

MASSACHUSETTS PLANNING

A publication of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association



American Planning Association
Massachusetts Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

Summer 2023

A photograph of an MBTA train station platform. A train with a white and purple front is stopped at the platform. The platform has a large, dark, overhanging roof structure. A yellow tactile paving strip runs along the edge of the platform. In the background, there are trees and a multi-story building.

MBTA Communities Grapple with Compliance

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On the cover: Outbound train at Salem station (credit: Tdorante10, Wikimedia Commons)

From the President

Welcome to the Summer edition of *Massachusetts Planning*! Our lead story this issue looks at some of the complexities that towns are facing as they embrace their obligations under the new MBTA Communities Act. We also include Part 1 of Peter Lowitt's "Lessons Learned Over a Career in Planning" — we know you'll find it a compelling read (and more to follow!). Mark Favermann and Kathy McCabe also contribute well thought-out articles on placemaking and housing, respectively. Please let us know what other topics you'd like to read (or write!) about. We always appreciate input from our members.

We've been enjoying bringing chapter members back together for in person social and CM events for the first time since the pandemic. We finally hosted a screening of "Museum Town" — which we'd originally scheduled for April 2020! Our new Social Coordinators (Melisa Tintocalis and Alyssa Sandoval) hosted a bike ride and happy hour in May (see page 15). We have several more events planned for the summer and even more coming this fall. We are so happy to be back together enjoying each other's company. Please let us know if you have any suggestions or places we should be visiting!

Ralph Willmer, FAICP, organized and led another great AICP Prep Course online this spring. A big thank you to Ralph and the instructors who volunteered to help our next generation of certified planners prepare for the exam.

We have some exciting news and a big congratulations due to UMass Boston's Urban Planning and Community Development Department. They were recently notified that they have been accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB)! This is a big step and we look forward to continuing to work with the faculty and students at UMB! This is a well-deserved honor — many congratulations!!

If you see *Massachusetts Planning* Editor Peter Lowitt, FAICP, or Central Region Representative Jim Robbins, AICP, congratulate them on their retirements!

As always, be in touch (president@apa-ma.org) if you want to volunteer for a committee, host an event, or just want to chat.



Alison

Alison LeFlore, AICP
president@apa-ma.org

MBTA Communities Grapple with Compliance

by Joe Peznola, PE, Director of Engineering, Hancock Associates

Hancock Associates has been working with several of our valued developer clients looking to build multi-family projects utilizing the MBTA Communities Act. The Act requires each of the 171 Eastern act-defined Massachusetts MBTA communities have a zoning ordinance or by-law that provides for at least one district of reasonable size in which multi-family housing is permitted as of right; provided, that such multi-family housing shall be without age restrictions and shall be suitable for families with children. A district of reasonable size must allow for a minimum gross density of 15 units per acre, subject to any further limitations imposed by section 40 of chapter 131 and Title 5 of the state environmental code and be located not more than 0.5 miles from a commuter rail station, subway station, ferry terminal or bus station, if applicable.



Many communities have expressed concern that the minimum 15 units per acre density will be impossible in areas without municipal sewers, fearing subsurface sewage disposal systems in accordance with Title 5 would preclude such densities. We have discussed the matter at length with municipal agents and others interested in trying to allay fears.

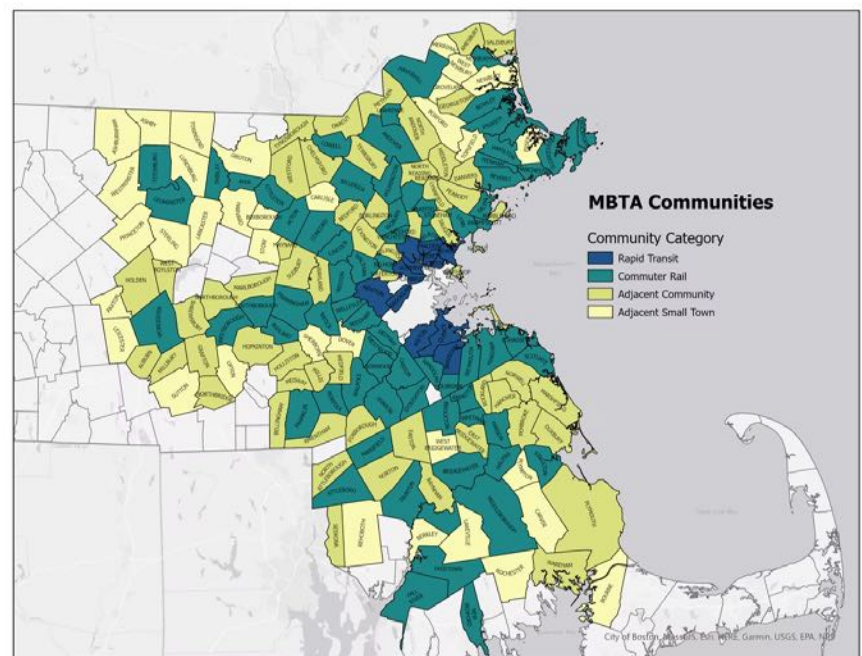
The only housing density restriction within Title 5 is within nitrogen-sensitive areas, limiting four bedrooms per acre of land area. The state considers protective areas around public wells and certain coastal embayment's nitrogen sensitive areas. This limitation would in fact preclude the densities envisioned in the Act. Communities might therefore avoid these areas in mapping appropriate district definitions. Alternatively, areas of wetlands and floodplain, not otherwise developable, can be used to meet the four bedroom-per-acre requirement making it theoretically possible for a tract of land to meet both the requirement while achieving the 15 units-per-acre requirement. An example would be a 15-unit project with an average of two bedrooms per unit (30 bedrooms). A tract of land having 7.5 acres with one acre high and dry would meet both criteria.

