

Regional Plan: MetroFuture

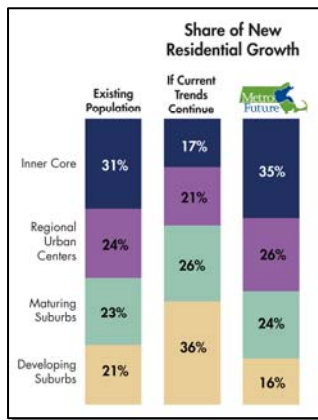
Making a Greater Boston Region

Location: Metropolitan Boston, Massachusetts

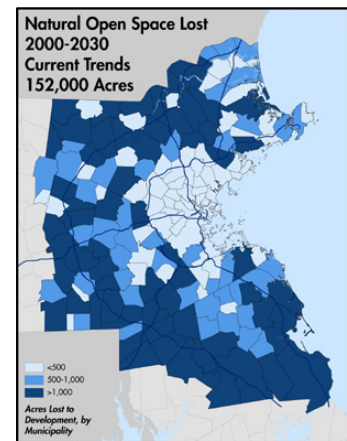
Partners: Metropolitan Area Planning Council, with the support of the Orton Family Foundation among numerous other foundations and partners



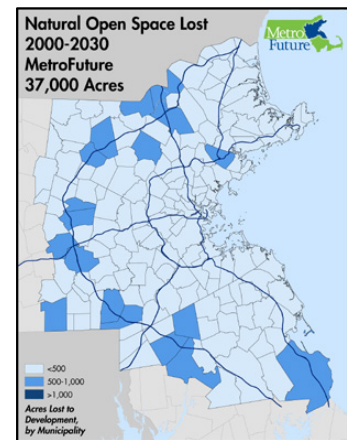
Context: Metropolitan Boston is a complex network of 164 cities and towns, accommodating a population of some 4.3 million people at the 2000 census. Slow and steady growth is anticipated for the plan period, with over a half million new residents predicted by 2030. As in many other parts of the country, the population is both aging and diversifying. Moderate economic growth is forecast, with most job growth in professional, business, education, and health services. The region faces many challenges as it seeks to meet complex housing demand, preserve open space, protect water supplies, and make efficient use of transportation resources.



In 1963, the State created the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to “prepare and, from time to time, revise both comprehensive regional plans and comprehensive economic development programs....” The last such plan was adopted in 1990. In 2003, the MAPC set about to update that plan using a new approach with an equal emphasis on technical planning, civic engagement, and implementation. The result is the MetroFuture plan, adopted as the official regional plan in spring, 2008, with an Implementation Strategy adopted in fall, 2008.



Project Description: The plan was developed in five phases: 1) Initial visioning activities; 2) analysis of current trends; 3) development of alternative futures; 4) preference selection; and 5) development of implementation strategies. With a great deal of public input, MAPC developed four alternative growth scenarios: Current Trends, Little by Little, Winds of Change, and Imagine, and built them as models in CommunityViz®. In the preference selection phase, two workshops were held in which 500 people had the opportunity to test the alternatives for themselves. Laptops on each workshop table allowed citizens to change assumptions in CommunityViz, discuss impacts among their fellow attendees, and vote on the alternatives using keypad polling technology. A “Scenario Exploration Guidebook” helped orient participants to their scenario and provided a framework for understanding the impacts of



modified assumptions. Participants overwhelmingly rejected the Current Trends scenario; most preferred Winds of Change, which changes the distribution of growth in the region by focusing new development in smart growth areas in both urban and suburban communities. In addition to these workshops, the alternatives were vetted through smaller public meetings and surveys, and refined accordingly. The preferred scenario, simply called “MetroFuture,” was ratified by 94% of the 400 people at a public seminar. The final phase of the project focused on policy refinement and development of 13 implementation strategies in areas ranging from land use to public safety and water policy.

Large quantities of data were collected for the project and are the underpinnings of the model built in CommunityViz. The model is expected to serve as a “living version of the plan,” highly valuable for incorporation of new data and plan updates.

“CommunityViz really helped our region’s residents plan for their future.... CommunityViz’s Scenario 360 had the geospatial components, equations and functions that were flexible enough for our staff to model exactly what we wanted. The slider bars help our model be responsive to participants concerns and incorporate their prospective into the scenarios planning dialogue. We are now looking to incorporate CommunityViz into our local planning analysis.”

–Holly St. Clair, Director of Data Services, Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Technology and Tools: CommunityViz 3.3 was used as the platform for building and analyzing the alternative scenarios, and for enabling the public to experiment with assumptions and assess impacts. In addition, data from the model developed in CommunityViz was aggregated to the Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) level for use by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization, responsible for the region’s transportation planning.



The insights and opinions of over 4,500 people and organizations were captured through a wide variety of citizen engagement tools and processes including: visioning workshops and leadership dialogues; a telephone poll; a survey administered through local papers, online and in person; briefings across the region; large workshops with workbooks, computers, and keypad polling; visualizations using Photoshop and aerial photos; a Policy Summit to address key policy areas prior to plan adoption; and a Strategy Summit to review draft recommendations prior to adoption of the implementation strategies.

Outcomes: Important implementation measures are underway. The Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization has adopted the plan as the basis for its Regional Transportation Plan. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation is using MetroFuture to forecast future water needs. Meanwhile, MAPC is developing a program to help individual communities discover ways to implement MetroFuture, often using CommunityViz and the findings of MetroFuture applied to the local level.

KEY LINKS

CommunityViz
<http://www.communityviz.com>
Metropolitan Area Planning Council:
<http://www.mapc.org>
Metro Future Project Web Site:
<http://www.metrofuture.org>