

MASSACHUSETTS PLANNING

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Massachusetts Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

Fall 2021

The Success of the Shared Streets and Spaces Program

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Topsfield, MA

Plus: *The History of MPOs...6 / SNEAPA 2021...7 / News From CPM (new name!)...9*



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On the cover: Hay bales/pumpkin-festooned crosswalks in Topsfield, MA.
 (Photo: Erin Clark)

From the President



Greetings Massachusetts Planners! I hope your summer was awesome! It's hard to admit that we are still dealing with a pandemic, but we are. I miss my planning friends! But virtual meetings have allowed us to stay in touch and maybe see each other's faces even more as we Zoom together more regularly. As I said in my last message, I strongly believe we are a resilient profession and we will continue to get through this. Keep your chin up, take time for yourself, and be kind to each other! Here are some updates from APA-MA:

• **APA-MA election results are in!** Congratulations to the new members of the APA-MA Board of Directors who will take office on January 1, 2022:

Alison LeFlore, AICP – President
Kenneth Comia, AICP – Vice President
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• APA-MA has **several volunteer opportunities** to serve on the APA-MA Board of Directors starting January 1, 2022: Legislative & Policy Officer, Professional Development Officer, and Cape & Islands Regional Representative. Learn more about these positions by contacting us at communications@apa-ma.org. Interested? Please forward a brief letter of introduction together with a bio or resume to communications@apa-ma.org.

• The 2021 **SNEAPA Conference** is October 28-29! Check www.sneapa.org for more details and to register.

• Annual **APA-MA Award Nominations** are open! Each year APA-MA recognizes planners and their work through its awards program. Please nominate an elected official by September 27th and all others are due October 25th. Check the [website](http://www.apa-ma.org) for more information!

Stay in touch! We continue to keep our website (www.apa-ma.org) updated, and post on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#). We also send out bi-weekly newsletters with regular updates on Chapter activities. Please make sure your contact information is up-to-date on APA's website at [My APA](http://www.apa-ma.org).

Be well,

Angie

Angela J. Cleveland, AICP
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Planning for People: The Success of Massachusetts' Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program



Downtown Belmont, MA transformed into a Shared Street for people, public transit, retail, and dining during COVID-19.

Credit: Solomon Foundation

Even as communities approach widespread vaccination, we know life will never be the same as before. One program in Massachusetts gives us a glimpse into the meaningful quality of life improvements we can take with us into the future if we continue to design healthy, fun, safe and affordable ways for people to get around and within our communities.

The Bay State's **Shared Streets and Spaces** grant program has supported 143 communities—from cities to small towns—in testing ideas to improve local outdoor spaces so that people can safely be in public together during the pandemic. Administered by the [Massachusetts Department of Transportation](#) (MassDOT) with support from the [Barr Foundation](#), the [Solomon Foundation](#), and the [Metropolitan Area Planning Council](#) (MAPC), and other nonprofit partners, the program has empowered [municipalities across Massachusetts](#) to implement [changes](#) to make their streets, sidewalks, and other public spaces more equitable, inclusive, and accessible.

While these projects may look simple—setting up a few chairs for strangers to have small talk, slowing down traffic so kids can play, adding a bus stop for essential workers—all strengthen community bonds and combat loneliness, keep downtowns buzzing, and remind all of us that we're in this together.

The Shared Streets and Spaces grant program has been successful in piloting projects and policies that in many cases will now be made permanent. So, how does it work, and what lessons does the program provide other cities around the country?

How Does it Work?

■ Grantmaking

The Shared Streets and Spaces grant program was formed in June 2020 in response to COVID-19 and has so far invested \$21.6 million in 194 projects, with 60% in designated Environmental Justice communities. All municipalities and public transportation authorities are eligible to apply for grants ranging from \$5,000-\$500,000, depending on project type, through an application process that is entirely online and is intentionally simple to complete.

Applications are reviewed and grants are made as quickly and seamlessly as possible deliver funding and support to communities fast. At this stage of the program, extra points are awarded during the scoring process for projects that provide better access and opportunities for school children and elders, to open space and public transit, and in Environmental Justice and 'COVID-19 red' communities. Finally, pro

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bono technical assistance is available to all municipalities, funded by the Barr Foundation, for assistance in developing applications. Another unique aspect of this program is that grants are paid in full and upfront, unlike other grant programs which are paid through reimbursement and electronically transferred to municipal Chapter 90 accounts (Chapter 90 funds are for capital improvements such as highway construction, preservation and improvement projects).