Physical constraints such as wetlands, floodplain and suitable soils for either subsurface sewage disposal or groundwater discharge

must be considered in properly planning zoning districts for denser housing development. Title 5 has criteria for sizing sewage disposal systems based on the characteristics of the soil on a site. Going back to our 30-bedroom example, the size of a subsurface sewage disposal system under Title 5 would range between 4,400 square feet and 22,000 square feet—a significant difference. There are different types of septic systems, topographic considerations and a requirement for a reserve replacement area that will impact the final layout of such a system. Our point being, the quantity of land needed for such densities may be large, requiring careful consideration by municipalities when defining these zoning districts with input from professionals as to where more suitable soils might be will aid in achieving the housing density goals.

Another important consideration is Title 5 limits subsurface sewage disposal system to no more than 10,000 gallons per day. This equates to 90 bedrooms (Title 5 design flow 110 gallons per bedroom per day). Beyond 90 bedrooms, a development would be required to build a wastewater treatment facility. These facilities are permitted through MassDEP Groundwater Discharge Program. In 2015, Hancock completed

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All 177 communities served by the MBTA must zone to allow for multifamily housing as of right, with a greater obligation for communities with better access to transit stations.

a report for MHP entitled “Sewage Rules Create Gap in Housing Supply in Massachusetts.” The report detailed the financial feasibility of small wastewater treatment facilities for housing projects. The report concludes wastewater treatment facilities are economically infeasible for projects having less than 200 bedrooms. Communities should be sensitive to this gap feasible project sizes in defining housing districts in areas where municipal sewer is not available, making sure available parcel sizes and environmental limitations support larger projects to absorb these costs.

The availability of municipal water is another challenge communities may face in targeting housing zoning districts to meet the guidelines. In Massachusetts, on-site wells are governed by local Boards of Health for wells servicing less than 25 persons. A well servicing more than 25 persons is considered

Physical constraints such as wetlands, floodplain and suitable soils for either subsurface sewage disposal or groundwater discharge must be considered in properly planning zoning districts for denser housing development.

a Public Water Supply (PWS), which must be permitted through the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) in accordance with the state Drinking Water Regulations. A well for a PWS must have a Zone I protective radius around the well in which nothing can be developed

that is not water-supply-related. Additionally, a Zone II area protective radius will be established beyond the Zone I. The radii are defined by the quality of water proposed to be withdrawn daily. The Zone II will come with the nitrogen loading requirements discussed in the prior section. Again, while theoretically possible to realize development to the housing minimum density of the guidelines by precluding the Zone I from use in the calculation, a community may be better served to target areas of town with municipal water available.

Cities and towns challenged with the unavailability of municipal sewer and/or water should engage engineers to assess limitations and constraints to development within their community to target the best areas for higher density residential development. Available mapping and data can be utilized to make such an assessment quickly and at a relatively low cost.

