



Metropolitan Area Planning Council
60 Temple Place
Boston, MA 02111
617.933.0700 | www.MAPC.org

MARC Minutes
Wednesday, February 25, 2026
8:00-9:30 am
Via Zoom

Attendees

Ashland: Deepa Venkat, Melissa Adams
Framingham: Yvonne Johnson, Elsiana Zhaka
Holliston: Tina Hein
Marlborough: Katie Robey, Meredith Harris
Natick: Morgan Griffiths, Amanda Loomis
Sherborn: Heidi Doyle
Southborough: Sam Stivers
Wayland: Mary Antes, Robert Hummel
Wellesley: Colette Aufranc
Weston:
Associate Members: Susan Nicholl (Senate President Spilka's Office); Jason Palitsch (495/MW Partnership), Ethan LaPointe (Boston MPO/CTPS)
MAPC Coordinators: Travis Pollack, Camille Jonlin
MAPC Staff: none
Others: Peter Milano, Massachusetts Office of Business Development

Welcome & Call to Order, and Open Meeting Law Updates

- Quorum reached and Yolanda called the meeting to order at 8:04

Approval of January 2026 Minutes

- Motion to approve amended minutes by Colette seconded by Mary. Motion passed 9-0, with one abstention.

Business Attraction for Cities and Towns

- Camille introduced the speakers; the panel includes statewide, regional, and local perspectives.
- Zoom poll of the Collaborative members and meeting participants asking, What are your business attraction priorities? Top responses included to enliven Main Street corridors, fill retail vacancies, increase job opportunities, provide amenities to residents, and understand state business attraction incentives. Filling office and industrial vacancies and increasing arts&culture amenities received fewer responses. Two others responses were added in the chat - retain businesses and improve their satisfaction with town interactions, and increase commercial tax base.
- Peter Milano - Massachusetts Office of Business Development. Somewhat surprised at poll results. Has background in running several businesses. Small office/staff of 4, but works across the Commonwealth. Primary business attraction programs:
 - Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) – tax incentives for new or expanding companies in exchange for job creation and investment in the community. All communities are eligible. Can work with RE tax relief that munis can offer, but no longer required to couple real estate tax relief with state. Applications approved by EACC on quarterly basis.
 - Business Builds Capital Grant Program - New program, first round of grants in next few weeks. \$500K to \$2M capital grants for for-profit companies. 1:1 match required by business. A closing fund for companies to create a substantial number of jobs.

- Vacant Storefronts Program – Tax credit program for retail businesses to revitalize Main Street districts.
- National Guard Tax Credit – companies with 100 employees or less can claim \$2,000 per active National Guard member employed.
- Massachusetts Center for Employee Ownership (MassCEO) supports and promotes employee ownership business models. Kevin Kuros manages this, as well as general MOBD business attraction in the Central Mass region. Provides an ownership pathway for small businesses, especially given the “silver tsunami” of aging business owners across the state.
- Business Front Door – the new statewide platform for businesses to receive technical assistance and apply for state grants. Includes 1:1 “business navigators” who help businesses start, stay, and grow in MA.
- Partner programs also available – MassWorks for infrastructure like water/sewer, etc. that supports job creation
- Question from Tina - do you present to Select Boards? Peter – yes, we are out across the Commonwealth, we can work with you.
- Jason Palitsch, Executive Director of 495/MW Partnership
 - Regional economic development group, 36 cities and towns. Includes 1/10 of the MA population.
 - 1 other full time employee Tom Driscoll who created a business resource guide for federal, state, and non-profit business support organizations. Available on website, or reach out to the Partnership for help navigating programs.
 - Competitive grant from MA provided to Partnership to provide support to businesses (Partnership member or not):
 - Site selection assistance and retention
 - Hiring assistance and other logistical support
 - State contracting assistance
 - Convenes municipal planning and economic development staff monthly – 3rd Thursday 3 pm for any member muni – up to 2 staff (non-elected officials only). This meeting is space for planner/ED staff to share ideas, engage together.
 - Business recruitment – what municipalities can do is emphasize site readiness. A lot of readiness needed for economic growth, like parcels available for development or rezoning and permitting processes. Marlborough (Meredith) has done great work to lay this baseline so that businesses can easily plug in. Knows what communities want, what they have, what they can accommodate.
 - For example, seeing a lot of large distribution centers interested in this area, esp. with online ordering. These tend to pay above minimum wage and offer commercial tax revenue to the town, but Towns need to know if that will receive community resistance before they recruit that kind of company.
- Meredith Harris – Executive Director, MEDC
 - For Marlborough, MEDC is the front line and face for any existing or new business in the business community. It is important to have this “face” and place to go for the business community to get resources and help.
 - Beyond listing available properties, it’s important for cities and towns to know what the community, council, and Select Board want and are looking for, and then go after that.
 - MEDC has robust website that lists available spaces and requires a login.
 - Municipalities need to be willing to help business, to find guidance or assistance for their needs, be flexible and willing to rezone, or find alternative sites. Example – Lost Shoe (restaurant/bar) wanted coffee roasting, but zoning did not allow coffee roasting so MEDC was able to revise zoning code to allow it.

