Kennedy 2022).

Massachusetts’ housing shortage presents a threat to the state’s long-term economic viability and has profound consequences for equity and community cohesion. Despite growing

job opportunities in the state (Arsenault 2023), the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (2022) found that 46,000 people left the state in 2021, often opting for states with a lower cost of living. Younger generations especially are discouraged from staying. Twenty-five percent of people between 20- and 30-years old plan to leave the state in the next five years, citing high costs of housing as their primary driver (GBCC 2024). These young people are missing out on employment opportunities and the region is losing potential innovators and workers. Furthermore, the housing challenges facing low- and moderate-income residents of all ages make it difficult for families and communities to stay together.

SINGLE-FAMILY ZONING

Minimum lot size and single-family zoning are key contributors to Greater Boston’s housing shortage. A lack of density, rather than a lack of land, is keeping housing supply low and prices high in areas outside of the urban core (Glaeser and Ward 2009). Zoning regulations from decades ago persist in many Massachusetts communities today, continuing a legacy of race- and class-based discrimination and exclusion (Dain 2023; Crump et al. 2020). 3A zoning is the first step in updating regulations to reflect the needs of residents in the state.

MULTIFAMILY DEVELOPMENT NEAR TRANSIT AND IN NEIGHBORHOODS

To promote medium-housing density options, multifamily zoning near transit and in existing neighborhoods is a commonly cited solution in Metropolitan

Boston. Crump et al. (2020) critique the lack of density near MBTA Commuter Rail stations and argue for state intervention to overcome the disconnect amongst regional housing, equity, and climate needs along with the outsized influence of homeowners in affluent, majority white communities. This laid the groundwork for Massachusetts’ Housing Choice legislation, streamlining zoning, incentivizing new development, and eliminating meritless legal challenges, which includes Section 3A.

Encouraging new housing development in residential neighborhoods near public transit allows for cohesive integration of “transportation, the environment, local economies, quality of life, and equity” (Dain 2022). MAPC estimates that Eastern Massachusetts needs 100,000 to 130,000 multifamily housing units over the next ten years to support a growing workforce and changing population (2023). Locating this housing near transit not only advances equity and climate mitigation efforts, but also allows local governments to increase their tax revenue and for the state to protect their public transportation investments. Balanced

with strong affordability measures and equitable planning processes to mitigate against potential gentrification, transit-oriented development can advance sustainable, connected communities in Massachusetts (Villagomez 2023).

OVERVIEW OF THE MBTA COMMUNITIES LAW

In 2021, the Massachusetts legislature adopted the Housing Choice legislation to address housing shortage in the state. As part of this legislation, the MBTA Communities Law, or Section 3A of the Zoning Act, requires the 177 communities served by the MBTA to create at least one zone of reasonable size in proximity to transit that allows multifamily housing by-right at a gross density of fifteen units per acre, and within half a mile of their MBTA station, where applicable. The municipalities are categorized into four groups according to the type of MBTA service they receive or are close to: rapid transit, commuter rail, adjacent, and adjacent small town. The location of the new multifamily districts and their capacity (the number of housing units the new zoning should allow) vary according to these categories and to the

community’s size. The law encourages a more circular relationship within the MBTA region, since communities outside of the inner core can access the economic and cultural opportunities available and thus should also do their fair share to address the region’s housing shortage (EOHLC 2023). The state emphasizes that developing accessible neighborhoods close to transit is good housing, transportation, and climate policy. The law reflects a cohesive solution addressing multiple state needs within a coordinated effort and is a step in the right direction to address the state’s housing, climate, and economic development needs.

REVISIONS

Section 3A zoning allows mixed-use development and does not require affordable housing. Based on feedback from several MBTA communities, EOHLC (2023) revised its initial guidelines to allow housing units in mixed-use buildings with required ground floor commercial uses to count toward the total number of units that the community is required to zone for (EOHLC 2023; Young 2023). The MBTA Communities Law does not include affordability requirements, and zoning compliant with the law cannot require more than 10% affordable units at 80% of area median income, except at the discretion of the EOHLC. To include additional affordability in their 3A zoning districts, EOHLC (2023) provides other programs as outlined in the law such as a smart growth district under 40R, or approval with a satisfactory Economic Feasibility Analysis.

RESPONSE TO THE LAW

Housing advocates have largely embraced the law while asserting that it doesn’t go far enough, often framing it as an incremental first step to addressing the housing shortage that must be complemented with strong affordability and equity provisions (Ziegler 2022; Edwards and Jennings 2024; Schuster 2024). Housing advocates add that Section 3A will give more households and families access to the amenities of communities outside Boston, and, hopefully, reduce the high redevelopment and displacement pressures on the inner core communities (Kennedy 2022). Opponents criticize it as a top-down measure misaligned with community goals and control (Brinker 2024a). Mixed responses to 3A reveal the range of needs and perspectives in the region, leading to some of the mentioned revisions such as including mixed-use and additional programs.

METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL & REGIONAL GOALS

MAPC is guided by MetroCommon 2050: the regional land use and policy plan for Metropolitan Boston, which identifies ways the Boston region can become more equitable, more prosperous, and more sustainable (MAPC 2019b). They work with local municipalities to advance the plan’s action areas and their associated policy recommendations:

- Inclusive Growth & Mobility
- Homes for Everyone
- Equity of Wealth & Health
- Dynamic & Representative Government
- Climate Change Mitigation & Resiliency

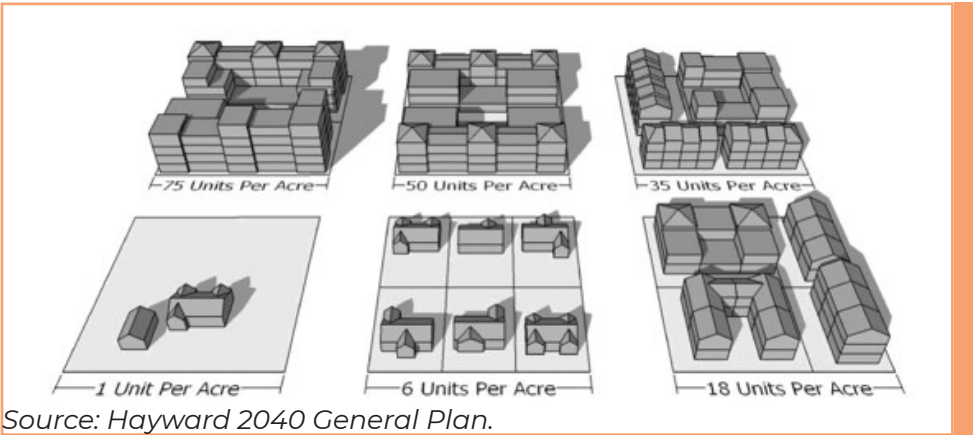


Figure 4. Density in Different Shapes and Sizes

Diagram showing different densities by unit per acre. The MBTA Communities Law requires 15 units per acre density near train stations.

Project Context

Expanding on Homes for Everyone, MAPC's Housing and Transportation Teams are assisting communities to develop and pass zoning that complies with Section 3A in response to the Commonwealth's housing shortage. Leveraging their expertise in different planning areas, MAPC sees this as an opportunity to ensure 3A-zoned areas are positioned to grow into complete transit-oriented resilient neighborhoods with mobility options and greater access to parks, open space, jobs, and culture. This project will focus on integrating the MetroCommon regional goals of Inclusive Growth & Mobility and Climate Change Mitigation & Resiliency to complement growing housing opportunities along public transit with increased multimodal mobility and climate mitigation and resilience efforts.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Although climate change issues are not directly addressed in 3A zoning, Climate Change Mitigation & Resiliency is one of MAPC's key priorities. Transportation is the largest source of statewide emissions, and buildings are second (EOEEA 2023.). By ensuring that new construction is conducted following the Stretch or Specialized building codes (see Building Energy Codes in the Literature Review), municipalities can work towards their own climate goals as well as the statewide goal of net zero emissions by 2050. Encouraging density around public transit and incorporating complete streets in the region will open options for residents to use alternative modes of transit such as walking, biking, and riding public transit, reducing vehicle

miles traveled (VMT) and contributing to cleaner air and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

DIVERSE HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Section 3A districts allow a wider range of housing options in high-opportunity locations close to transit, amenities, and jobs, resulting in more people accessing housing that meets their needs in the community of their choosing. Greater housing diversity is a step towards undoing a century of discriminatory zoning policy (Dain 2022, 2023). By locating housing near transit to enable accessible neighborhoods, municipalities can reduce emissions and car dependence, support local economies, and improve public health.

We, and our project partners at MAPC, believe this exploration of accessible transit-oriented development and climate resilience post-3A adoption will empower Metro Boston's municipalities to take meaningful action on community and regional priorities.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

To lay the groundwork for our content analysis, case studies, and recommendations, this literature review explores I) key transportation topics including multi-modal mobility, transit demand management, complete streets, and parking policies, and II) climate mitigation and resilience topics including building energy codes, floodplain overlays, and urban heat island effects. Encouraging density around public transit and incorporating complete streets in the region will open options for residents to use alternative modes of transit, like walking and biking, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and car dependence, support local economies, and improve public health. By ensuring that new construction adheres to climate and community resilience principles, municipalities can work towards their own climate goals, as well as the statewide goal of net zero emissions by 2050 (EOEEA 2022).

1. TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

CAR DEPENDENCE

Car dependence is a phenomenon that restricts automobiles to be the main form of transportation in the US, through infrastructure design and historic federal investment policies (Pokharel et al. 2023). This model promotes car use, increases GHG emissions, and marginalizes alternative modes of transit (TUMI 2021. Car ownership is a significant monetary investment to participate in a car-dependent society, reflecting income barriers to travel (Dargay 2001). Many factors influence behaviors related to driving and car ownership including parking availability, quality bus service, rental housing size, job access, regional employment density, and proximity to stores and downtown (Chatman 2013). In addition, infrastructure such as parking availability and expanding highways incentivizes car use, often at the expense of more efficient land uses (Christiansen

2017; Guo 2013).

Increased car use leads to increased congestion, which is typically addressed through adding highway lanes. However, increasing capacity fails to alleviate traffic congestion and instead contributes to sprawl-oriented development, further promoting car purchase and use (SGA 2022; Franco 2020; Pokharel et al. 2023, T4America 2020). Sprawl-oriented development increases overall vehicle miles traveled (VMT), which increases noise and air pollution, traffic accidents, and more.

Massachusetts is greatly car-dependent, as reflected in commuter patterns and emissions sources. Of all the commuter rail and adjacent communities, the mean percentage of residents taking the commuter rail to work was only 2.09% in 2022. The community with the most commuter rail ridership to work was 11% in Sharon (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). Current estimates suggest that 76% of commuters in Massachusetts drive a vehicle to work instead of opting to walk, bike, or take public transportation (ibid). The overall reliance on cars as the primary mode of commuting has led to intense congestion and immeasurable time loss among the region’s population, not to mention damaging environmental and health effects (Douglas et al. 2011). In addition, transportation is the greatest source of emissions for Massachusetts, with a majority coming from personal vehicles (EOEEA 2022).

The MBTA Communities Law is an opportunity to work toward

ending this damaging cycle of car dependence by encouraging medium-density development around existing transportation networks. The transportation planning literature suggests that strategies to reduce car dependence include Traffic Demand Management, Transit-Oriented Development, Parking Reform, enhancing multimodal mobility, active mobility, and complete streets. In addition to reducing car dependence, these policies, programs, and capital improvements can increase density and opportunities for mixed-use neighborhoods and create complete neighborhoods.

TRAFFIC GENERATION FROM NEW DEVELOPMENT

Community input from municipalities across Massachusetts reveals widespread concerns about the impact of new housing development on traffic issues. From a sample of 178 Massachusetts rural or suburban residents, participants consistently cited traffic-related issues as a top concern (Ryan 2002). Other comments from residents include concerns around increased congestion on local roads, loss of on-street parking to new residents, and noise disturbance from construction vehicles. (Brinker 2023; Czopek 2020; Nichols-Worley 2023; Young 2018).

Abundant literature disproves these traffic-related concerns by documenting that trips generated from new developments are overestimated. Many developers, engineers, and planners rely on the Trip Generation Manual, an informational report by the

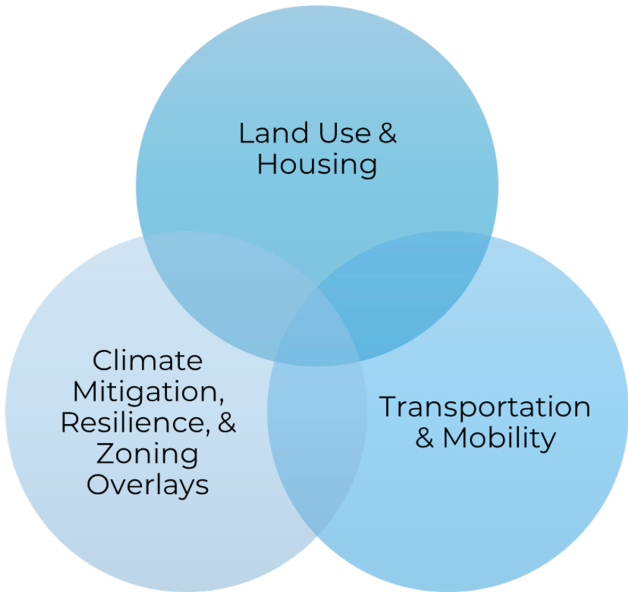


Figure 6. Components of Sustainable Connected Neighborhoods (Source: Field Project Team)

Institute for Transportation Engineers, to estimate traffic generation for new developments. However, the metrics and assumptions employed in this manual often overestimate the traffic generation created by new developments (Millard-Ball 2015; Ding and Taylor 2022).

Researchers found that in two regions of California and Utah, traffic generation studies overestimated actual trip generation and increases in VMT in 90% of cases (Voulgaris et al. 2024). Moreover, the methodology doesn't hold salience in suburban settings and is often inconsistently reported on (Ibid; Millard-Ball 2015).

Despite evidence disproving the correlation between increased traffic and new development, many communities still use this as a common argument especially in less dense areas. Inaccurate traffic generation studies promulgate low-density development by having underreported traffic generation, resulting in many lower-density developments built instead of one dense development. This oversight induces sprawl-oriented development, exacerbating overall car dependence (Ding and Taylor 2022). Transit-Oriented Development coupled with Complete Streets, parking reform, and built environment improvements that support and promote multimodal and active mobility can help assuage concerns of traffic generation and reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMTs).

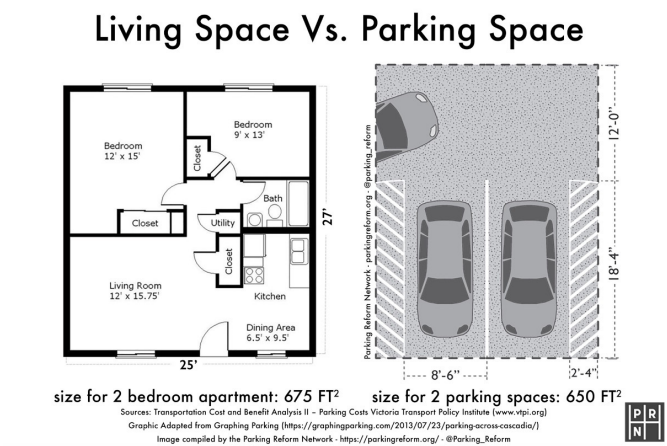


Figure 7. Living Space Vs. Parking Space (Source: Denver Urbanism).

2. STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED

PARKING REFORM

The average parking space costs more than the average car (Shoup 2011). Parking policy reform directly addresses car dependence and promotes TOD by reducing or eliminating parking minimums. In the Northeast, Buffalo, NY and Hartford, CT removed mandatory parking minimums citywide in 2017 (Hess and Rehler 2021; Parking Reform Network 2024). In Massachusetts, the City of Cambridge was the first municipality to eliminate all minimum parking requirements for residential and commercial development citywide (Parking Reform Network 2024; City of Cambridge 2022). Eliminating parking minimums in Buffalo resulted in 53% fewer parking spaces for mixed-use developments in the two years following the elimination than would have been required under the old parking minimums (Hess and Rehler 2021). Eliminating parking minimums gives

developers more flexibility in determining how much off-street parking is necessary (Gray 2021).

The price premium of parking spaces for new development not only burdens all stakeholders including prospective tenants but also inhibits alternative uses such as green space or additional living space. A study of the inner core region of Greater Boston found that 30% of parking spaces were empty during peak hours, revealing inefficient use of space and an opportunity to shift to TOD (MAPC 2019b). Alternatives to increasing parking supply include reducing demand by providing employer-paid or subsidized transit passes, parking cash-outs, and car sharing (Shoup 2011). Another option to manage parking for TOD is shared parking. In the city of Melrose, overnight street parking is prohibited. Residents can purchase an overnight parking permit annually which can be used in municipal lots and MBTA Commuter Rail lots overnight (City of Melrose 2023).

TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is a community design and planning strategy that promotes mixed-use, compact, walkable, and bike-friendly development close to mass transit, public services, employment, and leisure. TOD incorporates Metropolitan Boston's goals under one model by not only promoting inclusive mobility and decreasing car dependence but also reducing carbon emissions and improving public health. For instance, residents living near rail stations use transit at higher rates, decreasing overall car use (Chatman 2013). Promoting TOD by implementing mixed-use housing and increasing density within walking distance of rail stations may reduce congestion and thus reduce air pollution from personal vehicles. TOD is a strategy that suburban towns and urban centers can use to activate underutilized space and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

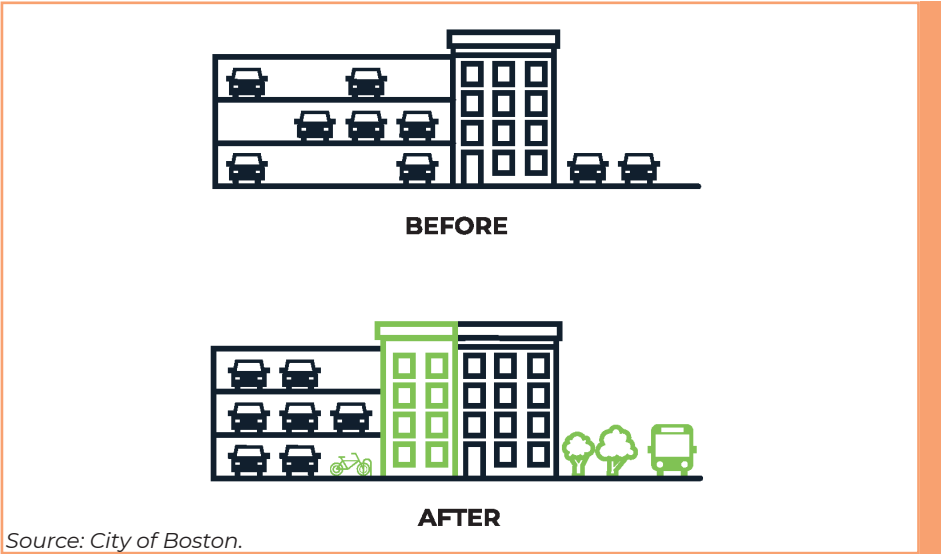


Figure 8. Right Size Parking Strategy. Reducing parking requirements opens up space for more housing, open space, and transit options (City of Boston).