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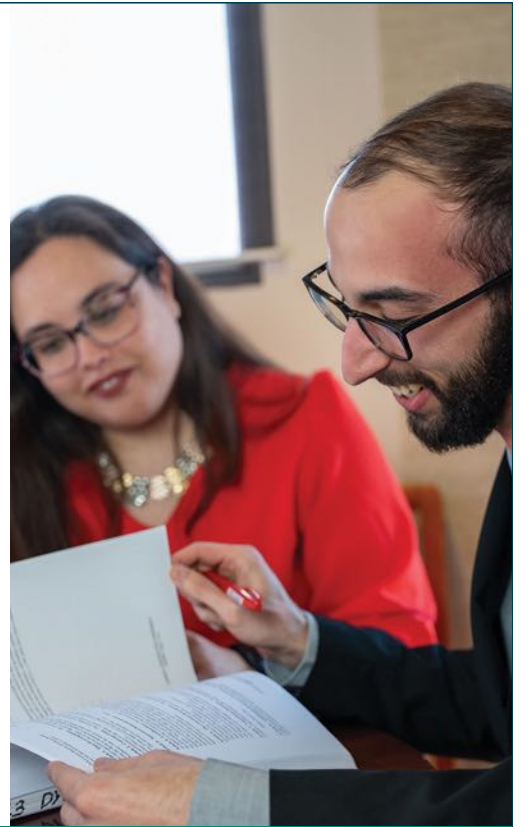
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Reflecting on Lessons Learned Over a Career in Planning (Part 1):

by Peter Lowitt, FAICP



A brief summary of my career in planning

After attending Brown University I started *Living Alternatives Magazine*, a journal of appropriate technology and renewable energy, and then worked for the Town of

Watertown's Community Development Department as its energy coordinator and became interested in planning. I went to Tufts UEP, got married and worked for a year in Waltham as a Junior Planner before working for Acton as its junior planner. I then went to Grafton, where I worked some magic and had a portion of the former Grafton State Hospital land declared surplus and started what became Centech Park and helped locate a commuter rail stop in Grafton at the park and adjacent to the Tufts Vet School. I then went north to Londonderry, New Hampshire as their Economic Development and Planning Director, where I got to implement my thesis and put in place a development impact fee program. After starting the Stonyfield Londonderry Eco-Industrial Park, I was recruited to Devens where I have been working to redevelop the base as a model of Sustainable Development for the past 24 years. When I left Londonderry the Londonderry Business Council gave me an apple sculpture with the saying, "Without vision, the people will perish." So, I guess I'm a big-picture vision type of planner.

It starts with a vision

"Make no little plans," as Daniel Burnham said. My vision became harmonizing economic

development and environmental protection—saving our planet for my kids and grandkids.

Networking is important

Who you know over your career can help move you forward along your career path. I'm going to offer a few examples. Look around at your classmates and colleagues, as they are part of the network you will access over the years to come.

For example: I met Gary Hirshberg, CEO of Stonyfield Yogurt, while working for *Living Alternatives*. The trust established by interviewing him about his role at the New Alchemy Institute and a visit to China led to him later working with me on the Stonyfield Londonderry EIP.

My Town Manager in Grafton, Dan Morgado, was upset with my constant networking activities until the contacts I made through them resulted in Professor John Mullin assigning graduate students from UMass Amherst to work with Pam Brown—at the time a land planner and lawyer at DCPO—to declare portions of the Grafton State Hospital land surplus and thus ready for redevelopment.

When I interviewed for the Devens job, two of the commissioners interviewing me were Hermann Field, the founder of the Tufts Urban Environmental Policy graduate program, and Paul Von Loescke, a Brown University alum. Small world. Networking is important.

Oh yeah, and I hired a graduate student to work with me at Devens, one Justin Hollander. I like to think I'm a good judge of talent as I also I hired Neil Angus, FAICP. For a time, Devens

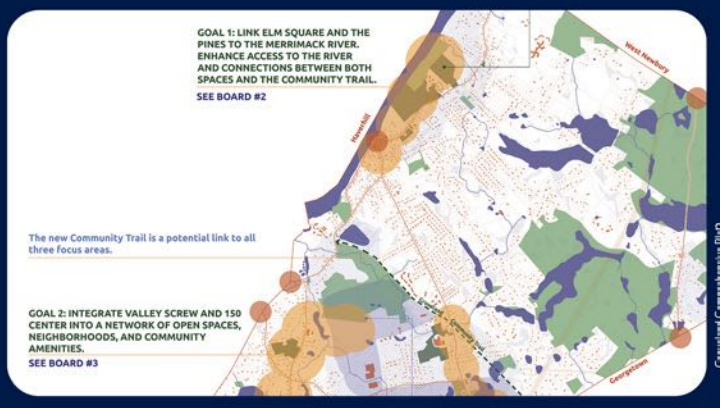
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Lessons learned *cont'd*

may have been the only jurisdiction in the country whose entire multi-person planning staff were FAICP members.