■ Project Types Eligible for Funding

Five types of projects are eligible for the Shared Winter Streets and Spaces grant program:

- **Main Streets**—Making investments in local downtowns and villages by repurposing streets, plazas, sidewalks, curbs, and parking areas to facilitate people-centric activities and community programming
- **Reimagined Streets**—Prioritizing safe space for people walking and biking by implementing low-speed streets, “shared streets,” new sidewalks, new protected bike lanes, new off-road trails, new bicycle parking, new crosswalks, traffic-calming measures, and ADA-compliant ramps
- **Better Buses**—Improving bus riders’ commutes through establishing new facilities for buses, including dedicated bus lanes, traffic-signal priority equipment, and bus shelters
- **Shared Mobility**—Supporting the capital costs of new bikeshare equipment to support more people trying cycling
- **Investments in the Future**—Converting temporary/pilot Shared Streets projects—including those not funded by MassDOT—to permanent facilities to benefit community members over the long-term

Transformational and Successful

Whether through [more vibrant Main Streets](#) and [greenspaces](#), safer routes to school or work, warmer places to safely [gather](#) or wait for the bus, people and communities alike benefit from the Shared Streets and Spaces grant program that continues to create increased space for people to move around safely, engage in commerce, recreate, and participate in civic life. Communities that have seen successful adoption of shared streets projects have also found opportunity to lay the ground work for adoption of regulatory change in areas like three season dining or expedited permitting processes.

Here are some examples of the variety of projects that have emerged through the program:



New Bedford, MA

■ Main Streets

- **Great Barrington**—Temporary barriers on Railroad Street created space for outdoor dining, commerce, community gathering, and entertainment, supporting residents and local business owners
- **New Bedford**—Multiple new outdoor dining destinations and safe pedestrian spaces within the city

■ Reimagined Streets

- **Belchertown**—New safe, child-friendly neighborhood walking and biking trail that connects to schools and other essential destinations and workplaces
- **Chelsea**—New crossings at the Chelsea Elementary School and Brown Middle School make the walk to school safer for kids

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Left: Outdoor dining parklets in repurposed on-street parking spaces in New Bedford, MA. Right: Shared Streets signage on Broadway in Everett, MA.



■ Better Buses

- **Brockton**—Installation of 10 new bus shelters with heaters to give dignity and comfort to bus riders
- **Lynn**—New bidirectional, curb-running shared bus/bike lanes and two transit signal priority treatments to speed up trips for bus riders and cyclists
- **Somerville**—New transit priority treatments, with additional benefits to bicyclists and pedestrian safety on Washington Street at McGrath Highway

■ Shared Mobility

- **Boston**—New bikeshare stations for residents in East Boston, Mattapan, Dorchester, and Roslindale
- **Newton**—Four new bikeshare stations with both electric-assist and pedal-powered bikes

Additional Shared Streets images are available on the [Shared Streets and Spaces Photo Library](#) on Flickr.

Shaping the Future of Municipalities through Continuing to Invest in Shared Spaces

Cities are at an inflection point with an opportunity to build back better than before by [investing](#) in our shared future as we recover from the pandemic and confront other existential challenges like climate change and inequality. Giving people more options to be outside and be connected to their communities helps to prevent the spread of the virus while also supporting our community's mental health and helping to create more fun and livable cities over the long run.

Additional Resources:

- [A Better City's Tactical Public Realm Case Studies](#)
- [Bench Consulting's Winter Places Guide](#)
- [The Better Block Foundation](#)
- [MAPC's COVID-19 Resources — Shared Streets Website](#)
- [Mass Healthy Aging Collaborative's Age-Friendly Winter Spaces Ideas for Municipalities to Embrace Winter and corresponding resources](#)
- [National Association of City and Transportation Officials — Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery](#)
- [Neighborways](#)
- [New York Times: How New Yorkers Want to Change the Streetscape for Good, December 18, 2020](#)
- [Open Streets Project](#)
- [Toole Design's Ensuring an Equitable Approach to Rebalancing Streets](#)




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From Freeway Revolts to the Future: The History of MPOs

by Rachel Strauss McBrien, AICP

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) play a critical role in transportation planning in a region, but what exactly is this role, and how did MPOs first begin? On July 13, the APA-MA Transportation Committee, in partnership with the Boston Region MPO, hosted a webinar, “From Freeway Revolts to the Future: The History of MPOs,” to share the origins of MPOs and how MPOs continue to evolve today. Attendees heard from Tegin Teich, Executive Director of the MPO staff, as well as from a panel of board members and staff from the Boston Region MPO and Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission about the activities led by MPOs. Approximately 110 attendees participated in the webinar.