TOD is not a new concept. Before the dominance of automobile transportation, pedestrian-friendly development concentrated along streetcar and rail corridors. TOD can be used to create neighborhoods similar to those neighborhoods built 100 years ago (Cervero et al 2017). Proximity to transit is increasingly desirable for older adults and younger adults. Two of the largest growing demographics, seniors and Hispanics prefer transit-accessible locations (MAPC 2012).

Communities can diversify housing stock by incentivizing the development of smaller rental units with lower parking requirements in locations with employment density and connectivity through bus service (Chatman 2013). While adjacent communities in our study area do not have a commuter rail station within their municipal boundaries, housing options in walkable, bikeable, mixed-use neighborhoods have the potential of accomplishing the same goals as TOD, decreasing vehicle miles traveled and improving environmental sustainability by reducing trips by car. TOD can be applied in communities ranging from Inner Core/Metro Core to Maturing or Developing Suburbs with stations classified as Town & Village, Commerce Park, Suburban Transformation, or undeveloped (MAPC 2012).

Several Massachusetts cities and towns have implemented Transit-Oriented planning and development including Concord, Framingham, Attleboro, Cohasset, and others. Concord

Commons is a transit-oriented mixed-use development in West Concord with 20 apartment units, restaurants, retail, and office space. Before the development, the site (formerly the Atlantic Pre-Hung-Door factory) was described as an eyesore in the town (Barrett Planning Group LLC n.d.). The Commons are adjacent to the train tracks with pedestrian access to West Concord Center Village and the Concord Commuter Rail station providing shopping and transportation options for residents. Pedestrian access to the station was essential to the development and to Concord’s long-range planning centering Concord Center Station in higher-density commercial and residential redevelopment (SGSET Toolkit n.d.). Without the connectivity, the development would have been categorized as transit-adjacent, without access to transit service and therefore requiring a trip by car to nearby amenities.

In Framingham, TOD has been used to meet the shift in preferences for more walkable, urban, transit-oriented locations that both younger and older residents desire (City of Framingham 2015). In Attleboro, TOD planning has been integrated with its economic development and Downtown revitalization planning through the city’s MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) district in alignment with other plans including the Downtown Attleboro Mobility Study and Downtown Attleboro Action Strategy (City of Attleboro 2022). Cohasset used a TOD Overlay District to encourage a mix of moderate- to high-density

development within walking distance of their transit station (Town of Cohasset 2006). Other advantages of the TOD Overlay include creating a commuter-friendly environment and encouraging transit use, reducing car dependence and congestion, encouraging healthy exercise through walking or biking, and more.

MULTI-MODAL MOBILITY

Multi-modal mobility is a transportation strategy that integrates various modes of travel rather than relying exclusively on car use. Multi-modal mobility requires infrastructure that supports the needs of all users whether they choose to walk, bike, use transit, or drive. It creates more connections between modes of transit, improving efficiency of transportation networks and increases choice in ways of getting around. Multi-modal mobility can be applied in proximity to transit stations to encourage ridership by increasing the convenience of getting to and from the station to the traveler’s origin or destination.

Train stations, like MBTA commuter rail and subway stations, are often points of convergence for multiple modes of transportation. Therefore, investing in bike and pedestrian infrastructure to access the station is imperative to expanding access and enabling multimodal mobility. The quality and attractiveness of the transport mode to and from the station is an essential consideration in attracting ridership (Venter 2020). The decision for riders to use public transport considers both the transit itself and the quality of the first/last mile. Increasing opportunity for

choice in mobility and supporting active mobility in accessing transit through complete streets design is one strategy to make utilizing public transportation more attractive to potential riders.

ACTIVE MOBILITY AND COMPLETE STREETS

Complete Streets (CS) is an impactful design approach for all communities to ensure that public rights-of-way are designed to support the movement of all users regardless of age, ability, or mode of transit. CS designs can include traffic-calming elements, accessible sidewalks, bicycle lanes, crosswalks, sidewalk bump outs, accessible pedestrian signals, public transit stops, landscaping, modified vehicular traffic lanes, and other streetscape elements. In car-dependent communities, Complete Streets improvements can be used to encourage active mobility and improve public health outcomes (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps 2024). To implement complete streets, infrastructure needs to be bike and walk friendly.

Adopting multifamily zoning as required by 3A is an opportunity to increase active mobility and the walkability of communities in Metropolitan Boston. Walkability is a key component of active mobility. To be considered walkable, the pedestrian experience must be useful, safe, comfortable, and interesting (Speck 2012). Promoting and improving walkability requires desirable destinations, mixed land use, presence of street trees, remediation of superfluous parking, protections for pedestrians and bikes and connectivity to transit. Walkable

communities are in high demand according to real estate trends and have many benefits including sustainability, health, and economic development (Speck 2012; SGA 2019). Despite the high demand for walkable neighborhoods, zoning in the U.S. generally promotes sprawling development, while prohibiting mixed uses in areas of single-family residential development. Building walkability measures into zoning, like reduced or eliminated parking minimums, and improving public infrastructure, such as with connected pedestrian networks, parks and other destinations can create a more connected neighborhood.

Bike infrastructure is another important component in promoting active mobility through complete streets design. Bike infrastructure includes bike parking and storage, protected bike lanes, shared use paths, and potential for bikeshare. A study conducted in Washington D.C. and Minneapolis found that each bike

in the Bikeshare program reduced car travel in a year by 153 miles and 84 miles, respectively (Fishman et al. 2014). In Washington D.C., 7% of Bikeshare trips were car substitutions, and in Minneapolis, 19% of these trips were car substitutions (Ibid). Within Greater Boston, one study found that areas that did have Bluebike stations drove 3% fewer miles on average compared to their non-Bluebike counterparts (Basu & Ferreira 2021a). In addition, 2% of households in areas that had BlueBike stations reduced vehicle ownership, reflecting a shift to alternative modes of transit. As a result, GHG emissions were almost 3% lower for each resident (Basu and Ferreira 2021a). Expanding Bluebikes service in Greater Boston is a great opportunity to connect new 3A districts to other municipal amenities including commuter rail stations and workplaces while simultaneously reducing VMTs, emissions, and car dependence.

Figure 9. Enabling Multimodal Mobility.

This design illustrates elements of multimodal mobility including public transit, parking, pedestrian infrastructure, and street trees (City of Boston).



Source: City of Boston

EQUITY CONCERNS WITH TOD AND COMPLETE STREETS

Incorporating TOD in neighborhoods correlates with increased property values and exclusion of low income and marginalized populations (Cevero et al. 2017). If not intentionally balanced with equity considerations, incorporating active mobility, green buildings, and open space can contribute to displacement (ibid). For communities implementing TOD, lowering barriers to multimodal transit for new residents may be prioritized over protecting existing residents from displacement. Policies to retain current residents include affordable housing and rent stabilization, tenants’ rights, and other affordability measures tailored to the community context are key preventive measures to ensure all have access to TOD (MAPC 2021, 2024).

3. CLIMATE MITIGATION, RESILIENCE, AND CODES

Metropolitan Boston faces many climate change issues including extreme temperatures, increased precipitation, severe storms, and sea level rise (City of Boston 2016, 2022). Buildings are the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the state, thus many GHG reduction responses focus on sustainable infrastructure vital to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 (EOEEA 2022). This section discusses opportunities to mitigate impacts and build resilience for communities across the region.

Climate solutions fall into two main categories: climate mitigation and climate resilience. Mitigation responses

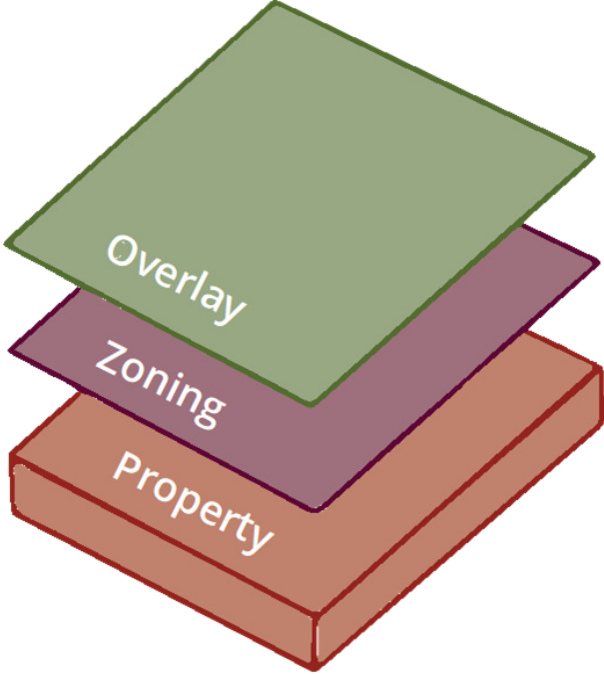


Figure 10. Zoning Overlay Diagram. (Source: Cuyahoga County Planning Commission).

reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) to limit warming, whereas resilience (or adaptation) refers to responses that adjust to the current and future effects of climate change (Campbell 2023). Climate measures protecting buildings from weather damage and incorporating decarbonization techniques are executed through local regulatory processes. Zoning overlays are a regulatory tool that municipalities can use to enact additional characteristics over the base zoning map and can be utilized to limit GHG emissions and limit impacts of severe heat and flooding (UWSP n.d.; MAPC 2019a). Building codes are regulations that set standards for a variety of structures that can be used to implement energy efficiency requirements (NIST 2022).

BUILDING ENERGY CODES

Buildings are the second largest source of GHG emissions for the state, accounting for 35% of greenhouse gas emissions across Massachusetts (EOEEA 2022; DOER n.d.). To curb emissions, building codes are the primary regulatory tool to enforce limits. While Massachusetts law does not allow municipalities to adopt regulations more stringent than the state building code, the state accommodates additional pathways to go beyond minimum standards. Chief amongst these is adoption of the Stretch Energy Code or the opt-in Specialized Energy Code, which set energy efficiency requirements for different building types.

The Base Code is the minimum requirements set by the state, which follows the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) with added state-specific amendments. The opt-in Stretch Energy Code builds on the Base Code by including additional

amendments emphasizing energy efficiency. Beyond the Stretch Code is the opt-in Specialized Energy Code, which requires all new construction to be consistent with the state’s net zero goals. The Stretch Code follows Home Energy Rating Scores (HERS) index certifications chosen by amendments or through Passive House certification, while the Specialized Code follows more rigid guidelines from the HERS certifications for new multifamily construction (DOER n.d.; NIST 2022). Massachusetts releases regular updates to ensure that the state meets its 2050 net-zero goals, providing a transitional setup for municipalities. More than 270 communities have adopted the Stretch Code, while 35 have adopted the Specialized Code.

Another emerging option is participation in the Fossil Fuel Free Building Demonstration Program (FFBDP). It is currently limited to a few pilot communities that meet one of three requirements: at least 10% of their housing stock is affordable as defined under Chapter 40B, or they were granted safe harbor status through the state’s Housing Production Plan, or they achieved compliance with Section 3A. FFBDP allows up to ten communities to opt into the all-electric pathway of the Specialized Code after meeting the housing requirements and filing a Home Rule Petition, enabling them to require that all new construction and major renovations be electrified (DOER 2022). Environmental justice advocates and others are pushing the state to expand the program, lower barriers to entry, and diversify the types of participating

communities (Lisinski 2024).

FLOODPLAIN OVERLAY DISTRICTS

Over 400,000 Massachusetts residents currently live in a 100-year flood zone, meaning they have more than a one-in-four chance of experiencing a flood during a 30-year mortgage period. Climate change increases the frequency and intensity of floods, which exacerbates impacts on people and the built environment (MEPHT 2024). Floodplain overlay districts (FODs) cover areas subject to a certain percentage of flooding in any given year determined by the municipality and are used to ensure that buildings in the district prepare for potential disaster. FODs, at minimum, must include all FEMA Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) vulnerable to a 100-year flood but can go beyond these standards (MAPC n.d). In Metropolitan Boston, municipalities can implement FODs to raise buildings, exceed height

limits set by the base zoning, and prohibit or restrict development in floodplains (MAPC n.d.).

Non-zoning climate planning also builds flood resilience through climate plans, bylaws, and ordinances. The City of Boston adopted wetland protection ordinances promoting the protection, restoration, nourishment, and migration of salt marshes to adapt to short-term and long-term coastal and stormwater flood control (MAPC n.d.. Dedham mandated projects to meet minimum stormwater infiltration requirements to limit flooding (MAPC n.d.. FODs not only protect existing and future buildings from flooding damage, but also adapt to existing natural infrastructure that can protect communities from extreme weather events.

COOLING MEASURES

In 2022 in Massachusetts, 49 days

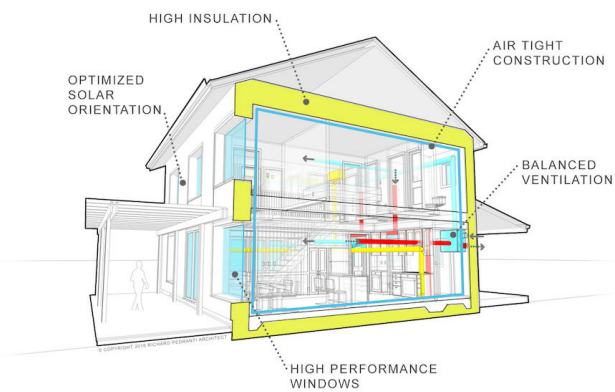


Figure 11. Passive House Model (Source: Massachusetts Passive House).



Source: Mystic River Watershed.

Figure 12. Small-Scale Low Impact Development.

This rain garden in Arlington, MA demonstrates small-scale LID techniques utilized by cities and towns.

exceeded temperatures of 90F. By comparison, between 1971 and 2000, an average of 11 days a year exceeded that temperature (MAPC 2023b). This increase in extreme heat days is of great concern, especially for vulnerable populations. Extreme heat increases energy costs, air pollution, and heat-related illnesses (EPA 2023). In response, many municipalities adopt green infrastructure measures to keep communities cool, including increasing the tree canopy, promoting eco-roofs (e.g.: solar roofs, green roofs, cool roofs), and painting surfaces lighter colors (Zhou et al. 2017).

Building codes can be a useful tool for reducing urban heat island effects and creating cooler and more resilient communities. Municipalities typically set a minimum Solar Reflectance Index Score for buildings and account for roof type to accommodate the many roofing options available. The City of Cambridge, for example, adopted a “Green Factor Standard,” which requires applicants to achieve a “cool score” by preserving mature trees, planting new vegetation, and installing green or cool roofs and cool pavements through site-specific planning (City of Cambridge 2023). Tree protection ordinances are another route to cool neighborhoods. Communities including Arlington and Concord have adopted bylaws to encourage and increase the tree canopy cover through preserving mature trees in the municipality.

LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT
Low impact development (LID) is a land development method that plans for natural resource preservation at the

site level that assists with stormwater management, extreme heat, and other climate issues (MAPC 2014). LID design follows a set of principles focused on working with the existing landscape and minimizing disturbances. MassDEP (n.d.b) summarizes the LID approach in four practice areas:

- Plan for the preservation of a site’s natural features
- Landscape with native vegetation to promote stormwater infiltration and reduce runoff.
- Prevent runoff through vegetation.
- Innovate new ways to reduce impervious surfaces on development sites.

Common elements of LID include rain barrels, grass filter strips, permeable paving, vegetated swales, and dry wells (MAPC 2014). In addition to managing stormwater through increased infiltration and decreased runoff, LID can increase energy efficiency (MassDEP n.d.b). Other techniques such as green roofs can reduce heating and cooling costs by absorbing heat when the roof is wet (MassDEP n.d.b).

LIMITATIONS OF CLIMATE OVERLAYS
To comply with the MBTA Communities law, any additional requirements for higher energy efficiency, flood mitigation, or greening standards must apply to all uses, not just to multifamily housing. The overlapping of Section 3A zoning overlays and other existing overlays may limit the feasibility of adding climate zoning overlays in some municipalities.

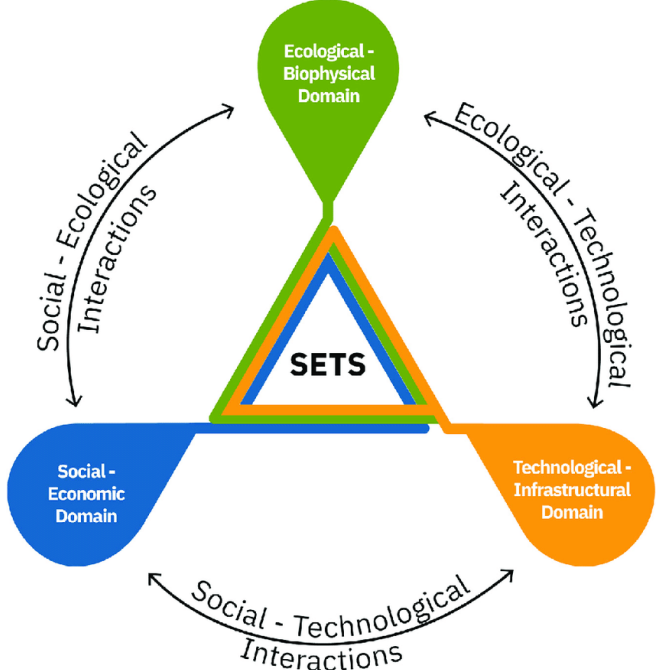


Figure 13. The social-ecological-technological systems (SETS) conceptual framework (McPhearson et al).

RESILIENCE PLANNING
Focusing on resilience planning is key for Metropolitan Boston to anticipate and be proactive in responding to long-term climate issues and systemic underinvestment of marginalized communities. Adding resilience to traditional planning manifests in creating greener, more equitable, and less vulnerable cities (Woodruff et al. 2018). Climate resilience captures adaptation efforts that not only combat the results of climate change but also integrate measures to prepare municipalities for future disasters. Community resilience, on the other hand, plays a role within climate resilience measures but takes it a step further by focusing on community-based efforts. Such efforts and strategies, like resilience hubs, allow residents to share information and resources and

thus be better prepared to anticipate, accommodate, and adapt/thrive in response to extreme climate events.