One of the first things I noticed at Devens was its reliance on single-occupancy vehicles to get employees to and from the area. In 1999 I initiated the Fitchburg Line working group and created a network of regional planning agencies, communities, and legislators from Cambridge to Gardiner to work together to make improvements to the Fitchburg Line Commuter Rail service. Eighteen years and \$272 million dollars later we had reduced the commute from Leominster to Porter Square by 20 minutes, increased safety and reliability along the line, and implemented operational changes to increase service and reliability for commuters. This enhanced commuter rail service also increased the desirability of residing in communities along



Picture taken from a gathering of eco-industrial park folks from around the world. Participants had to share their nation's drinking salutations. Needless to say, we learned a lot.

the Fitchburg line and increased property values.

At Devens I joined the Rotary Club. Social Clubs like Rotary, Lions, etc. are a great way to connect with your community. You will find

yourselves invited to speak at them regularly as part of your efforts to educate the community about various municipal planning initiatives. The Rotary connection came in

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Lessons learned *cont'd*

handy when learning about Kalundborg, Denmark, the first Eco-Industrial Park. The park evolved out of the trust established between firms through the local Rotary club connections.

Who you know over your career can help move you forward along your career path. Look around at your classmates and colleagues, as they are part of the network you will access over the years to come.

What is an eco-industrial park? Eco-Industrial Development encourages "a community of businesses [to] cooperate with each other and with the local community to efficiently share resources (information, water,

energy, infrastructure, and natural habitat), leading to economic gains, gains in environmental quality, and equitable enhancement of human resources for the business and local community." I attended the 1996 meeting at Cape Charles, VA where a score of communities from across the country created this definition. I was asked to explain why our Eco-Industrial Park in Londonderry New Hampshire was named Stonyfield:

So, a city slicker is visiting the rural New England landscape in the spring. He spots a farmer pulling a rock out of the field lined by stone walls. (The natural freeze thaw season brings rocks to the surface each year, you have to put them somewhere, hence the New England stone wall.) The city dweller asks, "Where did those rocks come from." Farmer says, "Glacier brought 'em." The city slicker looks around, scratches his head

a bit, and then says, "I don't see no glacier, I don't believe you. Where is it?" The farmer looks at him and says, "Went back for another load."

In 1996 the U.S. was a leader in Eco-Industrial Development. Then Bush came into office and any notion of federal support went by the wayside. Fortunately, I was working in NH where there was little if any federal or state support for economic development initiatives other than using innovation to create market niche. And that is what we did, eventually attracting the Granite Ridge natural gas-fired power plant to locate in our EIP and reducing the tax impact on Londonderry citizens by about \$5.00 per thousand in value (from \$38/1000 to \$33/1000). In addition we worked with the Conservation Law Foundation who had brought the power plant to our park, to add a hundred+/- acres of permanently protected open space

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It took me over 20 years to find a picture worthy of illustrating the concept of low-hanging fruit. I had to visit a fruit farm in Thailand.

Lessons learned *cont'd*

along the transmission lines to augment an existing open space reserve. Win-win!

Having created two EIPs (Londonderry and Devens) I became involved in the international Eco-Industrial Development (also known as industrial symbiosis) movement through the International Society of Industrial Ecology. All that I can say, with apologies to Garrett Morris




of SNL, is "Planning been very, very good to me." I have traveled the world teaching and learning about eco-industrial development and advocating for incorporating green infrastructure and sustainable development elements into all EIP projects. I have been able to visit New Zealand, Australia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Korea, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, UK, Ireland, and Canada.

Devens has hosted three international gatherings and multiple international delegations of visitors over the years. China is now a world leader in Eco-Industrial Development, with national criteria for EIPs.

One of the cool things I learned was how Korea used the concept of shared infrastructure to modernize its economic base. Most Korean industry evolved after the Korean War, in the late '50s and '60s. It had a reputation for being a bad actor in the pollution department. The Korean Innovation Ministry KIKOX, the equivalent of the Japanese MITI, created a pilot program linking universities with industries. The government would finance shared infrastructure projects with a short payback period after analysis and with the assistance of university teams. The results were Korea has put in place 21st-century industrial infrastructure and greatly improved its environmental performance.

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Lessons learned *cont'd*

And the U.S. still lacks a national program to promote EIPs, the Circular Economy and other initiatives which are supported by the European Union, China, and many Asian countries.

We position the EIP as adding value for facilities locating at Devens. It's using market niche to position our community to stand out from all the others in the world-wide marketplace that companies can choose from when it comes to locating their facilities.