MPOs, which serve federally defined urbanized areas with populations more than 50,000 people, were formally established under the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973. Prior to that time, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, planning for transportation infrastructure primarily focused on technical and engineering issues related to highway master planning rather than community-driven social and land use considerations that drive planning efforts today. Starting in the late 1950s through about 1970, “highway revolts” took form in the Boston region and across the country, challenging existing highway planning practices. The passing of the 1973 Act authorized MPOs to use federal transportation funds and to “flex” highway funds for public transit projects.

While MPOs have federally required responsibilities, such as the development of long-range transportation plans, transportation improvement programs, and unified planning work programs, they also serve as significant collaborators and conveners in a region. MPOs work closely with various stakeholders in their region, from the public to elected officials and other transportation pro-



fessionals, to ensure that transportation decision-making is done transparently and inclusively. MPOs work across transportation modes to promote multimodal approaches and support a transportation network that allows for safe, multiple, and sustainable choices for people traveling.

MPOs like the Boston Region MPO and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission continue to advance the work and role of MPOs today. This includes developing new tools for travel demand modeling and analysis that allows for more robust exploration of uncertainties and the potential impacts that these uncertainties may have on the future, such as rapidly changing technologies and climate change. MPOs are also assessing how they can continue to achieve their goals through performance-based planning. Above all, MPOs like those featured in the webinar are dedicated to listening to the needs of all voices in a region to ensure inclusive and robust public engagement throughout the planning, prioritization, and funding process for transportation projects.

A recording of the webinar is available on the [Boston MPO's YouTube channel](#). To learn more about the MPOs across the state, visit [MassDOT's Regional Planning webpage](#).

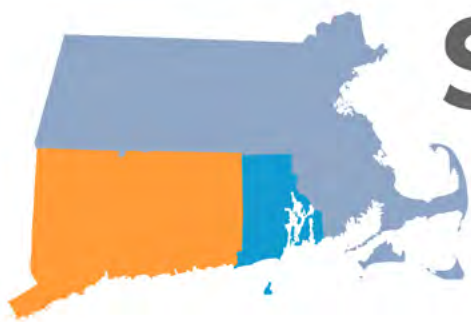
The MA-APA Transportation Committee would like to thank the Boston Region MPO for co-hosting this webinar and to the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission for participating in the panel. If you are interested in joining the APA-MA Transportation Committee, please contact Alison Felix at afelix@mapc.org.

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a virtual conference

The Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island Chapters invite you to join us at our second-ever virtual conference! Building on last year's success (and this year's ongoing pandemic...), we're pleased to again offer two days of programming—on a computer, tablet, or mobile phone near you. Save the dates:

October 28-29, 2021!

We're particularly excited about this year's Keynote Speaker, **Mary Means**, founder of the Main Street Movement. See below for more information about Mary! Stay tuned in the coming weeks as we announce the conference program and registration. If you do not currently receive emails from SNEAPA, let us know at news@sneapa.org and we'll add you to the distribution list.

About Our Keynote Speaker

Mary Means is widely known for leading the team that created the National Main Street Center. More than 1,600 towns and historic neighborhood corridors in 40+ states have successfully used the Main Street Approach to bring people back to their historic cores. Her small but mighty planning firm has helped communities and other public interest organizations with strategic plans that achieve strong public support. Her work has been honored by the American Planning Association with its national 2018 Planning Pioneer Award, and by the National Trust for Historic Preservation with the 2020 Louise de Pont Crowninshield Award, the highest honor in historic preservation.