At the local level, resilience incorporated into early and place-based action should be prioritized and planned in collaboration with other governmental institutions (Measham et al. 2011). If higher levels of government establish stronger leadership and facilitate climate-related efforts through technical and financial assistance, local governments will follow suit. Especially since climate issues span beyond municipal boundaries, having state and federal guidance can facilitate collaborative measures for more effective solutions. When considering changes in transportation and climate planning, stakeholders should consider incorporating a resilience lens into the policies, projects, and programs they integrate to ensure sturdy yet flexible responses that ensure everyone is supported and receives the resources they need.

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL-TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEMS (SETS) FRAMEWORK Building resilient municipalities requires an understanding of the systems interactions present between social, ecological, and technological/infrastructural facets of the urban landscape. The SETS framework coordinates natural, technological, and socio-economic systems to design, plan, and manage climate solutions for optimal social-ecological outcomes (McPhearson et al. 2022). Including technology in socio-ecological systems frameworks reflects the substantial role that built

and technological infrastructure play in mediating human activities and ecosystem processes (Kim et al. 2018). Analyzing the exchanges amongst these three realms questions existing institutions, knowledge, and who is affected and informing interdisciplinary solutions (Kim et al. 2018). Moving forward in resilience work with SETS can identify barriers to change within existing actions, governance conditions, economic constraints, value systems, and call forward a variety of stakeholders to combine efforts rather than work in silos (Iwaniec et al. 2021).

CO-PRODUCTION FRAMEWORK
Coproducts call for participatory engagement to co-create desirable future visions for a municipality that reflect diverse sectoral, cultural, and disciplinary perspectives (Iwaniec et al. 2021). This fabrication of ideas can occur through workshops, informal conversations, community events, and more. The focus of the convenings often involves reconciling differences and conflicts, shifting power dynamics, and finding a new, shared understanding of future visions (Iwaniec et al. 2021). By addressing historic and current abrasions amongst stakeholders, co-production can turn a new leaf to create innovative solutions and move toward a sustainable and resilient future.

RESILIENCE HUBS
One model of incorporating resilience into municipalities is resilience hubs – a physical space that meets both physical and social goals to improve emergency management, reduce climate pollution,

and enhance community resilience (USDN n.d.). Hubs may arise through existing facilities and organizations conducting similar work or be established by the municipality. They should be a trusted physical space that provides food, shelter, electricity, heating, cooling, communication infrastructure, basic health and medical supplies, and other forms of aid (ibid).

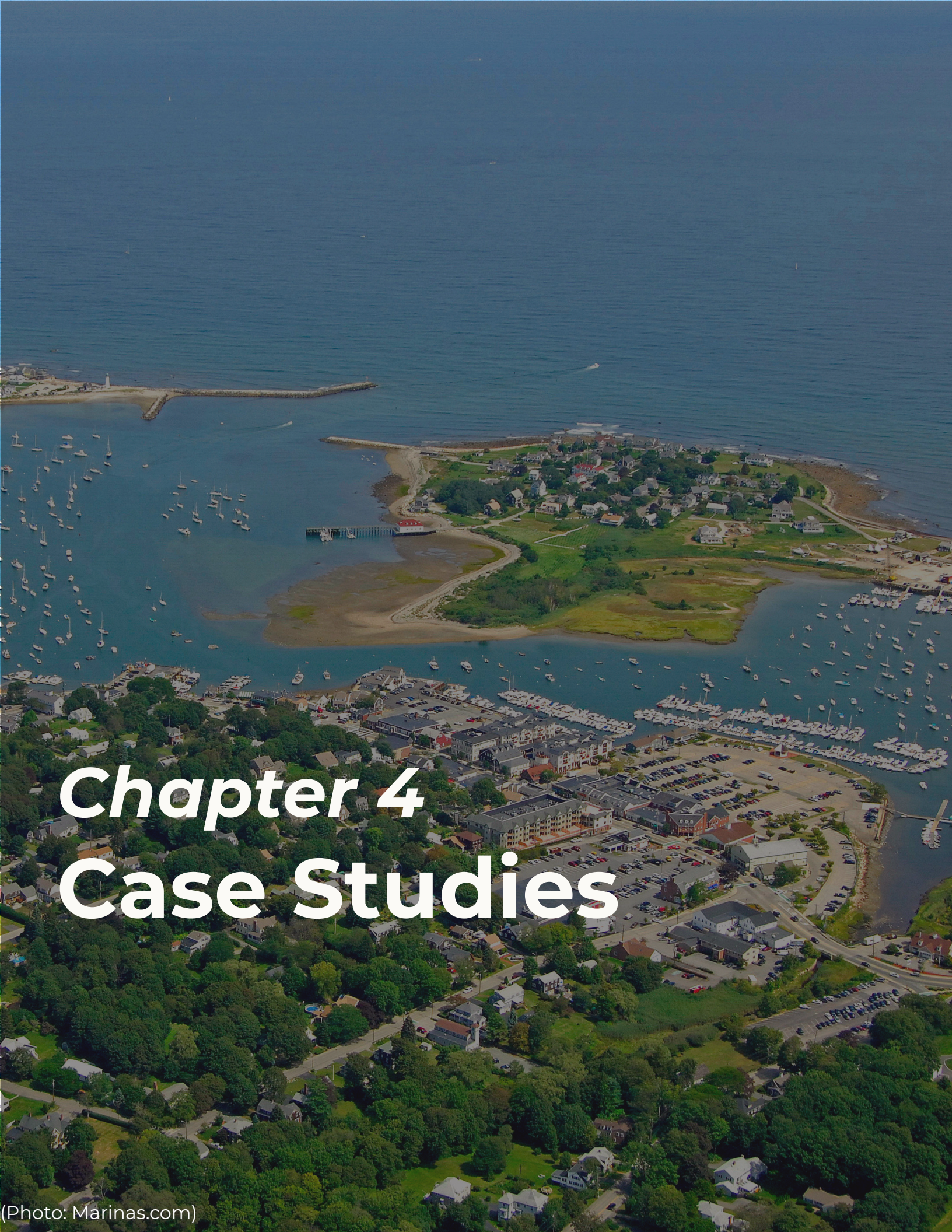
Resources can be coordinated across partner groups and should be oriented to address inequities and reduce climate impacts. Resilience hubs have three operating conditions: normal, disruption, and recovery. Normal conditions are the default state 99% of the time, with disruption and recovery resulting in response to any major disasters that arise (extreme weather, pandemics, etc.) (ibid). Coordinating an interdisciplinary space fills the gap of strained public services and systemic underinvestment, especially in marginalized communities, shifting power to the residents rather than government institutions and other historically untrustworthy services. Resilience hubs do not exist exclusively in one physical space but rather spread as a network that can transcend municipal boundaries to ensure all are accounted for. The following are some emerging examples of resilience hubs across the US.

Resiliency hubs were introduced in Baltimore in 2014 by Kristin Baja who worked for the city’s Office of Sustainability. Her team identified strong leadership in priority locations and found areas to support the existing deep community ties and fill their gaps,

rather than lead or direct the hub effort. The program has grown to host 20 hubs with 18 partners who receive grant-funded support from the city to gather resources. Convenings and trainings open opportunities to develop relationships across the network, raise awareness on climate and health risks, and determine gaps to address community concerns.

Baltimore’s hubs are piloting solar power and battery storage to increase access to renewable energy and back-up power to the communities who need it most. This program hopes to reduce utility cost burden for community groups and provide workforce development opportunities. Four hubs have already received solar and battery back-up infrastructure and another three are slated to receive similar services (Biron 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION This literature review synthesizes current research and findings to implement facets of MetroCommon 2050 priorities that promote a diversity of accessible transit modes, clean and healthy environments, and resilient communities. We connect these topics in the context of our case studies and stakeholder interviews with four chosen municipalities: Salem, Framingham, Scituate, and Lexington to evaluate solutions, gaps, and other factors to achieve Sustainable Connected Communities.



Chapter 4 Case Studies

(Photo: Marinas.com)

Case Studies

INTRODUCTION

This section contains In-depth case studies of four communities:

- Salem
- Framingham
- Scituate
- Lexington

Our four case study communities highlight the range of policy approaches available to municipalities adopting 3A zoning. They represent a range of geographic locations, population sizes, demographic characteristics, types of MBTA service, potential for active mobility, and status of climate and mobility planning.

Salem is a diverse, mid-sized city on the North Shore that was one of the first communities to achieve compliance with the MBTA Communities Law, along

with Lexington. With a commitment to affordability and resilience, Salem serves as a model of progressive housing and climate policy.

Framingham is an example of how to integrate transportation planning and housing development to meet the needs of a diverse community and bolster economic development. Framingham's demographics are relatively representative of the racial and median household income of the state (See table 1). Framingham has a TOD plan with several transit-oriented apartments already developed and occupied.

Scituate is an example of framing 3A as a method to support municipal goals. Scituate was selected as a case study due to its smaller population and its vulnerability to coastal impacts of climate change. Additionally, the town is an

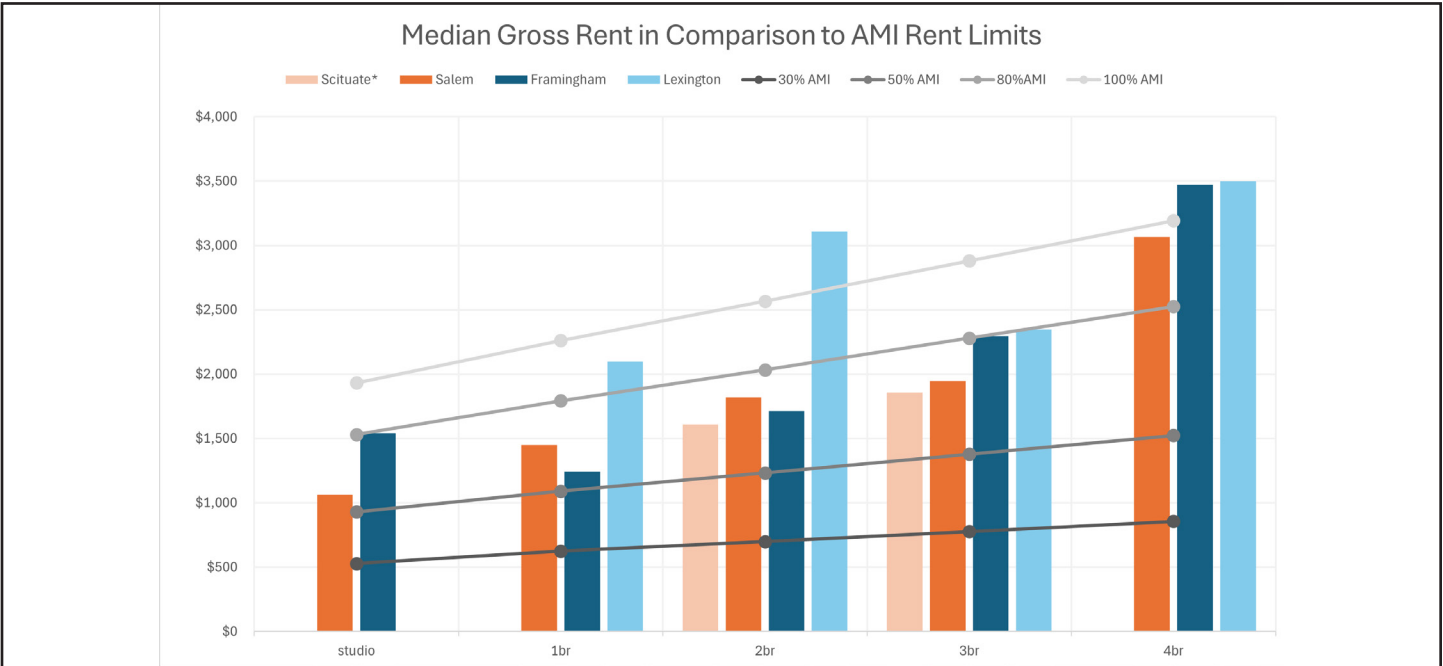


Figure 14. Median Gross Rent by Household Size (data from U.S. Census Bureau)
*Less than 950 housing units in Scituate are renter occupied (Census Bureau).

Case Study Comparison Tabels

	SALEM	FRAMINGHAM	SCITUATE	LEXINGTON
PLANS				
COMPREHENSIVE	✓		✓	✓
LAND USE	✓	✓	✓	
ACTIVE MOBILITY	✓	✓		✓
CLIMATE/RESILIENCE	✓	✓	✓	✓
HOUSING	✓	✓	✓	✓
OPEN SPACE	✓	✓	✓	✓
TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT		✓		
TOWN/VILLAGE DISTRICT			✓	✓
POLICIES housing, transit, mobility, climate, green buildings	Affordable Housing Overlay Low Parking Minimums Complete Streets Policy ADU Ordinance	Complete Streets Policy	Climate Action Plan Housing Action Plan Open Space Plan	Complete Streets Policy Specialized Stretch Code Transit Demand Management Ordinance
COMPLIMENTARY PROJECTS transit, mobility, connectivity climate resilience,	Blue Bikes Program Density Bonuses Salem Skipper Municipal Bus	Mary Denison Park Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Complete Streets upgrades	Community Visioning Driftway Path	Bedford/Hartwell Complete Streets Reconstruction Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Pilot, 2024

Table 1. Case study municipality demographic comparison. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018 –2022 Estimates

example of a municipality with two MBTA commuter rail stations giving two 3A district examples.

Lexington is a wealthy suburban town that adopted 3A zoning well ahead of the deadline for adjacent communities. The town is leveraging the new zoning to advance its ambitious plans for equitable mixed-use development, bike and pedestrian mobility, and climate mitigation.

CASE STUDY SELECTION PROCESS

We used geospatial and statistical data analysis of the commuter rail and adjacent communities to create a basic overview of each community in the study area, capturing key socioeconomic conditions, transportation metrics, and environmental conditions. Working in consultation with our partners at MAPC, we narrowed down the list until we arrived at four communities covering a range of geographic location, population size and demographic characteristics, type of MBTA service, potential for active mobility, and status of climate and mobility planning and 3A zoning adoption.

PLANNER INTERVIEWS

We interviewed planners from the four case study communities working on housing, transportation, and climate resilience and mitigation to inform our case studies. The interview questions focused on existing and anticipated opportunities, challenges, and best practices related to integrating policies on transportation/mobility, green buildings, climate resilience, and affordability

within their 3A zoning districts and the municipality as a whole. The questions are listed in Appendix B. We coded the interview transcripts, using a grounded theory lens to identify emergent themes. Grounded theory is a qualitative analysis method using inductive reasoning to analyze, synthesize, and explain data to identify patterns and relationships. As an initial guide for coding, we chose the following categories: transportation, climate, and community, each containing specific categories as seen in Appendix C.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PLANS, POLICIES, AND INTERVIEWS

We used a qualitative content analysis to highlight transportation, climate, and community planning goals and mechanisms that may complement 3A zoning. For our case study communities, we analyzed recent plans and policies related to housing, transportation, and climate. Guided by input from MAPC housing and transportation staff, we identified relevant policies from other Massachusetts communities to supplement our recommendations.

	SALEM	FRAMINGHAM	SCITUATE	LEXINGTON	MASSACHUSETTS
MAPC SUB-REGION	Northshore (NSTF)	Metrowest (MWRC)	Southshore (SSC)	Minuteman Advisory (MAGIC)	
MAPC TYPOLOGY	Regional Urban Center	Regional Urban Center	Maturing Suburb	Maturing Suburb	
COMMUTER RAIL LINE	Newburyport/Rockport	Framingham/Worcester	Greenbush	ADJACENT TOWN	
COMMUTER RAIL STOPS	1	1	2	0	
TRAVEL TIME BY CAR TO BOSTON (MINUTES)	74	66	68	54	
MEAN TRAVEL TIME TO WORK (MINUTES)	26.7	30.3	36.5	31.2	29.4
POPULATION	44,722	70,963	18,190	34,074	7,029,917
MEDIAN HH INCOME	\$79,196	\$94,909	\$108,194	\$206,323	\$96,505
RACE/ETHNICITY					
WHITE, ALONE, NOT HISPANIC/LATINO	58.9%	55.6%	90.8%	57.8%	69.6%
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN, ALONE	13.6%	6.4%	0.2%	1.7%	9.5%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN NATIVE, ALONE	1.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
ASIAN, ALONE	6.3%	7.5%	2.4%	31.6%	7.7%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER, ALONE	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
TWO OR MORE RACES	3.0%	11.6%	4.2%	6.2%	2.7%
HISPANIC OR LATINO	19.1%	17.5%	1.1%	3.2%	13.1%
RENTER POPULATION	49%	45%	13%	17%	38%
TOTAL HOUSING UNITS	20,349	29,033	8,260	12,310	3,036,334
MINIMUM MULTIFAMILY UNIT CAPACITY	3,052	4,355	1,239	1,231	
3A STATUS (SPRING 2024)	COMPLIANT District Compliance Application Approved	INTERIM COMPLIANCE Action Plan Approved	INTERIM COMPLIANCE Action Plan Approved	COMPLIANT Compliance Application Conditionally Approved	

Table 2. Case study municipality plan and policy comparison.

SALEM

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

In the face of both rising housing costs and flooding risks, zoning overlays can be powerful complementary tools to preserve affordability and climate resiliency within 3A districts. A healthy working relationship with local developers is key to ensuring that these overlays comply with 3A and produce affordable market rate housing.