Recommendation: Learn from your mistakes

Early in my career in Acton, I learned not to try and answer every question that comes up during town meeting. How did I do that? By trying to answer all of them and not knowing how to read the audience, I firmly inserted my foot in my mouth. I hadn't yet learned to read the audience.



Boston for five years. A big congratulations to the UMB team and thank you to those that participated in the PAB review!

At its April 2023 meeting, the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) accredited the graduate **urban planning program** at the University of Massachusetts

With the housing collapse in the late 1980s my position as Grafton Town Planner was in jeopardy. I had a young family at the time and am grateful the town chose not to let me go. They cut me back to a four-day work week and this became my motivation to become interested in economic development. It worked out for the Town of Grafton when I had portions of the former Grafton State Hospital put back on the tax roles.

Early on during my time at Devens I spoke with Julian Agyeman about sustainable development. He said, "Peter, you emphasize environmental protection and economic

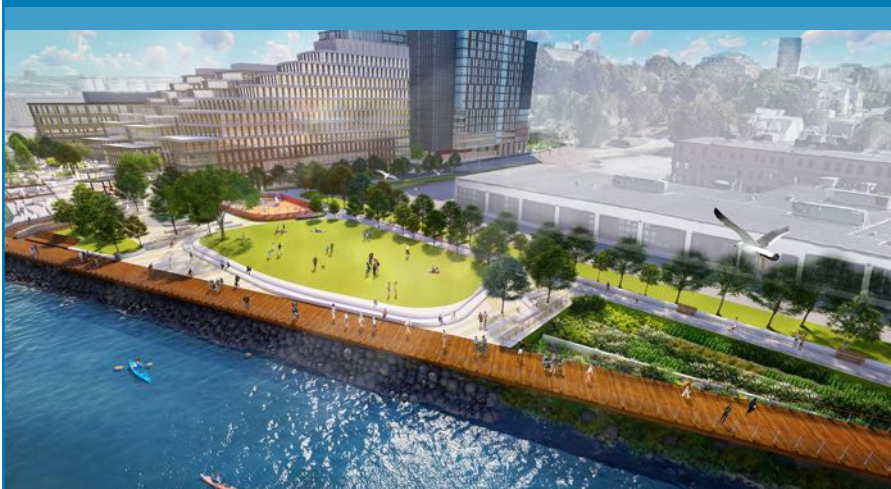
development; where is the social equity?" Thank you Julian. I've been emphasizing our social equity mission ever since.

I benefited from taking an active listening course. It really helped me. Also, as mentioned earlier, learn to read your audience. Learn to recognize and assess meeting fatigue, and adjust your remarks on the fly. Trust your gut read and run with it.

[Look for Part 2 in the next edition!]

— Peter Lowitt, FAICP, is Director of Devens Enterprise Commission and editor of this magazine.

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Plymouth Rocks: Creating Community Destinations and Municipal Magnetism

by Mark Favermann

While repairing a broken regional transit program — the often deservedly maligned MBTA — and strategically trying to address the crisis-level inadequate affordable housing, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has strangely not properly addressed the needs of the third leg of vital, essential communities: the economic engines of our downtowns and commercial districts. It is as if the state sees only a partial picture of what a civic entity is or what it takes to create a robust, magnetic municipality. Sure, there are some programs that do address mostly implementation of downtown infrastructure projects. However, there is a crucial need for technical assistance and creative consulting resulting in new ideas. Besides addressing the various economic, organizational, parking, storefronts, and commercial mix needs, to fulfill this economic potential, communities must somehow address the notion of their sense of place.

Scratching the surface of any city or town in Massachusetts, history immediately surfaces. Bubbling up, the good, bad, the seemingly insignificant, and the great appear. Annually, local historical societies bloom and prosper through-

out the Commonwealth. Flowering celebrations and seasonal cultural events, now that COVID-19 restrictions have dissipated, are blossoming across the state. Many seem to underscore the unique qualities of their locations. A town or city

needs to self-define by what makes it different from other communities. There are 351 stories in Massachusetts, and they should be told. This unique historical context is the foundation for potential individual urban or community branding, but not the only one. It is not just about Plymouth Rock, but about how Plymouth rocks.

As downtowns have been greatly affected over the last three years by the changes caused by COVID isolation, working at home, and even online buying habits, urban designers and planners need to reposition commercial parts of communities by asking the necessary questions about place identity. Now that we are able to travel, the creative solutions may be seen in some of the best examples of urban destinations.