- Ensure infrastructure can support new development. Don't oversell properties if there isn't water/sewer capacity.
 - Have a streamlined, easy process for permitting.
 - Be transparent and honest – if potential businesses isn't a good fit, say so.
 - Businesses are looking for the right workforce, need an appropriate talent pool, which means the live/work/play environment is essential. Employees have to want to live in town – understand your culture in the downtown.
 - Partner with commercial brokers who know your area and the potential leads. Large brokerages talk to businesses around the country. Regional partners like MOBD, 495/MW Partnership, and Chamber can also make connections. Other small business owners also tend to know what's going on and may know other potential business owners.
 - Talk with residents about entrepreneurship ideas; example is Pico recently opened – was local resident who had business in Boston but wanted to expand.
 - For retail vacancies, need to talk to the specific property owners to understand the spaces you have and what's physically possible and what landlords are willing to do – also word of mouth, farmer's markets, popup kinds of bizes
 - Marlborough did a popup program downtown, funded with MODB grant for new businesses to start up before going to brick and mortar sites. Has been great feeder for new businesses. Have partnership with Phantom Gourmet to support restaurants and other businesses.
 - Offer grants to businesses looking to expand in town like facade improvement or separate grant for new businesses wanting to open. The TIF from MOBD is good for large businesses making an assessment change, but these other grants help smaller businesses.
 - Since Marlborough EDC is a quasi public non-profit that works on behalf of City and funded by hotel revenue, they don't have constraints like typical municipal staff. MEDC can market the City at trade shows, operate grants, etc. Can also sign NDA for new businesses. Other communities are limited in some of these business support activities.
 - Recommendation for municipal staff: familiarize yourself with the programs offered in the state's Business Front Door so you can recommend them to businesses.
- Q&A
- Camille/MAPC – who should lead business attraction, especially in munis with less capacity?
Jason – when muni has ED staff, there are often more expectations than the Town is resourced to fulfill. So, need clarity of roles and measures of performance for ED staff ahead of time, such as identifying specific buildings the Town wants to fill, or industries you want to grow in the community.
Robert/Wayland – in Hopkinton (where he lives and serves on the Economic Development Advisory Board), will hire new full time ED staff so this conversation today is helpful.
 - Katie/Marlborough – Have no planner, have Meredith/EDC in Marlborough. For those munis without EDC, is town planner or ED planner/EDC better?
Meredith – can utilize others like MAPC, other agencies. Would need to see what roles the Town planner/ED director is expected to fill.
Jason – Marlborough EDC is gold standard, they have capacity to do more economic development work than planning staff have in other munis.
 - Sam/Southborough – Town got Costco recently, through rezoning via SB. Was sizable campaign to make it happen in Town meeting. This shows that if something turns up, Town can mobilize staff and others to make it happen.
 - Colette/Wellesley – interested how some munis have no economic development staff, or alternative EDC. Planning staff does so much, including ED. But would like more ED structure in Wellesley, it's often split among different town departments.

145 Meredith – we can talk offline on pros and cons of how to position it. Marlborough has
 146 planning funding each year in town budget, to fund consultants or larger efforts since the
 147 funds roll over.
 148 ○ Camille – Business front door program – how can cities/town work with business front
 149 door, since this is set up more for businesses than government?
 150 Peter/MOBD – muni staff can promote program, direct businesses to it. Might not work for
 151 each business and situation
 152 Meredith – familiarize yourself with the programs to help businesses utilize it.

153 **Community Share Prompt: *what state policy questions or concerns are you talking about in your community?***

- 154 • Ashland/Deepa – regarding the business attraction topic, today’s presentation gives us a lot to
 155 think about as Ashland has had staffing transitions.
- 156 • Framingham/Yvonne – get 80% AML changed; can’t fill units. Framingham isn’t like Boston.
- 157 • Holliston/Tina – early conversation on e-bike policy. Have upper Charles Rail Trail, gets a lot of
 158 traffic. Considering bike park for kids. Want to expand water/sewer for business. On bike policy,
 159 would like to hear from others.
- 160 • Marlborough/Katie – housing, multifamily. Like Framingham, feel designation of 80% AML isn’t
 161 working. Would like 60% AML. Legislative changes – rezoning received only 6 votes, but special
 162 permit requires 8 votes. Know that other legislation was proposed for simple majority; concerned
 163 with removing local control. House 91/Senate 2556 bill on digital infrastructure/tax on streaming
 164 services to support local cable television stations. Would like to hear from others.
- 165 • Natick/Morgan – ebikes – WalkMass has committee on micromobility including e-bikes, will have
 166 meeting tomorrow to see what state is considering on updating policy.
- 167 • Sherborn/Heidi – Sherborn is also in SWAP; SWAP and MAPC would like to have MBTA small
 168 towns (less than 10K) convene on how to navigate 3A, battery storage, and other state regulations
 169 when small towns have one Town meeting. Would like to see convening of smaller munis to address
 170 these.
- 171 • Southborough/Sam – agree 80% AML, can’t get housing built. Would like to see what state can
 172 do to help. Also local cable companies tax given changes in how people stream entertainment.
- 173 • Wayland/Robert – solar bylaw and battery storage... Wayland is a smaller community similar to
 174 Sherborn.
- 175 • Wellesley/Colette – cable access funding for streaming services; agree that cable revenues are
 176 going down to support local cable access. Need to look at funding local services with other
 177 sources. MassBay proposes housing with surplus land in town, but rules/regulations are still draft.
 178 Also bill on retirees and Medicare funding; Colette has materials on House Bill 1399 she can share
 179 via MAPC staff. Would like to have call with others if interested; legislative priority for MMA.
- 180 • Weston – no participants today.

181
 182 **Other Business Not Known at Time of Posting**

- 183 • 495/MW Partnership – upcoming panel discussion on stretch code and its impacts; Partnership is
 184 not for/against but offering space for discussion. Link to event included in chat.
- 185 • Please attend the upcoming MWRC/SWAP Legislative Breakfast on Friday 3/27 in Holliston.

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187 Motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Colette, seconded by Sam. Meeting adjourned at 9:27 am.

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189 **Attachments:**

- 190 • Presentation by Peter Milano, MOBD

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192 *Minutes compiled by Travis Pollack, MAPC*

193 *Minutes approved 06.25.2026*