Demographic Overview			
Population	Median Household Income	Renter Population	Non-Hispanic White
44,722	\$79,196	49%	69%
Relevant Plans and Policies			
3A Adopted Climate Action Plan Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Housing Plan Open Space Plan			

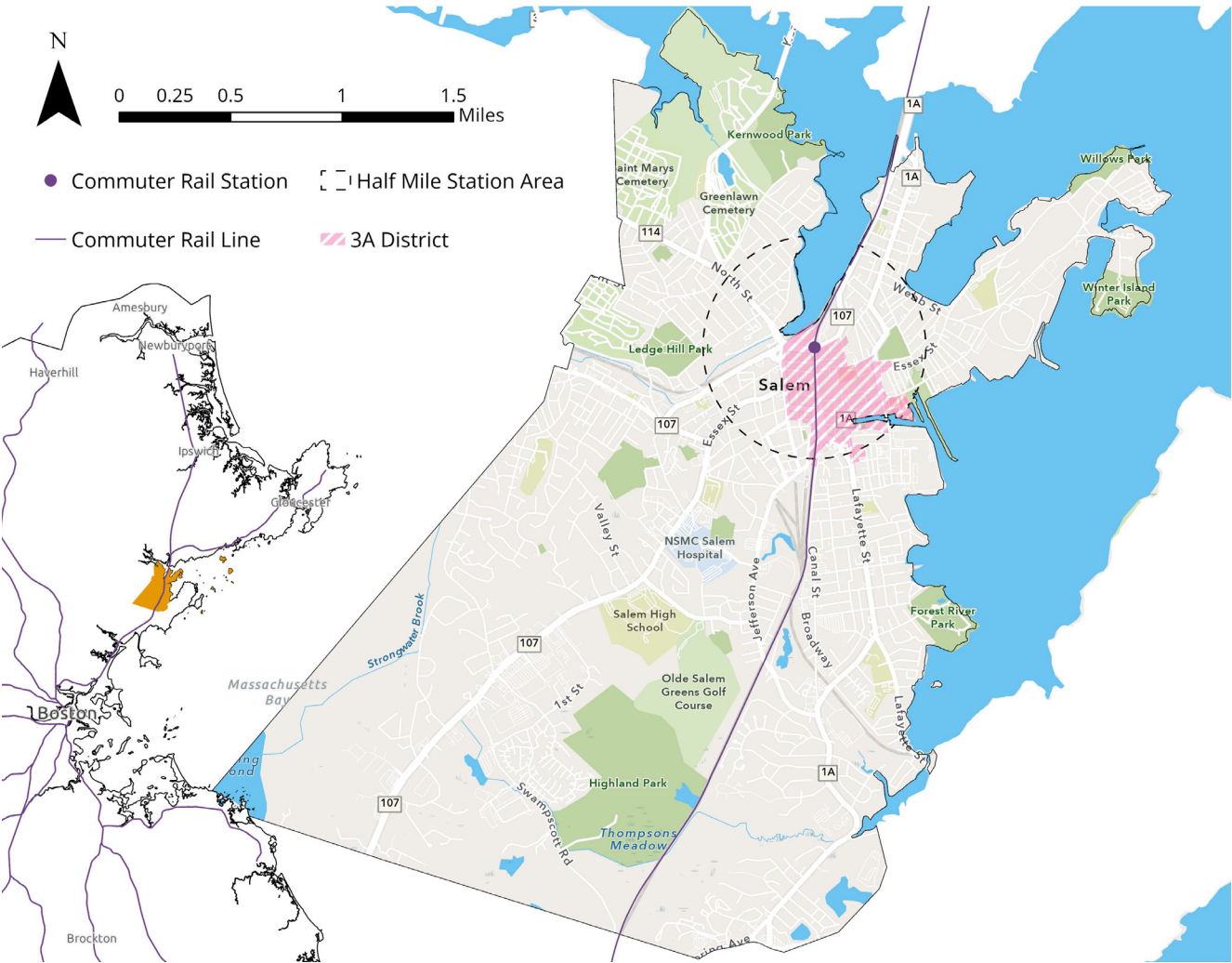


Figure 15. Map of Salem showing its Section 3A zoning district, which is also its B-5 “Central Development” zoning district. (Source: Field Projects Team).

INTRODUCTION

Situated on the North Shore coast, Salem is a diverse, mid-sized city about 20 miles northeast of Boston. It is located along the Newburyport/Rockport commuter rail line and is serviced by the Salem Station, which is about a 30-minute ride from North Station in Boston. Driving time to Boston is variable, taking about 30 minutes with no traffic, but well over an hour during peak congestion. Salem has a long and storied history from its days as a Puritan settlement, to a major shipbuilding and sea trade center, to its present status as a regional cultural hub. Salem was chosen as a case study as it is one of only a handful of municipalities to have its proposed 3A district fully approved by EOHLC. More so, the city boasts progressive and innovative housing and climate policies that act as effective examples for cities in the region facing similar challenges. To gain a deeper understanding of the city’s planning initiatives and 3A process,

we interviewed Amanda Chiancola, Deputy Director of Salem’s Planning and Community Development.

From a policy and planning perspective, Salem is an exemplary city. It is recognized as a leader in housing policy for its inclusionary zoning ordinance requiring that 10% of new units be priced at 60% of Area Median Income (AMI) and for allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) by right (City of Salem n.d.; City of Salem 2023). Unlike much of the region, from 1990 to the mid 2010s, Salem’s housing production kept pace with its growing population (City of Salem 2022). Since 2000, the city has added 1,570 housing units, representing about 8% of its total housing stock (Ibid). Unlike many other towns and cities in the region, 63% of Salem’s housing units are in multi-family properties, enhancing the city’s dense, connected, and urban environment.



Figure 16. Salem, MA. (Source: Social Palates).

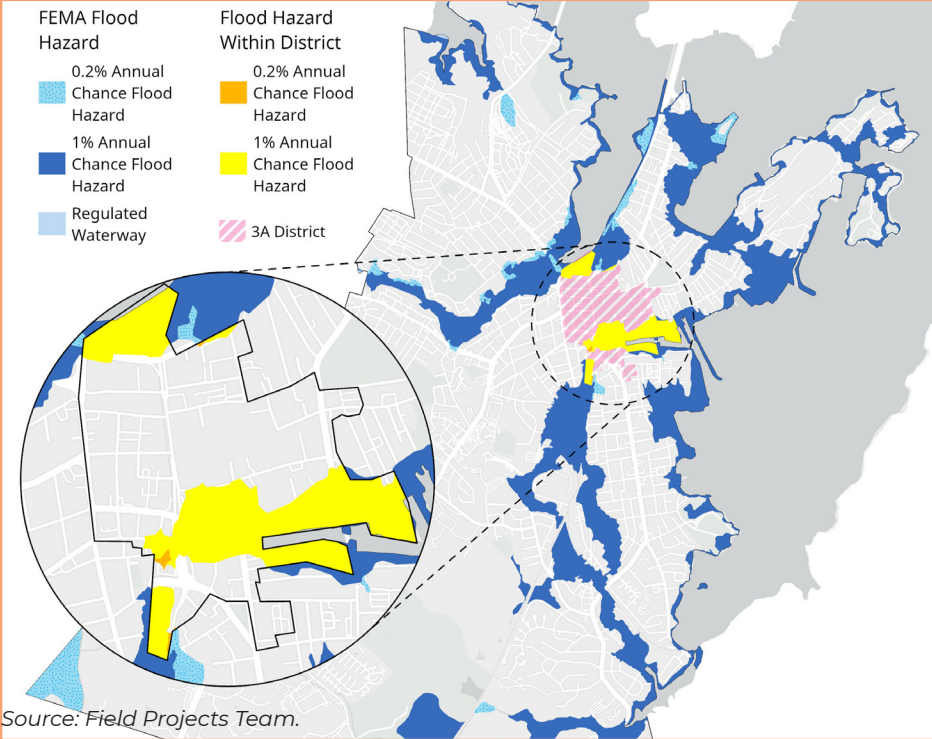


Figure 17. Salem Flood Risk.

Salem’s FEMA flood hazard showing citywide risk from coastal inundation as well as inland precipitation flooding. The inset shows specific flood risks within Salem’s 3A compliant district (FEMA 2023).

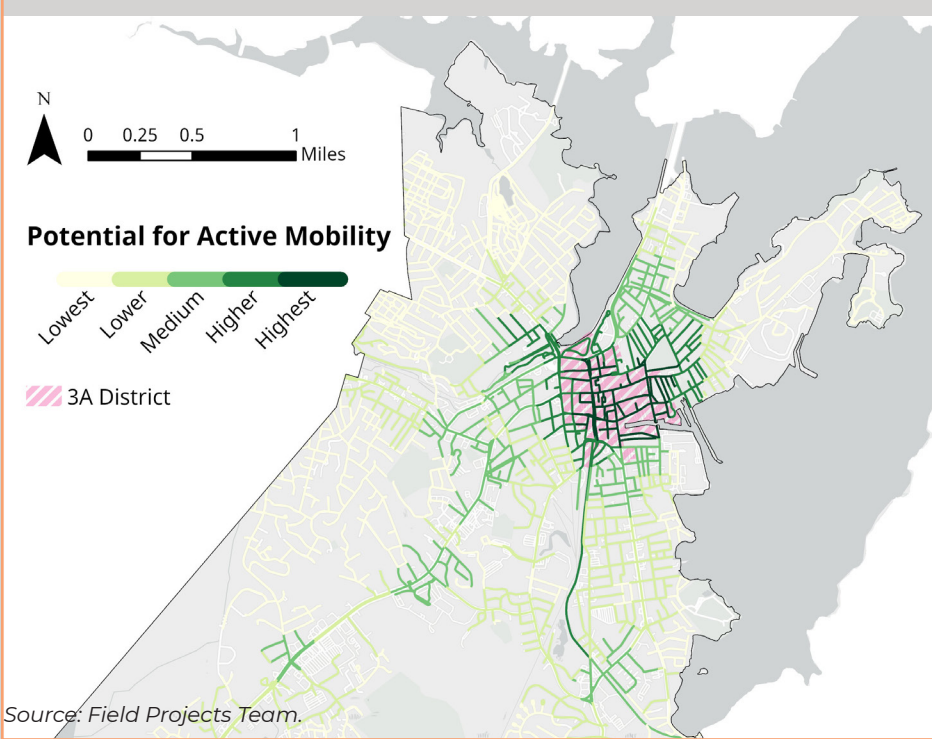


Figure 18. Salem Potential for Active Mobility.

A map showing the potential for active mobility overlaid with Salem’s 3A district. This is derived from MassDOT, who created an index representing a street’s potential to facilitate residents to walk or bike to meet everyday needs. Major factors include trip volume to present amenities, street infrastructure, transit access, and social equity (MassDOT 2022).

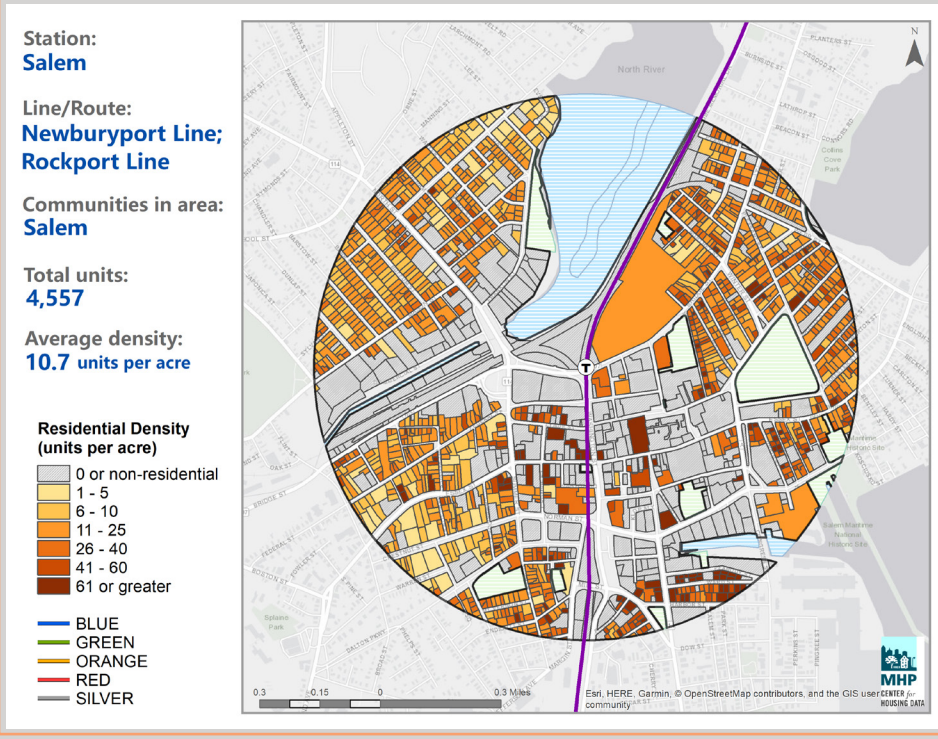


Figure 19. Density near Salem Station.

This map from MHP shows the average unit density of parcels surrounding Salem’s commuter rail station, illustrating that even in its current state, the city enjoys a dense stock of housing units.

However, the city is not immune to regional forces, and despite broad increases in housing stock, prices have risen 50% from 2010 to 2019 (Ibid). To address this, Salem has laid out a comprehensive vision to further increase housing across the city. 3A acts to complement their already ambitious goals.

Much of Salem’s new multi-family housing has come within its B-5 “Central Development” zoning district, which covers much of the historic downtown and is well within a half mile from the commuter rail station. This zoning districts allows projects with housing densities far greater than 3A’s requirement to be permitted by right. When the time came for Salem to file for

3A compliance, no additional changes to the city’s zoning ordinance were required. This district alone exceeded Salem’s requirement to zone for an additional 3,052 units. This led to the swift approval of their 3A District Compliance Application far before the December 2024 deadline.

AFFORDABILITY

According to Salem’s deputy planning director, the city’s main concern regarding 3A was not reaching compliance but instead staying in compliance given their robust affordable housing overlay (AHO) district. Section 3A requires that no more than 10% of the units in the district have affordability requirements, and that they be at 80% of the area’s median income. Salem’s

AHO, on the other hand, mandates that 10% of units be priced to be affordable to a household making 60% of the area’s median income. This deep affordability level within Salem’s 3A district triggers a state requirement that the city conduct an economic feasibility assessment (EFA) to show that affordable housing is viable and will not dissuade development. To do this, Salem received technical assistance from MAPC, and has recently submitted their EFA. They remain confident about its approval, but until then, Salem has excluded its downtown 3A district from its affordable housing overlay so that they won’t lose their compliance status if the state does not accept their EFA.

The city has a strong working relationship with the development community and came to this mutually agreed upon affordability level through conversations and deliberation. One major element that makes this deep affordability feasible is that the city gives the developer a 25%-unit bonus and flexible parking requirements. Complying with Salem’s affordability requirement gives developers a wider latitude on project decisions, and allows them to build more units than normally permitted.

CLIMATE

As a coastal community surrounded by rivers and marshes, Salem faces challenges related to flooding caused both by sea level rise and increased precipitation. The areas with the most acute risk lie around the North River and the Point Neighborhood, which both are significantly impacted by storm surge effects. As shown in figure 17, a significant

portion of the city’s 3A district is at a 1% annual flooding risk. Notably, this data only takes into account current sea level and precipitation rates.

In response to this risk, the city has implemented a climate resilience overlay district, which incorporates 2070 flood lines to the existing flood hazard overlay district. The ordinance ensures that new development in Salem is ready for future climate risks, not just present ones. As with the affordable housing overlay, the city consulted with the development community to ensure that proposed regulations would not stifle new housing production. For example, the ordinance requires that when built within the flood zone, the residential units must be above the first floor. At the same time, the building height of these projects only counts above the flood zone. This allows developers to have the same number of units in the project, while allowing the units to be above the flood line.

According to planning staff, there are already several projects built within the flood zone areas, and most of them have used parking on the first floor to push the building height above the flood line. The requirements within the climate resilience overlay district were initially intended to be enforced through special permit review. However, as the city aims to comply with 3A, they will use site plan review, which staff are confident will be permissible and achieve the same outcome.

Beyond these zoning overlays, the city requires that all new developments have

a plan to achieve net zero emissions, as well as pushing for green roofs for larger developments.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

The city has goals to become a car-light community. As an old city, Salem has an innate advantage, as much of the commercial downtown is walkable from residential areas on well-maintained sidewalks. A large part of downtown is already pedestrianized with the Essex Street Pedestrian Mall: cars are banned and businesses thrive on foot traffic from residents and tourists. The city’s walkability is best illustrated by figure 18, which shows that streets in and around Salem’s downtown 3A district allow for abundant access to everyday amenities and transportation options. According to MassDOT, these streets have the potential to support active mobility 125% more than streets located elsewhere in the city. This walkable environment is supported by the reduction of parking minimums for new developments. Salem requires that developers provide one parking spot per unit in and around downtown. This is half of what is typically required in the rest of the city and facilitates a dense and walkable environment.

Beyond pedestrian infrastructure, Salem has seen success with the introduction of Bluebikes. Used across Metro Boston, Bluebike bike shares offer accessible and reliable bike transportation. From 2021 to 2024, the system expanded from 8 to 18 stations, and has seen a consistent increase in ridership (Bluebikes).

Active mobility is further supported by Salem’s complete streets policy. Adopted in 2014, this ordinance ensures that street construction projects accommodate all forms of transportation, whether it be on foot, on bike, or auto.

The city has also had success with its local bus network, the Salem Skipper. Funded through state grants, PILOT payments from local tax-exempt institutions, and city funds, the bus network supplements the limited MBTA bus service in the city by connecting major employment centers to residential areas.

EQUITY

Salem is a progressive city regarding tenant rights. For example, the city has petitioned the state to allow them to pass an ordinance that would protect tenants when their units are sold off as condos. Currently, the state only allows tenant protection for condo conversions in buildings larger than four units. The city aims to reduce this threshold, as many condo conversions in the city are occurring in two-to-three-unit properties. The proposed ordinance would have landlords pay the cost of the displaced tenant’s move, as well as provide much longer notice. Together, these policies and plans enhance the quality of the city’s 3A district and bring about a more sustainable connected community.

FRAMINGHAM

KEY TAKEAWAYS:
Transit-Oriented Development requires a holistic planning approach. Consider employment opportunities, access to food, recreation, and open space in addition to housing, climate, transportation options, and connectivity to meet the needs of a diverse population with downtown Commuter Rail access.

Demographic Overview			
Population	Median Household Income	Renter Population	Non-Hispanic White
70,963	\$94,909	45%	56%
Relevant Plans and Policies			
3A Action Plan Approved Master Land Use Plan Climate Action Plan Bike & Pedestrian Plan Downtown Framingham Transit Oriented Development Plan Open Space Plan Complete Streets Policy			

INTRODUCTION

The City of Framingham is an urban hub of the MetroWest region of Metropolitan Boston. Framingham is about a one-hour drive to Boston’s South Station during morning rush hour traffic. Framingham is serviced by the Framingham/Worcester line of the MBTA Commuter Rail. A ride on the Commuter Rail from Framingham Station in the heart of Downtown Framingham to Back Bay, Boston takes just under 45 minutes.

Downtown Framingham is home to historic buildings, residential buildings, small businesses, boutiques, and restaurants. With a rich history and a growing population in the 21st century, Framingham has evolved from its industrial history of gristmill to manufacturing to retail. Framingham’s neighborhoods range from single-family areas with a suburban character to a mixed-used, Transit-Oriented Development downtown.

Framingham is an example of how to integrate transportation planning and housing development to meet the needs of a diverse community. Framingham has a Downtown Transit-Oriented Development Plan, a Bike and Pedestrian Plan, and a Complete Streets Policy. Framingham recently updated its Master Land Use Plan in 2020 (City of Framingham 2020) to reflect Framingham’s transition from town to city and is currently developing a Climate Action Plan with MAPC.