Why is Paris unique? Is it the Eiffel Tower? Or Avenue des Champs-Élysées? Its neighborhood and commercial architecture? More to follow about Paris. What makes London, London?

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A town or city needs to self-define by what makes it different from other communities.

There are 351 stories in Massachusetts, and they should be told.

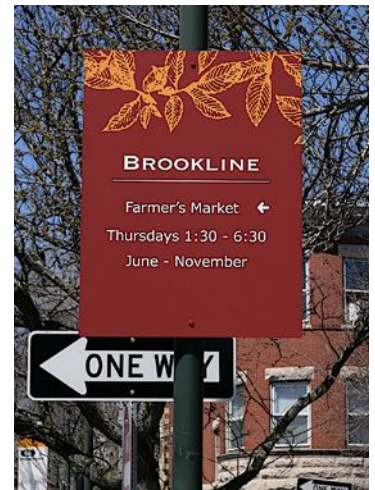
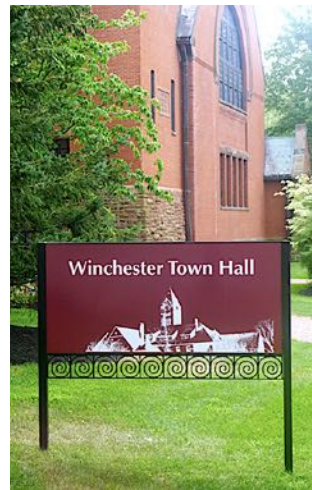
Photos: Favermann Design



Big Ben? Classic taxis? Red double-decker buses? Or fish and chips? And what about Washington, D.C.? It trumpets “government” as well as “nation’s capital,” while New York roars skyscrapers, financial markets, entertainment, and human energy. Rome proclaims itself by placing its ancient structures in a modern, vital context. Through its multiple church spires, its gigantic emperor’s palace, its old and new architecture, and its quaint Old Town, Prague announces its 800-year-old patinated existence. Municipality as metaphor, this notion of place identity is literally urban branding.

Looked at through the focused lens of design, urban branding establishes “image vitality” by way of a memorable reinforcement of civic or institutional identity. Our greatest cities and regions around the world exhibit this visual energy with exuberance. Smaller towns and cities can also embrace their own community branding. As the world becomes more and more urbanized, there is a clear need for a city or town to find ways to differentiate itself, to bolster its visible distinction for the sake of projecting an individual character, to reinforce its residential and commercial viability. Public character-defining and character-building contribute to perceptions of civic pride and pride of place. Unfortunately, a minority of the 351 Massachusetts communities evoke a clear personality.

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Urban branding is the application of large-scale markers to civic environments, corporate and commercial areas, healthcare, and other institutions, as well as sporting and cultural events to develop identity and reinforce public image. Urban branding is not only about logos, but include secondary and tertiary identification elements, such as visual themes, lighting, colors, symbolism, and typography. Elements of urban branding include gateways, entrances, signage, paving, fences, public art, street furniture, monuments, plantings, and streetscapes.

Wonderful examples of urban branding proclaim its power. Architect/designer Hector Guimard's Art Nouveau 80 Metro station entrances are sprinkled throughout Paris. La Rambla, which is at the heart of Barcelona, is a pedestrian promenade that generates the joy of living. Just as the cable cars and Golden Gate Bridge illustrate and illuminate the City of San Francisco, architect Eero Saarinen's stupendous Saint Louis Arch memorably marks this gateway city on the Mississippi River. Chicago's magnificent Millennium Park is a gathering place for thousands throughout the year.

These are all rather grand gestures. Closer to home, there are many scaled-down examples of effective urban or community branding as well. Often from grants given by the Commonwealth's significantly underfunded Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) program, Massachusetts communities that have fostered place identity

FAREWELL AND THANK YOU, ANGIE

Hello APA-MA and MAPD Planning friends,

As some of you know, our family is moving up to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, which means my time on these two awesome boards is coming to an end. As I wrap up my last days in Massachusetts, I wanted to send a word of thanks to all of you who I've worked with over the years in a volunteer capacity with APA-MA and MAPD. I have enjoyed working to create great communities with you. If we haven't connected on LinkedIn, send me an invite :)

Best to each of you and hope to see you at a conference (or anywhere!) soon!

Be well,

Angela Cleveland, AICP / aclevelandaicp@gmail.com

include Reading, Shrewsbury, Chelmsford, Winchester, Wellesley, Woburn, Brookline, Ipswich, Scituate, Southbridge, Hudson, Sturbridge, Shelburne Falls, and Wakefield. Several other communities are in the process of applying and implementing branded programs.