She'll address the SNEAPA Conference on Thursday, October 28th. Her talk (and her book) is entitled "Main Street's Comeback and How It Can Come Back Again"—the compelling story of a citizen-led movement that has brought the centers of hundreds of communities back

to life again over the last four decades. Downtowns had been the heart of their communities, but by the 1970s shopping centers and suburban lifestyles were draining them of business and activity. Left behind were vacant storefronts, marginal businesses, and the proud but shabby build-

ings that once lined main street. Anyone who wanted to save their historic downtown had nowhere to turn for help. The

National Trust for historic Preservation envisioned a way to harness the historic character of main street that made economic sense. Forty years later, thanks to the dedication of thousands of citizens, small business owners, and civic leaders—most of them volunteers—more than 1,600 towns and scores of city neighborhood corridors across America are thriving with life.

This is the story of how the Main Street Approach came to be, how it spread across the country, and how caring citizens have brought the heart of their communities back from the brink. Then came the pandemic shut-downs, and everything stopped. Within days, Main Street organizations pivoted, helped their small businesses and communities adapt and weather extraordinary conditions.

Eighteen months later the pandemic continues and small businesses are feeling it. But downtowns are scrappy, as are the people who care about them. Mary Means offers a vision of how downtowns can emerge even stronger from the pandemic, and it could not be more timely. We can't wait to hear her speak at SNEAPA 2021 and hope you will join us! **Register at www.sneapa.org.**



Mary Means

Judi Barrett
Principal



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NEWS FROM CPM | Consulting Planners' Perspective

by Kathleen "Kathy" McCabe, FAICP

As we savor the last days of summer, the Massachusetts Association of Consulting Planners is donning a new name — **Consulting Planners of Massachusetts** or CPM, for short. Leonardi Aray, President of CPM, notes the organization has been mulling over a name change for quite a few months, and it was just time to do it. The Mass-ACP or MACP acronym was confusing, so it was time for a change.

Folks can find Consulting Planners of Massachusetts on the web at consultingplanners.org. The digital Directory of Consulting Planners is on the website as well, a valuable tool for purchasing agents and municipal planners to use to identify the expertise of various planning firms and how to contact the firms.


CPM serves the private practice planning community in Massachusetts, collaborating with the APA-MA chapter as well as the Private Practice Division of APA. CPM's mission is to promote the private sector of the planning profession, to improve planning services to both public and private clients, and to participate




cooperatively with all planning groups and activities. CPM was founded in the 1970s by Carol Thomas, FAICP, the doyenne of private planning. The APA-MA chapter has a scholarship, named after Carol Thomas, who passed away at 95 in 2019.

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Planning Critiqued by *The Boston Globe*

Planning is becoming part of the heated Boston mayoral race. In late August, the acting mayor announced that there would be a new plan for the Downtown Harbor area tossing out a 2017 plan developed under former Mayor Walsh that had green lighted for enabling new tower long desired by developer Don Chiofaro. The Downtown Harbor Plan, is lengthy (360+ pages), and its development included a mayoral appointed advisory committee and a series of public meetings. However, a shadow "stakeholder consultation" that was essentially a zoning negotiation with individual developers behind closed doors undermined the extensive public process. Plans are not zoning deals. Plans need to articulate a shared vision, goals and principles that the advance public and municipal interests and goals, including equity and resiliency, that can span elections.

CPM weighed in on the [Shirley Leung column](#) with the following letter:

Shirley Leung's column lamenting the "process" that led to Acting Mayor Janey's withdrawing the Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan focuses on the wrong things. Leung says the public process in Boston is broken, it was long with many meetings and was torpedoed by "powerful forces and deep

pockets." The real issue is that the City of Boston ignored its own earlier Greenway District Planning Study Use and Development Guidelines and developed a municipal harbor plan that violates the 200-foot height guidelines and violates Chapter 91 Waterways Regulations in several ways including height.

Further, the Municipal Harbor Plan process is primarily intended to take a broad view and incorporate local goals and translate them into a plan for a certain area of the harbor. While it may include on guidelines for individual parcels such as the Harbor Garage, the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) got hung up on negotiating in private meetings with developers instead of creating a plan to guide future development. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "Plans are nothing; planning is everything." Commenters in her column got it right: planning for the downtown waterfront needs to be done next time, not zoning to enable a few parcels.

— Consulting Planners of Massachusetts

King Tide Walk

A King Tide is super high tide, in Boston, over 12 feet. CPM's annual King Tide walking tour and discussion about strategies for sustainability and resilience in the wake of rising waters and climate change will be Friday, November 5. We will observe the impacts of rising waters at Long Wharf and East Boston, share lunch and hear from planners working to increase the resiliency of the East Boston neighborhood. Watch out for details.



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