Framingham’s 3A Action plan has been approved by the state. The city has interim compliance until December 2024 and is currently determining the best location for the 3A-multifamily housing district. The Transit-Oriented downtown far exceeds the gross density requirement of 15 units but does not currently permit multifamily development by right. The Central



Figure 20. Map of Framingham showing possible Section 3A zoning district. (Source: Field Projects Team).



Figure 21. Framingham, MA (Source: Field Projects Team).

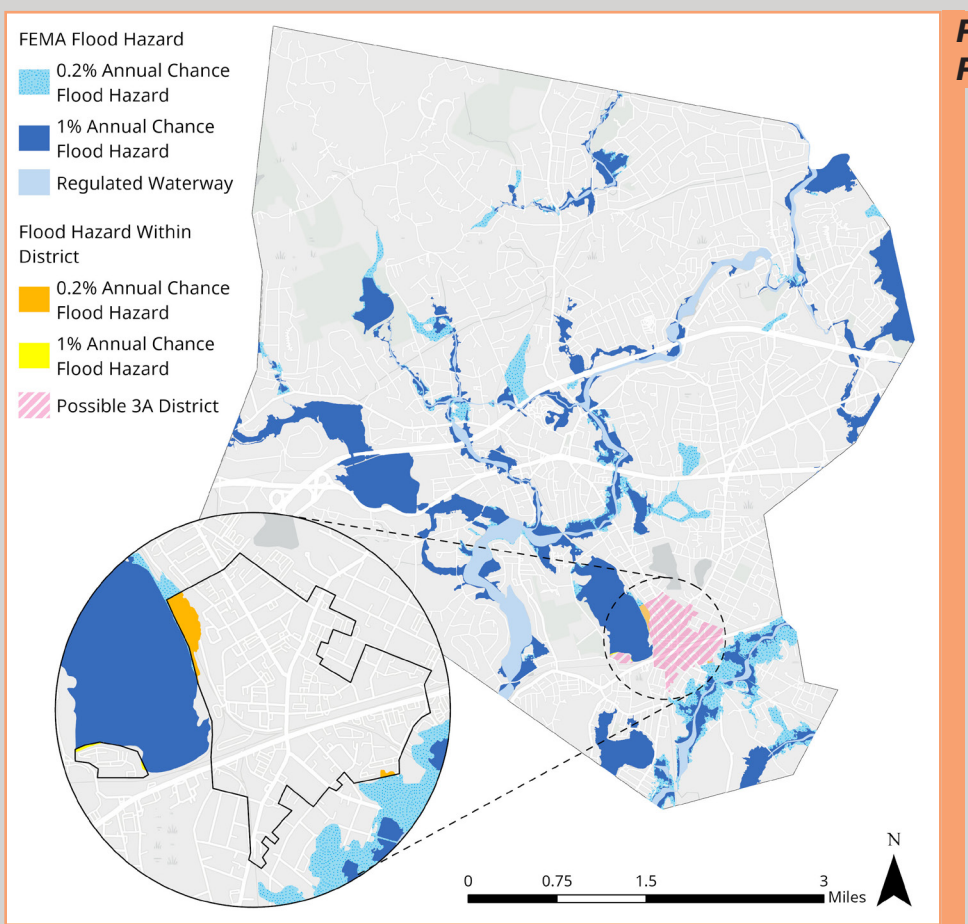


Figure 22. Framingham Flood Risk.

Framingham’s FEMA flood hazard showing citywide risk precipitation flooding. The inset shows specific flood risks within a possible 3A district (FEMA 2023).

Source: Field Projects Team.

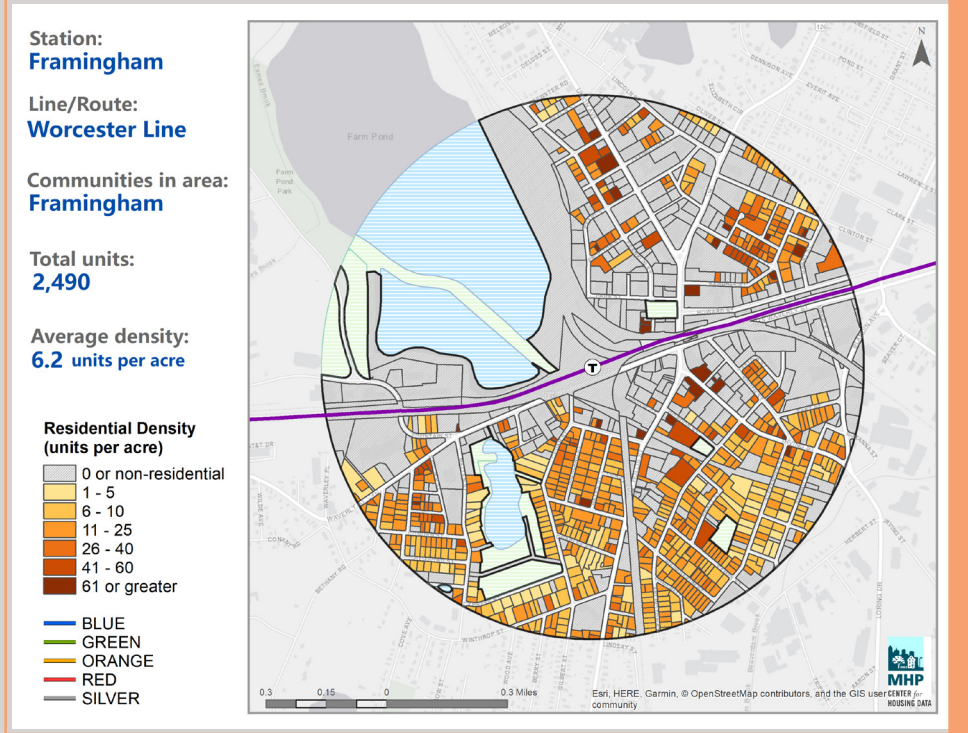


Figure 23. Density near Framingham Station.

This map from MHP shows the average unit density of parcels surrounding Framingham’s commuter rail station, illustrating that the city in its current state enjoys a range of density units per acre mixed with non-residential parcels and open space.

Source: MHP.

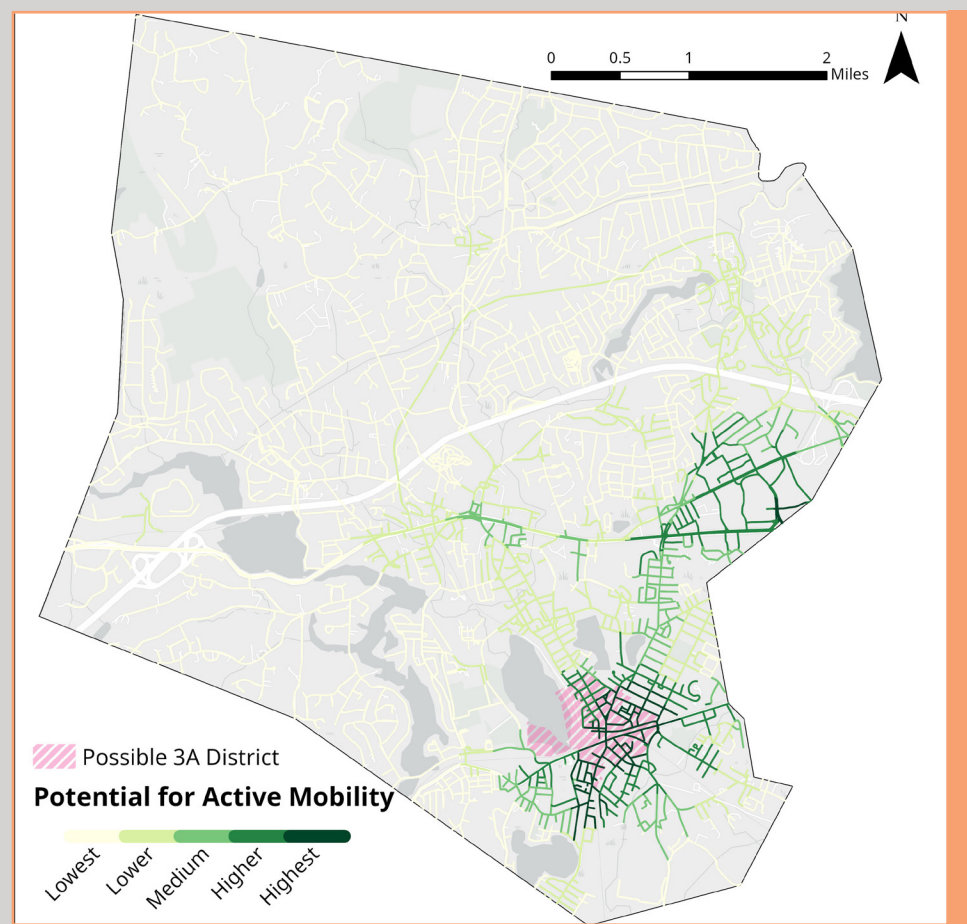


Figure 24. Framingham Potential for Active Mobility.

A map showing the potential for active mobility overlaid with a possible 3A district in Framingham. This is derived from MassDOT, who created an index representing a street’s potential to facilitate residents to walk or bike to meet everyday needs. Major factors include trip volume to present amenities, street infrastructure, transit access, and social equity (MassDOT 2022).

Source: Field Projects Team.

Business District covers 227 acres and can produce up to 12,000 units. Other sites for potential infill include the Golden Triangle and the 9/90 Technology Park corridor adjacent to Route 9. The city is actively determining the best location for the 3A district, considering the possibility of expanding multifamily housing stock beyond the Central Business District.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Framingham is served by the Metrowest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) which provides bus and paratransit services to 16 communities in the MetroWest region of Metropolitan Boston. Connectivity within the MetroWest region is important as Framingham is

an urban hub providing various social services to the region. The city is also one of four suburban communities with LoganExpress service, providing service to Logan International Airport every half hour on weekdays and every half hour to hour as scheduled on weekends with additional early bird trips daily from the hub in the Golden Triangle. As the city considers options for 3A district, they are committed to integrating transportation planning throughout the process, ensuring that connectivity and access to jobs, food, services, and recreation are prioritized from the beginning rather than considered as an afterthought.

Framingham’s Commuter Rail station is

located in the central business district. The edge of the city limits is also within a half-mile radius of the West Natick Commuter Rail Station, providing additional commuter rail access. The Commuter Rail regularly stops in Framingham and provides connectivity east to Boston and west to Worcester. The MWRTA station and both Framingham and West Natick’s Commuter Rail stations are located along Waverly St. Many properties along Waverly St are currently zoned industrial and may have potential for multifamily housing.

As represented in Figure 24- active mobility map, the downtown Central Business District has the highest potential for active mobility, with another high potential area northeast of the Central Business District along the southeast city limits to I-90. The city is building more bike lanes, including the current Complete Streets updates to Union Street. In 2023, the city acquired 3.5 miles for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail through Mass Trails Grant Funding. Upon completion, the project will enhance regional connectivity by filling the gap between the Upper Charles Trail loop through Sherborn, Holliston, Milford, Hopkinton, and Ashland to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail through MetroWest to Lowell. Within Framingham, this project will increase access to green space and local infrastructure supporting active mobility, including connectivity to the MBTA Commuter Rail and MWRTA bus service.

AFFORDABILITY

Framingham’s demographics are relatively representative of the racial and median household income of the state (See Table 1. Affordability is a significant concern in Framingham as the city’s income inequality is among the highest in the region with a Gini coefficient of 0.513. This indicates significant income inequality within Framingham and suggests that households within the city have a spectrum of resources and priorities. Affordability and convenience of commuting are often cited as reasons residents were initially attracted to Framingham (City of Framingham 2020). Director of Planning and Community Development Sarkis Sarkisian notes that an additional attraction beyond relatively affordable housing now could come from encouraging commuters to take advantage of the train, enabling the opportunity for households to rely on one car instead of two.

There is already developer interest in Framingham with several residential development projects in the pipeline, including the approved construction of a 181-unit residential development with a total of 21 affordable units, and the addition of a 4th floor to an existing building to accommodate additional residential and retail space in the Central Business District.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Before 3A, significant developments and investments were already happening downtown. In 2015, Framingham passed new zoning to encourage TOD as recommended in the Transit Oriented

Development Plan. To encourage development and reactivate downtown, the city provided 15-year Tax Increment Financing to two large projects. The apartments are now 95% occupied, and small business owners are contributing to the transformation of downtown. The Brazilian population in Framingham has also played an active role in economic development and reactivating downtown.

Other planned developments downtown include the construction of a Community Center, and the relocation of Seabra Foods grocery store to the intersection of Howard and Concord Street. A Public/Private partnership with Avery Dennison Corporation will enable the clean-up and remediation of Mary Dennison Park which will benefit from new amenities and provide a clean and safe area for the community to enjoy. These additions to the downtown area will support economic development goals and transit-oriented development while increasing food access, creating jobs, and providing recreational opportunities to environmental justice neighborhoods in Framingham’s downtown.

CLIMATE

Framingham is currently developing a Climate Action Plan, a collaborative process between city departments, community residents, and other stakeholders, with the support of MAPC. The city is working to address significant flooding challenges in downtown Framingham and has purchased 40 acres of land in South Framingham to be preserved as open space and floodplain storage. The city is also addressing

extreme heat on the south side of Framingham by planting trees, therefore mitigating flooding and expanding the city’s tree canopy.

SCITUATE

KEY TAKEAWAYS:
Transit-Oriented Development in a small coastal town requires thoughtful planning that incorporates the needs of residents, builds resiliency to climate change, and works to maintain the characteristics of the town.

Demographic Overview			
Population	Median Household Income	Renter Population	Non-Hispanic White
18,190	\$108,194	13%	91%
Relevant Plans and Policies			
3A Action PlanAdopted Master Land Use PlanClimate Action PlanHousing Action PlanHousing Action PlanCommunity Visioning PlanOpen Space Plan			

INTRODUCTION

Scituate is located 30 miles south of Boston, an hour from Boston’s South Station via MBTA and an hour and thirty minutes via car during rush hour. A small coastal town with a population of 18,781, Scituate is a commuter rail community served by the Greenbush line. The town has two stations, North Scituate, and the line’s terminal station, Greenbush. The town’s 3A action plan outlines two potential multifamily districts. This has been approved at town meeting, is now awaiting approval from the state. To better understand the town’s planning context, we interviewed Scituate’s Town Planner, Karen Joseph.

Founded in 1636, the town’s history has been moored to the ocean. Scituate operated as a small fishing community for over two centuries and was home to many Irish immigrants who made a living harvesting moss from the coast. Widespread adoption of automobiles

starting in the 1920s led to significant growth in population and tourism. Today, Scituate’s economy is based on tourism, attracting visitors during the warm summer months. Scituate 2040, the town’s comprehensive plan, describes what the municipality will look like in 20 years (Town of Scituate 2021). Scituate aspires to be a small town with a diverse tax base that is inclusive, innovative, resilient, and maintains its coastal identity.

Scituate’s greatest asset is now its greatest challenge. Climate change-induced sea level rise and severe storms have left the town susceptible to disasters including flooding. The town’s comprehensive plan, Scituate 2040, names sea level rise as one of the most significant threats facing the town. The town already faces flooding in the harbor district during king tide. The potential for development around MBTA stations1.5 miles inland from the coast presents

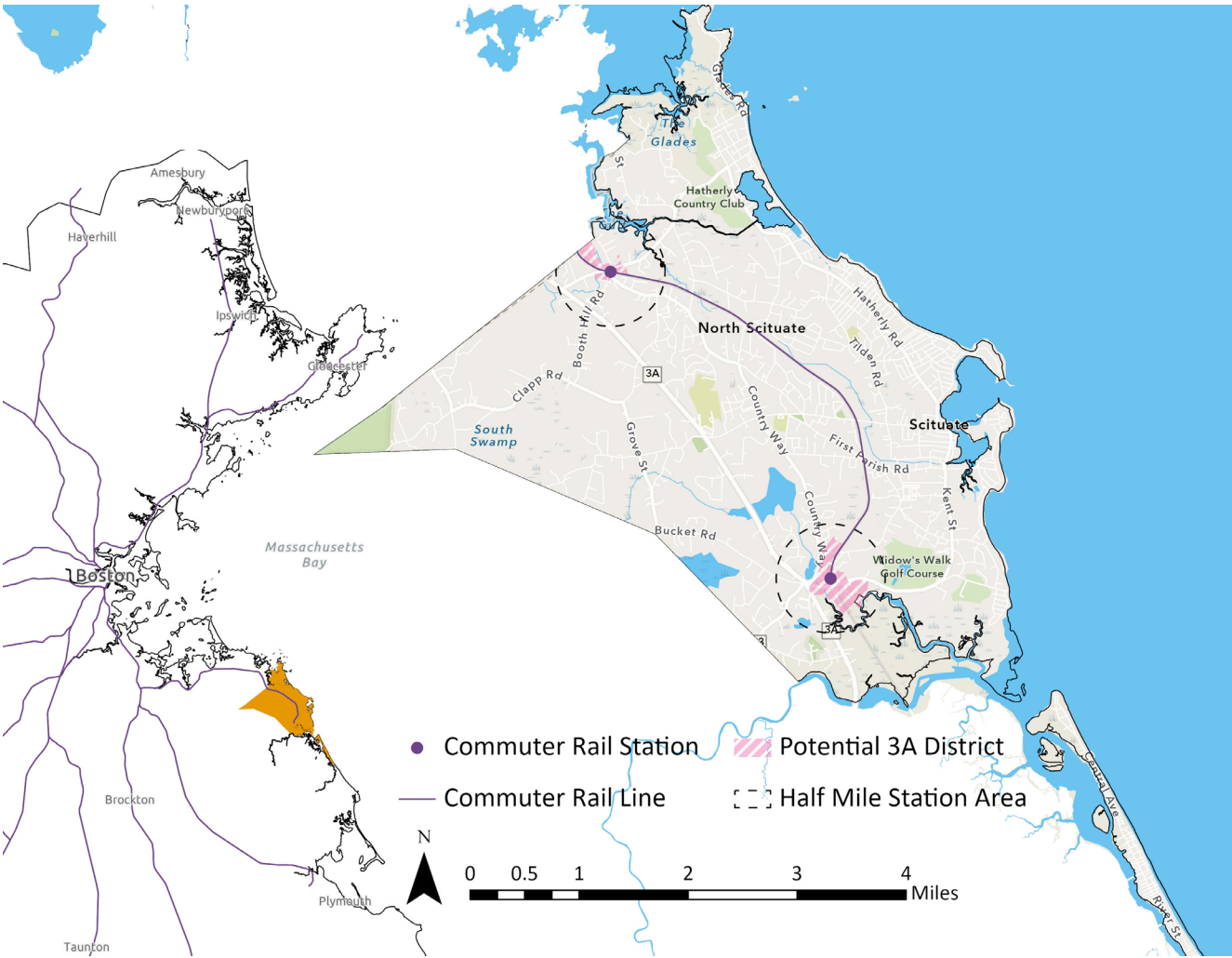


Figure 25. Map of Scituate showing possible Section 3A zoning district. (Source: Field Projects Team).