Urban branding both adds texture and image reinforcement to the fabric of the town or city. Because urban branding underscores a sense of arrival, a sense of shared experience—both visual and environmental, and even spiritual—it speaks to a sense of place, how it creates a particular civic experience, giving visual and

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even symbolic meaning to a specific location. This sense of strategic civic consciousness underscores tourism and residential appeal, while strongly encouraging a desired retail experience translating into increased image distinction and a strong municipal magnetism.

For example, appropriate wayfinding and signage feed into feelings of well-being and comfort in terms of safety and confidence. Branded street furniture and public art reinforce civic personality through creativity. In addition, urban branding can encourage sustainability and reinforce accessibility.

In an elemental sense, urban branding is how a civic entity defines itself. It is about the establishment of a place's unique character. Think of it as applying the concept of "personality" to a metropolitan area, city, town, neighborhood, or institution. Now augmented and reinforced by 21st century digital media, urban branding is about strategically adding civic personality, visual interest, even provocative perceptual surprises to our civic environment. More than ever, today there is a need for a visual poetry of place.

— Mark Favermann is principal of Boston-based Favermann Design, a creative urban design practice involved in community branding, wayfinding, strategic placemaking, storefront and façade enhancement, streetscapes, and public art.




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Biking for the Fun of It!

by Alyssa Sandoval, AICP, Deputy Chief Planner, City of Newton



Photos: Melisa Tintocalis

Combining biking with socializing was the approach from which Melisa Tintocalis (Town of Burlington Economic Development Director) and I planned the event highlighting the new Watertown-Cambridge Greenway for the APA Massachusetts chapter. We wanted to get everyone together again (post-COVID) and wanted to make the bike ride more casual by making the ride shorter with a few stops to point out unique features, and include a social component at the end, gathering at a local brewery, CityWorks.

Over 40 planners from across Massachusetts attended the bike/social event with approximately 30 bicyclists arriving at the Arsenal Park on a chilly afternoon in Watertown at the start of the event rounded out by others joining at CityWorks Brewery for the post-ride social. At the ride kick off, Melisa spoke about the simple enjoyment of biking to things within a 10-minute drive of home. Steve Magoon and Gideon Schreiber from the City of Watertown welcomed the crowd and described the background and community efforts that led to the planning of the bike path.

Planners were raring to go on their bikes when the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) team, Dan Driscoll and Stella Lensing, started a four-plus-mile roundtrip tour of the two-mile greenway highlighting the technical and logistical details, noting areas where DCR had to negotiate easements with state agencies and communities to tie in all the pieces.

Dan highlighted particularly challenging sections where the path needed to be located to negotiate City water systems and bridge overpasses.

Any new bike path traversing an already built urban landscape is often a long-standing effort, with the groundwork laid by many others. In the case of the Watertown-Cambridge Greenway, it was advocacy on the part of local bike groups and residents, who collaborated with the City of Watertown and the DCR, working with dedicated planners engaged on the project for decades to

[continued next page](#)



connect Watertown to the Fresh Pond Trail in Cambridge. Planning for the greenway link began in the 1990s and included a rezoning of the railroad property as Open Space by the City of Watertown. As is typical for most rail-trail projects, the project gained momentum when the DCR purchased the existing Boston and Maine Railroad right-of-way.

The Watertown Bicycle Committee's advocacy efforts kept the issue at the forefront on both the local and state level, increasing awareness of the importance of the Path link. The fully completed Watertown-Cambridge Greenway opened officially in 2022 to the delight of many. At a stop on the tour, David Loutzenheiser of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council noted that a bike counter stationed on the path had already logged 230,000 users over three years.

Beyond all this, the event was a chance to reconnect with our common love of the bicycle—a mode of transportation that does not need to be expensive and meets so many needs. It was also an acknowledgment to those planners who work in such a dedicated manner to create a network that supports this. Massachusetts is one of the top states in the creation of bike trails, with the League of American Bicyclists ranking Massachusetts first in



the nation for its actions to build a Bicycle Friendly America in 2022.

So, if you haven't done so in a while, we encourage you to go ahead; it's as easy as riding a bicycle.

— Alyssa Sandoval and Melisa Tintocalis are Social Coordinators for the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association. Please stay tuned for more events and activities.