Figure 26. Scituate, MA (Source: Michelle Larnard Real Estate).

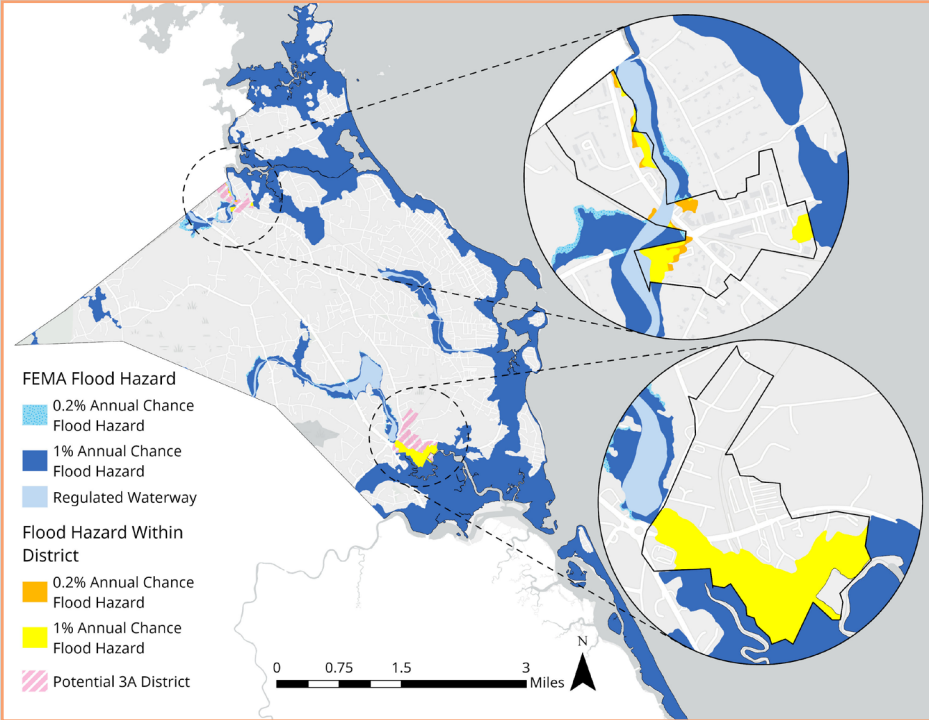


Figure 27. Scituate Flood Risk.

Scituate’s FEMA flood hazard showing citywide risk from coastal inundation as well as inland precipitation flooding. The inset shows specific flood risks within Scituate’s 3A compliant district (FEMA 2023).

Source: Field Projects Team.

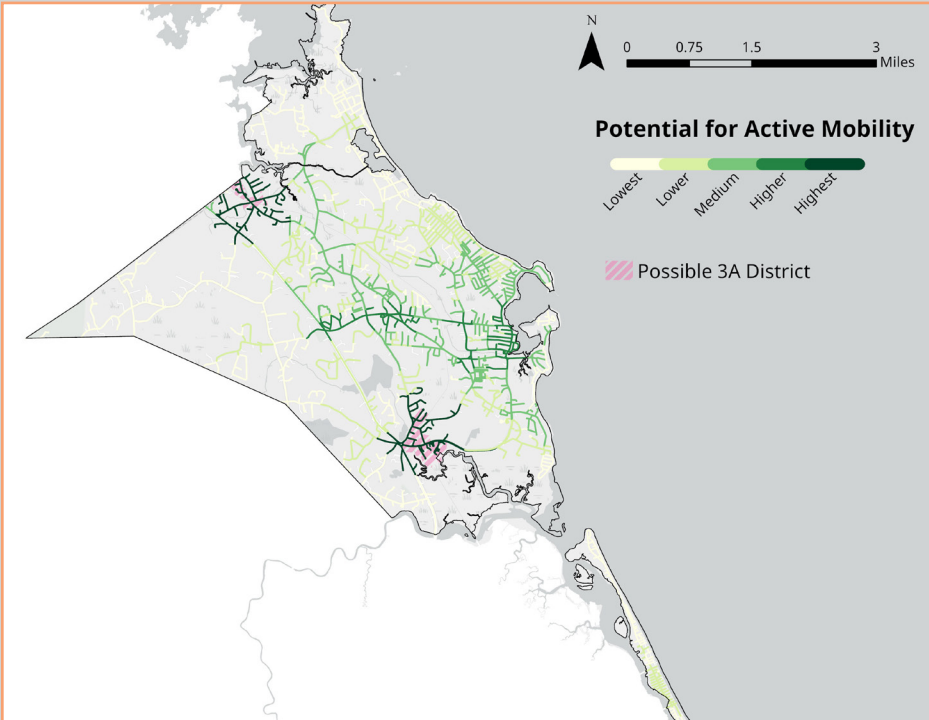


Figure 28. Scituate Potential for Active Mobility.

A map showing the potential for active mobility overlaid with Scituate’s 3A district. This is derived from MassDOT, who created an index representing a street’s potential to facilitate residents to walk or bike to meet everyday needs. Major factors include trip volume to present amenities, street infrastructure, transit access, and social equity (MassDOT 2022).

Source: Field Projects Team.

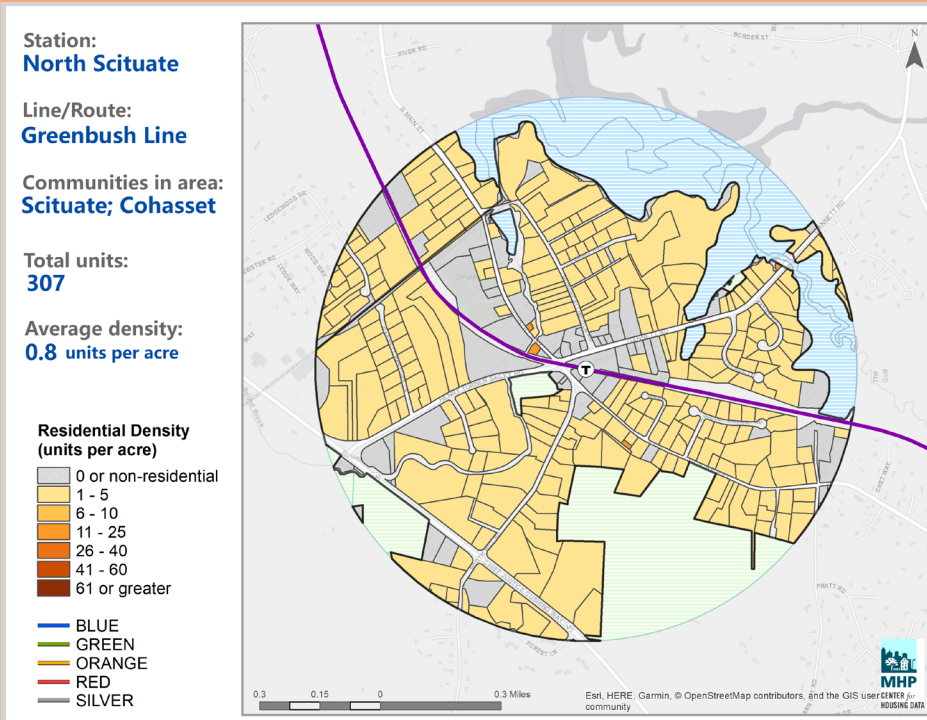


Figure 29. Density near North Scituate Station.

This map from MHP shows the average unit density of parcels surrounding North Scituate Station.

Source: MHP.

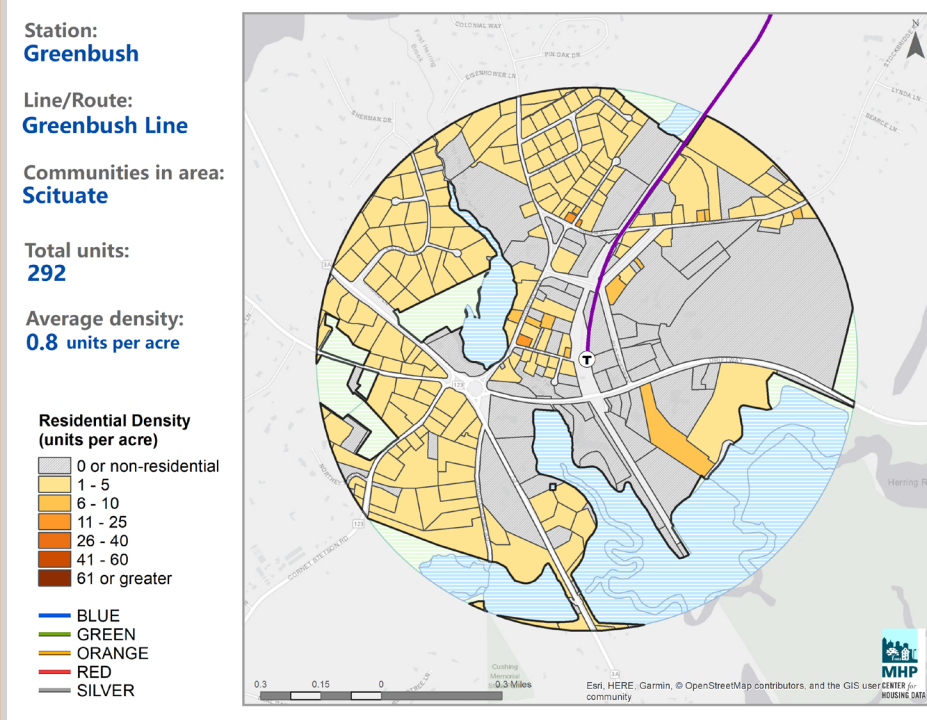


Figure 30. Density near Greenbush Station.

This map from MHP shows the average unit density of parcels surrounding Greenbush Station.

Source: MHP.

the opportunity for the town to shift its population density away from the front lines of sea level rise.

CLIMATE

Scituate 2040 gives significant attention to resilience and the threat of climate change. The municipality emphasizes four resilience categories: ecological, physical and infrastructural, economic, and social and cultural.

The town’s comprehensive plan pays special attention to the role of wetlands and ecosystems to improve resilience and support biodiversity. Wetlands are a characteristic of the coastal town and provide abundant recreational and ecosystem services. Scituate hopes to expand wetland protections to include migration areas due to sea level rise. Other ecosystem-based resilience planning practices include reducing fertilizer use, increasing tree planting, and reducing clear-cutting in the town.

Scituate 2040’s response to sea level rise is driven more by green infrastructure and natural solutions than engineering-based solutions. Municipal staff noted new development near the Greenbush station was designed using low-impact development strategies including rain catchment and infiltration methods. The town planner noted the importance of low-impact development in the area given its proximity to local wetlands and the North River.

Even with the current threat of sea level rise, there are only three mentions of sea walls in the plan, all referring to the

renovation and two-foot height increase of the harbor sea wall. Based on Scituate 2040 and an interview with municipal staff, it appears the town is interested in shifting population density inland. Scituate aims to establish a program for buy-outs to assist landowners looking to relocate inland and allow commercial uses near the harbor to relocate uphill. The town has proposed potentially establishing a third “inland village” between North Scituate and Greenbush to meet retreat needs. During an interview with Scituate’s Town Planner, it was mentioned that 3A development near MBTA stations could serve to relocate coastal residents.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Based on interviews with municipal staff, it appears the main area of focus for increasing mobility in the town is supporting the construction of new sidewalks. Given the town’s small size, there is little public transit other than the two MBTA stations and a shuttle run by the senior center. There is a multi-use path that connects Greenbush station to the town’s Harbor district along Driftway. To improve mobility, the town is working to add sidewalks in newly developed areas near MBTA stations to make the area more accessible. According to MassDOT, streets in the proposed 3A district have the potential to support active mobility 140% more than streets located elsewhere in the town.

CHALLENGES

During an interview with the town planner, it became clear that a significant constraint for small communities such

as Scituate is financing. Prior to the MBTA Communities Act, Scituate had planned for 20% affordable housing within transit-oriented development districts. However, with 3A constraints on affordable housing production without an economic feasibility assessment, the town opted to reduce the overall affordable housing zoning to 10%. The town planner expressed that for a town with limited resources, an economic feasibility study is not as valuable as investing in other municipal programs. To increase and diversify the town’s revenue, Scituate encourages mixed used and new commercial uses in districts near MBTA stations. Development associated with the new 3A districts could provide new tax revenue to the municipality and help achieve the town’s goal of diversifying its tax base.

Water and sanitary sewer capacity are two of the most significant challenges facing the community. In North Scituate near the town’s proposed 3A districts, new development must use septic tanks, as current municipal infrastructure cannot accommodate future development. This could become a barrier to the towns’ hopes to shift population density inland. The town planner cited regional sewers as a potential solution and mentioned that the creation of a new treatment facility in North Scituate was unlikely given current funding constraints.

LEXINGTON

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Support the local economy and walkable neighborhoods through mixed-use development.
- Engage residents to promote multimodal mobility and sustainability.
- Use creative strategies to build affordable, green housing.

Demographic Overview			
Population	Median Household Income	Renter Population	Non-Hispanic White
34,074	\$206,323	17%	58%
Relevant Plans and Policies			
3A Action PlanAdopted Comprehensive Plan Climate Action Plan Bike & Pedestrian Plan Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Pilot Open Space Plan			

INTRODUCTION

Lexington is a mid-sized, affluent, suburban town located eleven miles west of Boston. It is classified as an adjacent community because it abuts several community rail communities on the Fitchburg and Lowell lines. To get to Boston’s South Station from Lexington Center during rush hour takes about 50 minutes by car and one hour by bus and train, via Alewife Station. Residents and visitors prize Lexington’s historic sites, extensive open space and trails, proximity to Boston, and excellent school system and town services (Town of Lexington 2022). Thanks partly to rail connectivity that lasted from 1846 to 1977, Lexington has a moderately active town center with a mix of retail, restaurants, and service providers, located along Massachusetts Avenue and accessible by car, bus, and the Minuteman Bikeway. There are three larger commercial districts, including two clusters of life sciences and defense companies, and several

smaller commercial areas around town. Only 6% of Lexington’s land is zoned for commercial use, with residential, open space, and civic uses making up the rest (Ibid).

Across the town’s several residential neighborhoods, some of which boast architecturally notable mid-century modern homes, single-family houses are the norm, with a few exceptions. This fact, along with Lexington’s many attractions and the market dynamics of Greater Boston, contributes to the town having some of the highest housing prices in the state. In recent years, as documented in the Lexington NEXT comprehensive plan, municipal staff, the planning board, and many residents have identified a lack of diverse housing options as a major barrier to their central goal of creating a socio-economically and racially inclusive community. They’ve begun to pursue housing strategies compatible with their priorities around economic development,

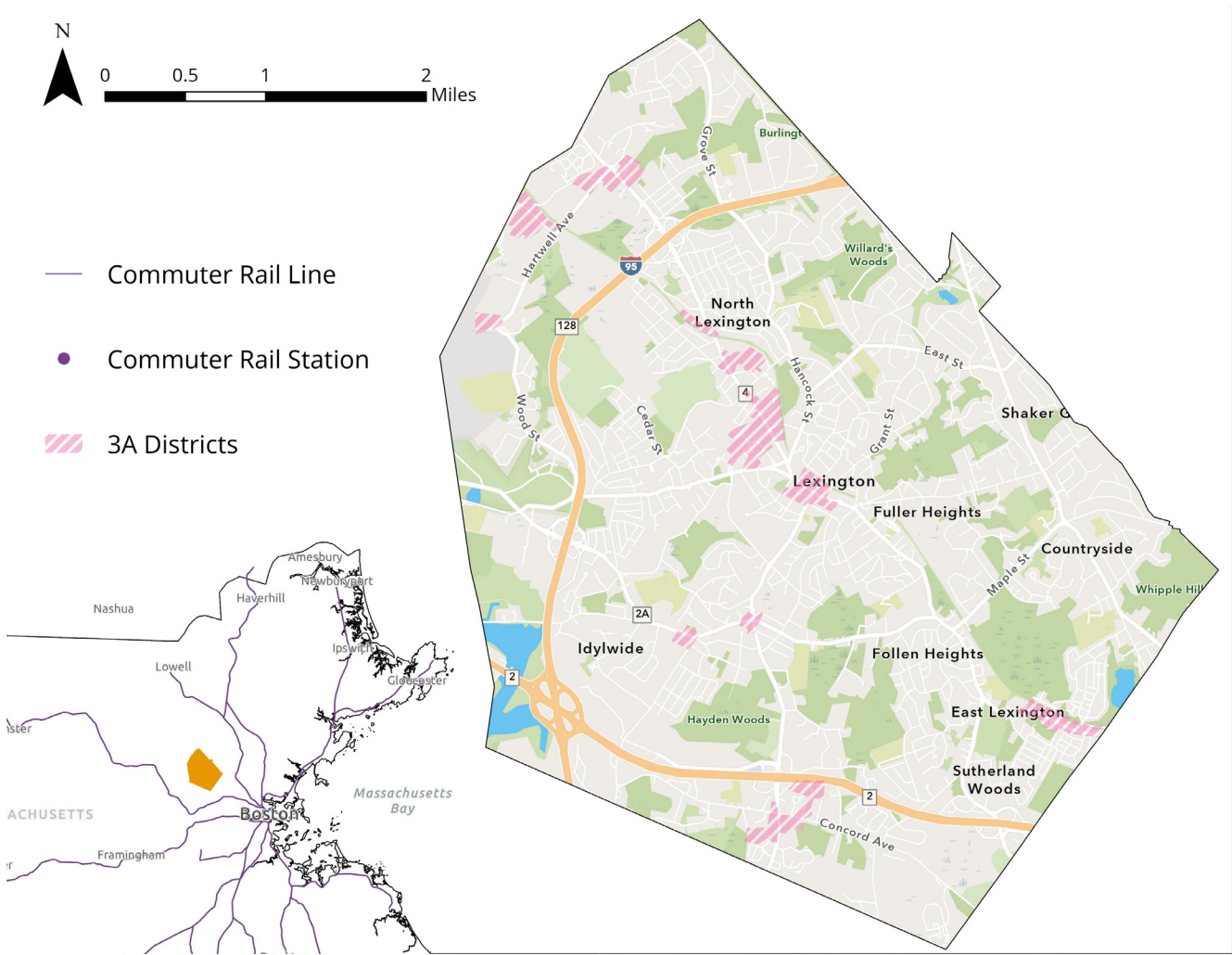


Figure 31. Map of Lexington showing possible Section 3A zoning district. (Source: Field Projects Team).



Figure 32. Lexington, MA (Source: Martha Sevigny).

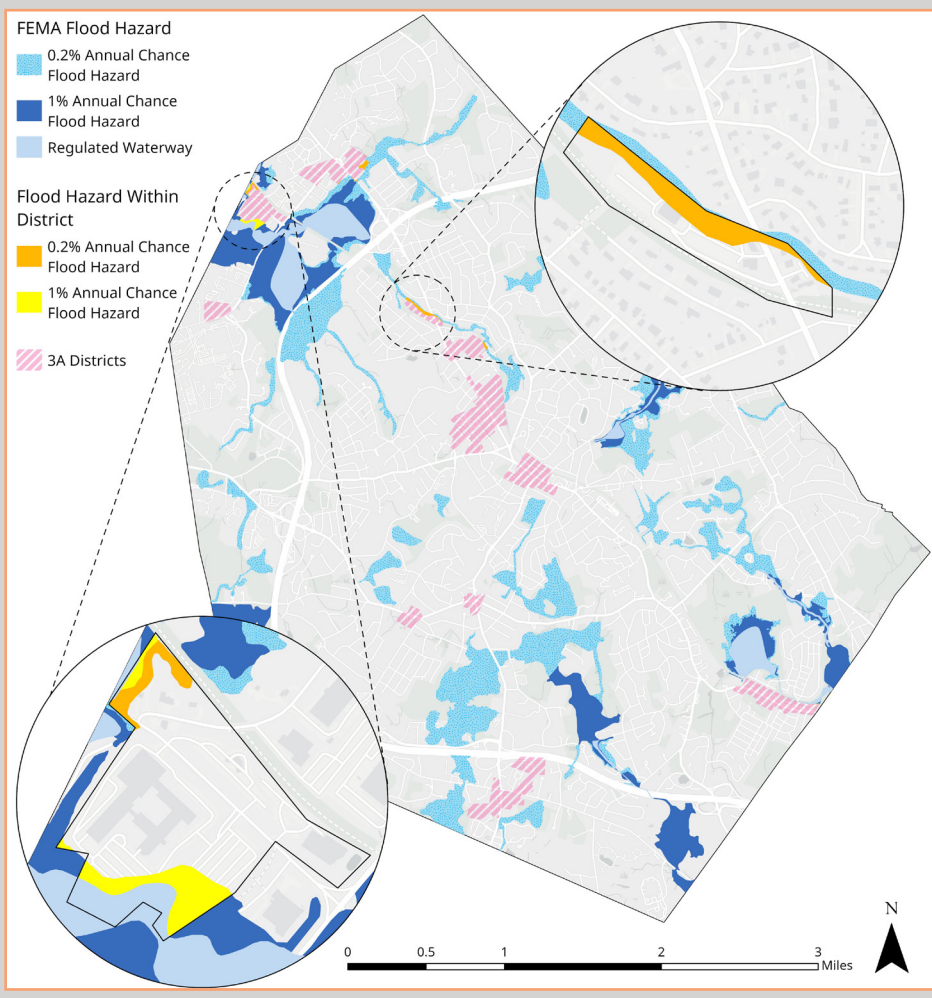


Figure 33. Lexington Flood Risk.

Lexington's FEMA flood hazard showing citywide risk precipitation flooding. The inset shows specific flood risks within a possible 3A district (FEMA 2023).

Source: Field Projects Team.



Figure 34. Lexington Potential for Active Mobility.

A map showing the potential for active mobility overlaid with Lexington's 3A district. This is derived from MassDOT, who created an index representing a street's potential to facilitate residents to walk or bike to meet everyday needs. Major factors include trip volume to present amenities, street infrastructure, transit access, and social equity (MassDOT 2022).

Source: Field Projects Team.

environmental sustainability, and preservation of open space and historic assets (Town of Lexington 2022).

Given this context, Lexington took the MBTA Communities Law as an opportunity to go beyond the basic requirements for adjacent communities and adopted by-right zoning for multifamily homes in three types of mixed-use overlay districts near transit and businesses. The town submitted a 3A Action Plan well ahead of the deadline for adjacent communities and its district compliance application has been conditionally approved. This case study draws on the plans listed below

and interviews with the assistant town manager for development, the planner director, and the transportation manager.

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT Lexington's residents and municipal leaders see mixed-use zoning as a key strategy for furthering the core community goals of developing a more ample and diverse housing stock and fostering economic growth and vitality. Lexington's comprehensive plan and its 3A Action Plan highlight its small amount of commercially zoned land and the need to expand the commercial tax base, tying economic development to goals in housing, inclusion, mobility,

and sustainability. The town's 3A zoning builds upon strategies identified in the comprehensive plan for revitalizing Lexington Center, East Lexington, and the life sciences and defense commercial clusters. To fit the needs and context of the different areas, it creates three distinct mixed-use zoning overlays: a multifamily overlay, a village overlay, and a village high-rise overlay, each with different height bonuses for developers that incorporate ground floor retail. The planning staff emphasized that they would encourage restaurants and retail types that drive foot traffic and serve community needs in their discussions with developers.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY Lexington has an array of multi-modal transit options but also some significant shortcomings that have kept it rather car dependent. In addition to access to commuter rail stations in neighboring communities, Lexington also has limited MBTA bus service. A local bus system, Lexpress, connects to MBTA and Lowell bus lines, and a shuttle system links certain business areas and the town center to Alewife Station. The Minuteman Bikeway runs through Lexington and neighboring Arlington, connecting to Alewife Station in Cambridge, and further to bike paths in Cambridge, Somerville, and Boston. Bike repair, rental, and retail

options all abound in Lexington, although it does not have a bike share program. Resident-led committees on biking, trails, and transportation are active influences in the town’s planning process. Commuting by bike and transit has grown in recent years, but single occupancy vehicles (SOV) remain the dominant mode of transportation. The town aims to reduce SOV mode share from its 2021 baseline of 63% to 53% by 2030 and 30% by 2050 (Town of Lexington 2023b).

Lexington was ahead of the curve with a progressive TDM ordinance in 1998, and more current plans show that many residents and policymakers are keen to reduce vehicle emissions and traffic congestion, promote physical activity, and reduce space devoted to parking (Town of Lexington 2022, 2023a, 2023b). The town’s 3A zoning reduces parking minimums for new residential developments to one per unit and largely clusters development near bike and bus routes. However, in recent meetings, developers have advocated for two spaces per unit, citing market forces and high demand. The police department also supports ample parking to avoid disputes. With no rapid transit in town, two MBTA bus routes that combine into one during off-peak hours, a dearth of first- and last-mile transit options in some areas, a largely affluent population, and proximity to Route 2 and Interstate-95, the incentives for car ownership in Lexington are high. With continued funding and advocacy, transportation and planning staff are hopeful that the bikeway, Lexpress, Alewife Shuttle, EV infrastructure, and zoning measures to promote

walkable mixed-use development can all contribute to a reduction in car trips and emissions, if not ownership (Town of Lexington 2023b). While further integrations with multi-modal transit have not always been a top priority in development decisions, the planning board, transportation staff, and trails and transportation committees do advocate for walking paths and connections to bike and pedestrian routes and open space in negotiations with developers. Lexington’s 3A districts are sited to take advantage of bus, bike, and walking access. According to data from MassDOT, illustrated in Figure 34, the active mobility potential of the streets within those 3A districts is 83% higher than that of streets elsewhere in the town.

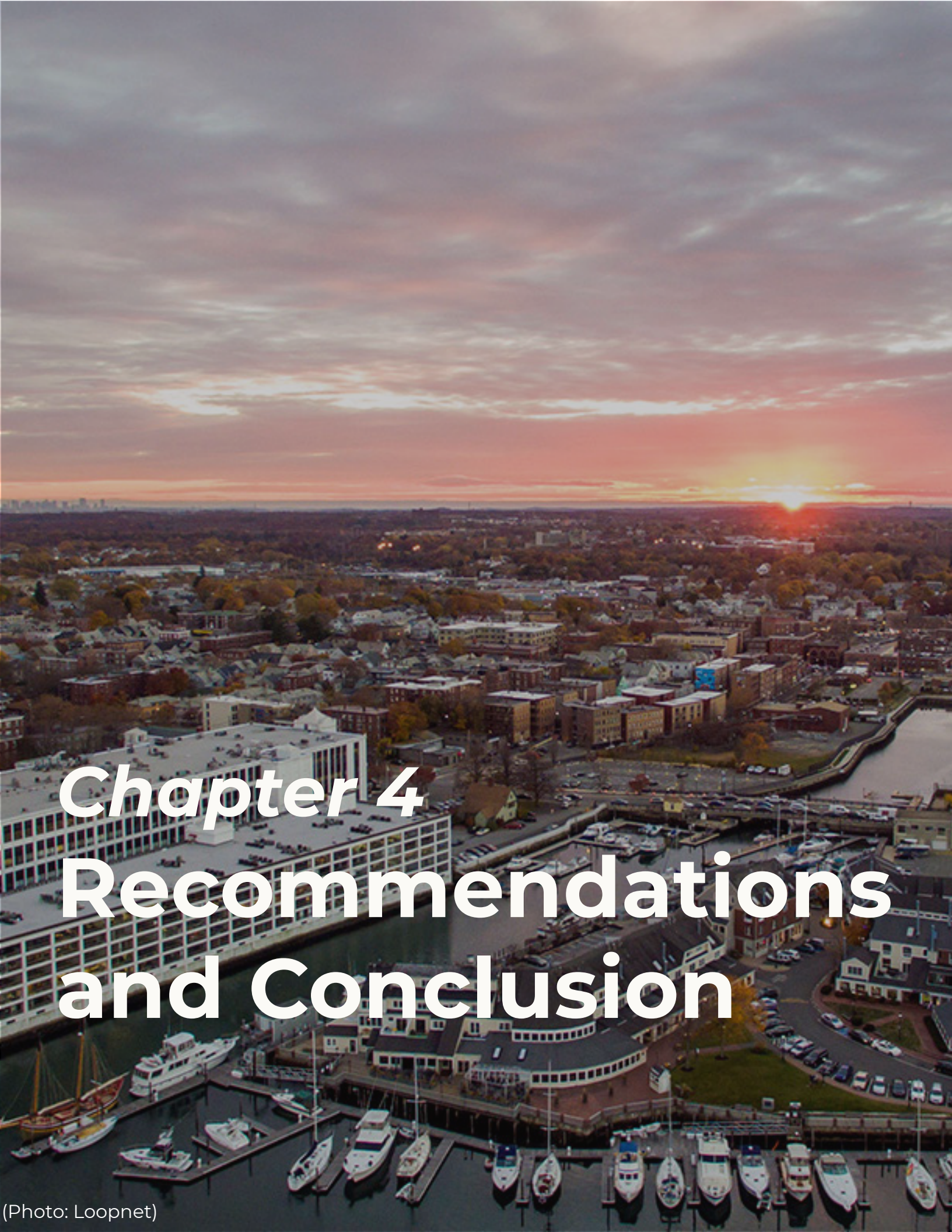
CLIMATE

Climate change mitigation – and, to a lesser extent, resilience – is an area of focus for Lexington, which in 2010 was one of the first “Green Communities” designated by the state. Since then, the town has established a sustainability committee, passed a climate change resolution, adopted community choice energy, and created a climate action plan, Resilient Lexington. Noting that 27% of emissions come from the transportation sector, Resilient Lexington aims to promote safe and accessible low carbon transit options and a complete transition to electric vehicles by 2050. Adoption of the all-electric building code option, as part of the state’s Fossil Fuel Demonstration Program, will push forward the plan’s ambitious goal of having 100% high-efficiency and electrified buildings by 2050.

Resilient Lexington also recommends expanding open space protections and strengthening the existing tree by-law (Town of Lexington 2023a).

AFFORDABILITY AND EQUITY

Given historical trends and market forces, plus the strong green building requirements that will likely contribute to higher prices for new market-rate units built in town, expanding affordability in Lexington remains a challenge. Lexington’s planners have not yet received approval from EOHLC for the modest increase in affordability they proposed in their 3A Compliance Plan: 15% affordable units for larger development instead of the law’s limit of 10% of units at 80% AMI. They have pursued affordability beyond their 3A districts via other avenues, including establishing an affordable housing trust funded by the Community Preservation Act, exploring development of affordable housing on town-owned land, and recently approving a 100% affordable development in 2023. Lexington has filed petitions with the state to turn the town’s affordable housing developer LexHAB into a non-profit housing development corporation and to allow transfer fees on luxury housing sales to fund affordable housing development. These actions, along with a strong commitment to developing more diverse housing types, are helping Lexington move towards its goal of becoming a more inclusive and equitable community.



Chapter 4 Recommendations and Conclusion

(Photo: Loopnet)

Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

This section draws on the literature review, case studies, and input from MAPC’s Housing, Transportation, and Clean Energy teams to highlight policy instruments that municipalities can use to promote sustainability and mobility in their 3A districts. The diversity represented in our case studies informed

the range of examples and “ways to get there” outlined for each recommendation below. Our recommendations fall into four broad categories: complete streets and active mobility; parking reform; climate resilience and mitigation; and affordability and tenant protections.

MULTIMODAL MOBILITY	<div>1. Adopt or update a Complete Streets Policy</div> <div>2. Adopt a Bike and Pedestrian Plan</div> <div>3. Encourage Engagement in Active Mobility Safety, Planning, and Policy</div> <div>4. Promote Active Mobility by Investing in Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure.</div> <div>5. Use thoughtful mixed-use planning to support local businesses and walkable neighborhoods.</div> <div>6. Prioritize Transit on Local Streets</div> <div>6. Promote and facilitate shared commuting and micro-transit options.</div> <div>8. Foster a culture of transit ridership and choice in mobility.</div> <div>9. Consider adopting a Transit Demand Management Ordinance (TDM) that promotes multimodal mobility and reduced automobile use.</div>
PARKING REFORM	<div>10. Reduce or eliminate parking minimums for new developments and consider implementing parking maximums.</div> <div>11. Explore and facilitate shared parking options.</div> <div>12. Unbundle parking from housing prices.</div> <div>13. Create or update a climate action and resilience plan to proactively address flooding, heat, and other climate- related risks.</div>
CLIMATE RESILIENCE & MITIGATION	<div>14. Increase the tree canopy into 3A zones.</div> <div>15. Incorporate green infrastructure and low impact development (LID) best practices.</div> <div>16. Incentivize green building measures in cost-effective ways.</div> <div>17. Establish resilience hubs and policies to strengthen community resilience.</div> <div>18. Plan for more affordable housing within 3A districts and broader municipality.</div>
HOUSING AFFORDABILITY	<div>19. Remove zoning barriers to alternative housing types like single-room occupancy (SROs), accessory dwelling units (ADUs), congregate housing, co-housing, and community land trusts.</div> <div>20. Where 3A districts overlap with existing multifamily housing, proactively prevent displacement of low-income tenants and property owners.</div>

Table 3. Table of Recommendations.

MULTIMODAL MOBILITY

1. ADOPT OR UPDATE A COMPLETE STREETS POLICY.

A strong Complete Streets Policy specifies a community’s approach to street planning, design, and maintenance to improve the safety of users of all ages and abilities.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Smart Growth America [provides resources](#) on coalition building, drafting a policy, and implementing and evaluating Complete Streets.
- ▶ Funding and Technical Assistance for the Complete Streets Program are available through [MassDOT](#).
- ▶ Drafting Policy [Language and Examples](#)
- ▶ Best Complete Streets Policies of 2023 according to Smart Growth America’s policy framework score includes several MA towns

EXAMPLES

- ▶ Boston Complete Streets [Policy and Design Guidance](#)
- ▶ City of Salem Complete Streets [Policy](#)
- ▶ City of Weymouth Complete Streets [Policy and resources](#)
- ▶ Town of Holliston Complete Streets [Policy](#)
- ▶ Town of Norwell Complete Streets [Policy](#)
- ▶ Town of Longmeadow Complete Streets [bylaw](#)

2. ADOPT A BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN.

A bike and pedestrian plan can provide a framework for implementing new and improved active mobility connectivity.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ [Learn more](#) about the elements of a Bike and Pedestrian Plan
- ▶ Resources available through [MassDOT](#)
- ▶ Seek technical assistance from [MAPC](#)

EXAMPLES

- ▶ City of Salem [Bicycle Master Plan](#)
- ▶ City of Framingham [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#)
- ▶ Town of Watertown [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Report](#)
- ▶ Town of Littleton [Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan](#)
- ▶ Town of Lexington [Town-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#)
- ▶ Town of Wakefield [Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan](#)

3. ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT IN ACTIVE MOBILITY SAFETY, PLANNING, AND POLICY.

Increase pedestrian and cycling access and safety via expanded education and resident involvement.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Form a Walk/Bike Committee
 - ▶ Conduct a walk (and roll) audit of the area to assess existing connectivity and identify opportunities for infrastructure improvements to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists.
- [WalkMassachusetts](#) offers

- resources and technical Assistance
- AARP offers a Walk Audit [Toolkit](#)
- ▶ Partner with the MA Safe Routes to School program ([school programs + curriculum](#)) or conduct community bike safety workshops
- ▶ Organize a community event for [Bay State Bike Month](#) in May or [Walk, Bike & Roll to School Day](#) in October.
- ▶ Implement supportive policies via a Transportation Management Association.

4. PROMOTE ACTIVE MOBILITY BY INVESTING IN BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE.

Increase pedestrian and cycling access and safety via improved infrastructure. Leverage state funding and developer requirements or incentives to promote active mobility.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Use wayfinding signage that includes distance to destinations so that walking and biking routes are visible and navigable.
- ▶ Best practice design standards: paths, protected bike lanes.
- ▶ Provide bike parking – see [bike parking policy recs](#) from Boston Cyclists Union. Replace some car parking with strategically located bike corrals to improve visibility and safety.
- ▶ Expand Bluebike bike share network.
- ▶ Increase public access to bike repair tools as available in [Melrose](#), [others](#).
- ▶ [Leverage funding](#) for Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure Improvements.

- ▶ [More funding opportunities](#) for mobility improvements

EXAMPLES

- ▶ Somerville: Community Path, signage, and bike corrals in Union and Davis squares.
- ▶ Lexington bike/ped plan, participation in MA Safe Routes, connectivity to Minuteman bikeway.
- ▶ Scituate creating new sidewalks in 3A districts.
- ▶ Everett wayfinding signage and mobility hubs on [Broadway](#).