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Special thanks to: **Dan Driscoll**, Green Transportation Director, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation | **Stella Lensing**, Senior Planner, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation | **Steve Magoon**, Assistant City Manager and Planning Director, City of Watertown | **Gideon Schreiber**, Assistant Director of Planning, City of Watertown | **Laura Wiener**, Senior Transportation Planner, City of Watertown | **All bicycle groups and community advocates** working on behalf of making the Cambridge-Watertown Greenway a reality

NEWS FROM CPM | Consulting Planners' Perspective

by Kathleen "Kathy" McCabe, FAICP, Vice-President, Consulting Planners of Massachusetts



Be Bold, Mr. Secretary, and Take Action

This month, Ed Augustus became the first secretary of the new state cabinet agency on Housing and Livable Communities. This comes as Massachusetts is in the midst of a housing crisis that has been brewing for decades but demands immediate action. Massachusetts has been under-producing housing and needs 135,000 to 200,000 new housing units across the Commonwealth.

The Boston-Cambridge-Newton Metro area has the lowest homeowner vacancy rates—0.5%—amongst the ten largest metro areas nationally. Housing prices rose faster in 2021 than rents. The Boston metro area now ranks amongst the five most expensive rent markets in the country.

The lack of housing production impacts not only housing costs but has ripple effects adversely affecting quality of life and the Commonwealth's economic future. As a state, we are losing population, attributable largely to the high cost of housing. Firms and businesses find recruiting and retaining talent in Massachusetts harder since prospective employees fear they cannot afford to buy a home here. This has a negative effect on state and local tax bases that help pay for schools and our communities.

New Housing Secretary Ed Augustus will need to take bold

action to help us all move forward on addressing Massachusetts's housing crisis. Consulting Planners of Massachusetts (CPM) wishes Secretary Augustus well and looks forward to working with the new Secretary. CPM offers 13 Housing Actions for Secretary Augustus.

1. Talk to people on the ground developing and building new housing and address the hurdles they are facing in permitting, financing, design, and construction. This means talking with nonprofits, community development corporations, and the for-profit development community, as well as planners. Engage those that have concerns with building additional housing in their neighborhoods. Tailor incentives and resources to address the hurdles facing housing developers.
2. Support and act on a Housing First policy to address the needs of many of the homeless residents throughout the Commonwealth.
3. The push for affordable housing should include affordable home ownership and rental housing options and incentives for both.
4. Take steps to ensure that *all* types of housing are being built. It is not one type that fits all

communities. Nearly every community needs additional housing but often differing types of housing. Different housing types and various levels of density should be supported and constructed.

5. Encourage municipalities to remove zoning barriers and streamline their permitting processes for housing, including publishing a Housing Permitting Guide for developers and builders of all sizes and types of housing. Local pre-permitting municipal meetings with representatives from all relevant boards and departments would be another plus.
6. Support of Housing Choice communities should be continued and expanded with funding for planning and pre-development to accelerate housing development, as well as funding and expansion of the Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP).
7. The housing crisis is not an excuse to build on every patch of green open space. The country and the Commonwealth have a mental health crisis, too. We learned from the pandemic that open space is critical for well-being. Moreover,

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Be Bold, Mr. Secretary *cont'd*

trees and green spaces are important components in addressing the climate change crisis.

8. Office space in the Commonwealth's downtowns is a housing opportunity. The Commonwealth with MassDevelopment and private sector partners should develop a team to help cities and towns assess what vacant office buildings in their downtowns can be more easily converted to residential and provide appropriate incentives.

9. Innovate and adopt new methods for designing and building housing, including off-site manufacturing. Design makes a difference in community acceptance of new housing models, let's use better design. Massachusetts is a brainy, creative state, so let's use our strengths to solve the housing crisis and build quicker and better.

10. Municipalities achieving housing production goals by constructing new housing units and complying with 40B should receive bonus payments with higher "cherry sheet" payments.

11. Existing housing needs to be preserved and updated, especially public housing and other subsidized housing. Existing housing needs to be stabilized and maintained. This requires state resources.

12. Incentivize homeownership in the form of multifamily condominium buildings. Young professionals and empty nesters aren't the only ones who can enjoy living in midrise buildings surrounded by great city amenities; families can as well. Those condominiums may need technical and financial support to function as healthy Housing and Livable Communities.

13. Taking stock of the Commonwealth's land and buildings for opportunities to locate and build housing is a good initial step. This assessment should also invite large private and nonprofit landowners, such as colleges, universities, and golf courses to identify how they can build housing and be partners in solving the housing crisis.

These 13 Housing Actions need not only to be implemented, but also address equity; incorporate climate resilient design such as passive house design and net-zero design; be close to jobs, transit/transportation infrastructure; and reinforce and support our town centers and downtowns. Congratulations, Mr. Secretary: Be Bold and Act! We are ready to assist.

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