5. USE THOUGHTFUL MIXED-USE PLANNING TO SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES AND WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOODS.

Prioritize locally owned businesses that encourage foot traffic and allow residents to access amenities within walking distance of their homes.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Adopt mixed-use zoning near transit.
- ▶ Adopt mixed-use zoning near transit.
- ▶ Create a [Business Improvement District](#), with leadership from diverse small business owners.
- ▶ Encourage street-level activity through outdoor seating and window displays.
- ▶ Guidance from MHP’s [Complete Neighborhoods](#) Partnership and [15-Minute Neighborhoods](#) report.
- ▶ Advocate for state policies on workforce development and small business loans.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ Framingham’s TOD plan successfully used TIF to attract developers and

Recommendations

- revitalize the downtown district.
- ▶ Lexington gives priority to developers with feasible plans incorporating ground floor retail and/or restaurants.

6. PRIORITIZE TRANSIT ON LOCAL STREETS.

Prioritizing transit on local streets improves transit efficiency and quality of local bus service, enhancing local connectivity.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Create dedicated bus lanes.
- ▶ Give buses signal priority at intersections.
- ▶ Improve bus stop shelters, seating, and facilities.
- ▶ Enhance pedestrian access and safety at and near bus stops.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ MBTA is partnering with Boston, Chelsea, Somerville, and Everett to speed up travel times and improve bus service by utilizing dedicated bus lanes and other strategies. See the [Bus Transit Priority Toolkit](#) for more information and related resources.
- ▶ The City of Cambridge installed dedicated bus lanes along MBTA's 77 bus route on Massachusetts Avenue. This is a key route that connects Arlington to Harvard Square's robust transportation hub. Following the addition of dedicated bus lanes, route 77's median daily run times decreased approximately 23% travelling inbound and 40% outbound, saving riders time and improving reliability. See the full report [here](#).

7. PROMOTE AND FACILITATE SHARED COMMUTING AND MICRO-TRANSIT OPTIONS.

Shuttle services, vanpools, and carpools can facilitate commuter connections to transit and reduce VMT.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Join or start a nonprofit Transportation Management Association (TMA) to access and pool funding and convene business and municipal actors.
- ▶ Prioritize public accessibility, regardless of funding source.
- ▶ Apply for funding from Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's Community Connections Program.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ The Salem Skipper, a low-cost ride-sharing service originally partially funded by a MassDOT workforce transit grant is now expanding to other North Shore towns thanks to inclusion in the 2022 federal spending package.
- ▶ Shuttles serving Lexington, Waltham, and others in the 128 West Corridor, funded by members of the 128 Business Council to serve their employees, with routes open to the public and bike racks on all shuttles.
- ▶ The [Crosstown Connect shuttle](#) to Acton's commuter rail station is funded by a local meal tax.
- ▶ The [Lower Mystic TMA](#) facilitates vanpools, carpools, free bikeshares, and guaranteed rides home for members.

8. FOSTER A CULTURE OF TRANSIT RIDERSHIP AND CHOICE IN MOBILITY.

Promote understanding of the commuter rail and bus as assets in creating walkable mixed-use neighborhoods.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Incorporate creative placemaking at train stations and bus stops.
- ▶ Support forums for resident advocacy on transit improvements.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ Chelsea [redesigned a bus stop](#) to be more functional and welcoming with a youth-created art installation.
- ▶ Lexington's Transportation Advisory Committee advocates for multimodal transit and bike and pedestrian improvements.

PARKING REFORM

9. CONSIDER ADOPTING A TRANSIT DEMAND MANAGEMENT ORDINANCE (TDM) THAT PROMOTES MULTIMODAL MOBILITY AND REDUCED AUTOMOBILE USE.

A TMD ordinance can encourage mode shift by allowing developers to reduce or eliminate car parking if they take actions that support biking, walking, and using public transit.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ MAPC's [Parking and Transportation Demand Management](#) recommendations

- ▶ See specific policies in recommendations below.

EXAMPLE

- ▶ [Everett's TDM ordinance](#) uses a point system balancing parking and traffic impacts against credits for strategies such as unbundling parking from housing prices; subsidized transit passes; onsite shuttle, vanpool, or rideshare services; bikeshares; bike parking; onsite amenities such as daycare; mixed uses; and affordable housing. The ordinance uses membership in a Transportation Management Association (TMA) to support and monitor developers' TDM Plans.
- ▶ Lexington has drafted a TDM ordinance using a point system with some similarities to Everett's, but it has not yet been approved or adopted.

10. REDUCE OR ELIMINATE PARKING MINIMUMS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND CONSIDER IMPLEMENTING PARKING MAXIMUMS.

To enable demand-driven, rather than supply-driven, outcomes for parking, consider reducing or eliminating parking minimums or implementing parking maximums so that developers are not forced to produce more parking than is needed and residents are incentivized to bring fewer cars.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Learn more about the benefits of [Parking Reform](#) and what [communities around](#) the nation are doing to balance

Recommendations

- parking with other community needs.
- ▶ Incentivize reduced parking via density or height bonuses.
- ▶ Adopt a [transit demand ordinance like Everett's](#).
- ▶ Conduct parking studies with an eye toward demand management or utilize MAPC's [Perfect Fit Parking](#) Resource.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ Salem requires only one parking space per unit in its 3A zone, which is a pedestrian-friendly downtown district.
- ▶ [Bedford](#) eliminated parking minimums in their 3A zone.
- ▶ [Acton](#) eliminated parking minimums in some parts of town and implemented maximums of 1.5 or 2 spaces per unit in their two types of 3A districts.

11. EXPLORE AND FACILITATE SHARED PARKING OPTIONS.

Sharing parking between buildings with different peak use times allows for more efficient land use and less allocation of space to parking lots and garages.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Conduct a study to assess parking demand and opportunities for shared parking.
- ▶ Convene lot owners and developers to facilitate sharing agreements.
- ▶ Incentivize sharing agreements by reducing or eliminating parking minimums.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ [Municipal and lab parking study](#) from MAPC and Central Transportation Planning Staff

- ▶ [Melrose's parking reduction provisions](#) allow spaces within municipal lots to count towards parking minimums for abutting properties by right and for properties within 1000 feet by special permit. The city also offers low-cost passes for residents to use the lots outside of business hours.

12. UNBUNDLE PARKING FROM HOUSING PRICES.

Require property owners to rent, lease, or sell parking spaces separately from housing units.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Include an unbundling requirement in a TDM ordinance, zoning code, or other regulation.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ [Everett's TDM ordinance](#) incentivizes unbundled parking for large developments.
- ▶ [Somerville's zoning code](#) requires that residential parking be leased or sold separately and eliminates all parking minimums near transit.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE & MITIGATION

13. CREATE OR UPDATE A CLIMATE ACTION AND RESILIENCE PLAN TO PROACTIVELY ADDRESS FLOODING, HEAT, AND OTHER CLIMATE RELATED RISKS.

Ensure that prospective 3A districts are at minimal risk from future climate

impacts through careful siting and overall municipal resiliency planning.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Work with a consultant like [MAPC](#) to develop a community process and a climate action plan.
- ▶ Access funding from the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program.
- ▶ Identify how newly zoned high-density districts can support efforts to address sea level rise.
- ▶ Use a climate overlay district to require or incentivize best practices.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ MAPC's [Smart Growth Resources Library](#) links to dozens of climate, housing, and transportation plans.
- ▶ Salem and Beverly's [Resilient Together](#) climate action plan and dashboard include implementation blueprints and exemplify joint municipal planning.
- ▶ Salem's climate overlay district requires flood resilient first floor uses and allows height bonuses to keep housing density high.
- ▶ Scituate is leveraging 3A zoning to concentrate new development inland in areas of lower flood risk.
- ▶ Lexington's climate action and resilience plan incorporates green building, reducing vehicle emissions, and open space considerations.

14. INCREASE THE TREE CANOPY IN 3A ZONES.

Take advantage of the cooling properties, aesthetic benefits, ecosystem services, and emissions reductions that trees can

provide. Balance preservation of mature trees and increased tree canopy with other land use needs to avoid hindering housing development.

WAYS TO GET THERE:

- ▶ Consider adopting (or updating) a local tree ordinance to promote the planting of trees and preservation of existing trees in new development, require trees in parking lots, and promote the equitable distribution of trees throughout the municipality.
- ▶ Prioritize the preservation of mature trees in all new construction projects, in the redevelopment of existing lots, and in the redesign of streets.

EXAMPLES:

- ▶ The [Greening the Gateway Cities](#) partnership provides free assistance and trees.
- ▶ DCR's [guide to writing a local tree ordinance](#)
- ▶ Lexington's Tree Committee's commemorative tree fund expands tree planting at no expense to the town.
- ▶ [Concord](#) used MVP funding to distribute native tree seedlings through the library and create a tree planting guide.

15. INCORPORATE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT (LID) BEST PRACTICES.

Manage stormwater runoff and add ecosystem, aesthetic, and cooling benefits through bioswales, pervious pavement, rain gardens, tree trenches

Recommendations

and green roofs.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Use MAPC's Low Impact Development [Toolkit](#).
- ▶ Incentivize developer best practices via allowances for density, height, and reduced parking.
- ▶ Access planning grants through MassDEP.

EXAMPLE

- ▶ [Salem](#) used an MVP grant to address stormwater through tree planting, pervious pavement, and green infrastructure.
- ▶ Ten Massachusetts communities including Boston use a [stormwater charge](#) to fund green infrastructure and drainage improvements.
- ▶ [Watertown](#) has used tree trenches and other methods to manage stormwater issues.

16. INCENTIVIZE GREEN BUILDING MEASURES IN COST-EFFECTIVE WAYS.

Promote energy efficiency and electrification in all new construction and redevelopment to advance state and local climate mitigation goals. Take advantage of incentives to reduce building costs.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Inform developers of incentives and rebates for energy efficiency and electrification for new multifamily development available via Mass Clean Energy Center, [Mass Save](#), and other programs.

- ▶ Consider adopting the Specialized Energy Code or if possible, participate in the Fossil Fuel Free Building Demonstration Program (FFFBDP), to promote green building throughout municipality.
- ▶ Outside of 3A districts, utilize green building incentives for affordable housing development.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ [Salem's zoning code](#) requires all new and renovated municipal buildings of a certain size to meet Passive House or LEED certification standards and encourages the use of utility incentives, reused materials, green roofs, and solar.
- ▶ Lexington, Acton, and Arlington are part of the FFFBDP and created a [website](#) to highlight available rebates and incentives.
- ▶ Tenants of the [800-unit passive house](#) Northland Newton Development will pay no heating or cooling bills.

17. IDENTIFY A RESILIENCE HUB AND CONNECT WITH OTHER HUBS REGIONALLY.

Build community resilience within 3A districts by utilizing existing or fostering social infrastructure to disseminate resources and information and build connections. Support the neighborhood before, during, and after emergencies with the hub.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Use the Urban Sustainability Directors Network's (USDN) [Guide to Developing Resilience Hubs](#).
- ▶ Evaluate existing and potential

community spaces to site potential resilience hubs based on capacity, accessibility, building condition, proximity to critical infrastructure, potential backup power, and other requirements.

- ▶ Apply for funding from the [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness \(MVP\) Program](#) hosted by the Executive office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.
- ▶ Apply for MAPC's [Accelerating Climate Resilience Grant Program](#) hosted with the Barr Foundation.

EXAMPLE

- ▶ [Cambridge Community Center](#) is a resilience hub partnered with USDN and the Barr Foundation that is well established in the neighborhood as a service provider and trusted community space.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

18. Plan for more affordable housing within 3A districts and in the broader municipality.

To prioritize equity, increase affordable housing within 3A districts where feasible, and in other areas suitable for residential and mixed-use development.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- ▶ Conduct an Economic Feasibility Analysis ([EFA](#)) to allow EEOHLC to determine the viability of increasing the subsidy depth and number of affordable units within 3A districts.
- ▶ Create a [Municipal Affordable Housing Trust](#).
- ▶ Use municipal land for affordable

housing development.

- ▶ Appeal for the disposition of state-owned land to the municipality.
- ▶ Partner with nonprofit developers who have experience with the state's array of programs and subsidies.
- ▶ File a home rule petition to adopt a real estate transfer fee on sales of over \$1 million to fund AH (to go into effect if MA legislature passes the Affordable Homes Act).
- ▶ Create an affordable housing overlay outside of 3A district.

EXAMPLES

- ▶ Salem filed an EFA and is confident they will be able to keep deeper and broader affordability in their 3A district.
- ▶ Lexington's affordable housing trust is funded by the Community Preservation Act and funds deeper affordability.
- ▶ Lexington has petitioned the state to create a community development corporation in town and to assess linkage fees on commercial sales and transfer fees on residential sales to fund affordable housing.

19. Remove zoning barriers to alternative housing types like single-room occupancy (SROs), accessory dwelling units (ADUs), congregate housing, co-housing, and community land trusts.

Policies legalizing existing alternative housing models and encouraging the development of new ones can diversify housing stock, create workforce housing, and build community.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- Rewrite zoning to allow alternative housing models.
- Provide technical and if possible financial assistance, such as no or low interest loans, to property owners and developers seeking to create alternative housing.

EXAMPLES

- Malden created a new cohousing ordinance spurred by the [Bay State Cohousing](#) development, which incorporates units of various sizes with shared living and outdoor space.
- [Salem](#) allows ADUs by right citywide and is working on an ordinance to allow single room occupancy dwellings.
- [Boston](#) has a program supporting ADU development with interest-free loans and technical assistance.
- [Newton](#) amended its code to facilitate ADU development.

20. WHERE 3A DISTRICTS OVERLAP WITH EXISTING MULTIFAMILY HOUSING, PROACTIVELY PREVENT DISPLACEMENT OF LOW-INCOME TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS.

Prioritize equity by evaluating risks of displacement and taking steps to protect vulnerable populations.

WAYS TO GET THERE

- Adopt a tenants’ rights ordinance with provisions such as lease extensions for vulnerable tenants, anti-discrimination measures, and enforcement staffing and protocols.
- Enforce the Fair Housing Act.

- Implement or advocate at the state level for policies encouraging greater affordability, such as tax incentives for property owners.
- Advocate for the legislature to pass Tenant Right of First Refusal to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing.

EXAMPLES

- [MAPC’s Housing Task Force](#) has numerous strategies and examples on fair housing, affordability, and housing development.
- Somerville’s [Housing Stability Notification Act](#) requires tenant protections.
- Salem has proposed a Tenants Rights Ordinance.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Our research provided key insights into potential pathways for commuter rail and adjacent communities to achieve Sustainable Connected Communities after 3A adoption. However, there were some limiting factors that emerged in the research process.

INSUFFICIENT APPLICABILITY ACROSS STUDY AREA

The recommendations and findings of this study are intended to inspire other municipalities within our study area;; however we recognize that these cities and towns have a whole host of unique characteristics. Adjusting and scaling policies, coproducing with stakeholders, and discussing outcomes and challenges with other adopters can assist in transitioning ideas from one context to another.

LIMITED RESEARCH TIME

Due to the limited timeline of the project, we narrowed the sample size to a handful of municipalities and were unable to conduct other interviews with multiple stakeholders in each case study community. In addition, we could not collect other original data such as surveys to support our findings or include outcomes and challenges for each of the recommendations.

FUTURE RESEARCH

To further the scope of this study, future research can evaluate specific recommendations and identify key factors that influenced implementation and outcomes. In addition, tracking the outcomes of 3A districts from rezoning

can identify which complementary policies have the most potential to contribute to regional goals in differing municipal contexts.

CONCLUSION

There is an undeniable need for housing development in Metropolitan Boston, and the MBTA Communities Law is an important step toward meeting that need. Taken in the right spirit, it can also serve as a catalyst for greater municipal change, spurring the development of robust, livable neighborhoods. By requiring municipalities to reexamine their zoning, Section 3A creates an opportunity to leverage existing and new policy and planning tools in service of local and regional goals. Each of our case study communities, and many others across Metropolitan Boston, are going beyond the basic requirements of the law to ensure that their 3A districts develop into resilient neighborhoods with diverse housing and transit options.

While the MBTA Communities Law has met with some resistance for being too top down or one-size fits all, our research shows that most cities and towns are finding ways to align their new zoning with their existing goals around mixed use development, housing, mobility, and climate. If planners continue to think creatively and proactively about complementary policy approaches and learn from one another, this can become a great opportunity to move toward more equitable, sustainable, and connected communities in Massachusetts.

Appendix A. Interview Questions for Municipal Planners

Confirm interviewee is comfortable with recording meeting.

Start with introductions, summary of project, review purpose of interview.

Tailor questions to where the community is in the process.

General Introductory Questions

How long have you worked for [municipality]?

What are your primary responsibilities in your role?

Content Questions

Do you approach the 3A zoning process as complementary to your current planning priorities and practices, or will it be/is it being conducted as a standalone endeavor?

How do you see 3A tying into initiatives already underway or completed?

Get an arc of their narrative in implementing 3A

Then get specific after initial response

Does the rezoned district complement or support your community's vision for transportation and mobility? Are there specific policies and plans you are considering or using to facilitate this?

How have you approached crafting and/or implementing 3A zoning – have you used it to improve/address climate, transportation, equity, or other goals?

What communities do you see as similar to yours, in terms of opportunities and barriers?

Who have you looked to and have other communities reached out to you?

What elements of 3A zoning have community members and other stakeholders responded to most positively? What are some best practices you'd recommend?

Concluding Questions – time check, if needed choose 1!

What insights or advice would you give to a municipality in the process of adopting 3A rezoning?

Any recommendations or warnings/words of caution?

Is there anything else you would like to share about the MBTA Communities Law or your experience in your role as a planner/elected official?

Is there someone else in your municipality that you recommend we speak with?

Is it ok if we follow up to ask additional questions?

Appendix B. Codebook

Appendix C. Codebook
Interview Codebook

	Code	Salem	Framingham	Scituate	Lexington	Total Segments
Community Framing (3A)	4	9	4	23	40	
Municipal Resources / Capacity / Constraints	14	10	7	5	36	
Non 3A Zoning / Development	4	20	6	5	35	
Regulatory measures to guide development (Non-Zoning)	5	1	1	2	9	
3A Zoning / Development	1	11	8	13	33	
Climate Problems	1	2	2	0	5	
Climate Solutions	7	5	3	2	17	
Bike / Pedestrian / Sidewalks	11	5	2	0	18	
Bus / Train	2	2	1	9	14	
Parking	5	2	1	7	15	
Open Space / Conservation	0	2	2	1	3	
Equity / Housing Affordability	12	6	1	27	40	

Citations

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