MetroCommon x 2050 x Local Plan Review
Greater Boston's next regional plan
Led by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

Greater Boston's Local Priorities

Table of contents

Introduction

MetroCommon 2050 is a long-range regional plan. Its purpose is to dig into issues bigger than any one place, and to explore ways communities should work together. But part of what makes Greater Boston itself is the independence of its 101 cities and towns. Balancing that traditional local focus with the benefits of thinking regionally was MAPC's first MetroCommon challenge.

Our solution was to take what our cities and towns had written into their own plans, and use those priorities as the foundation of MetroCommon.

As of March, 2019, MAPC has completed a systematic project to catalog and analyze a large sampling of local plans. We found many differences from place to place. But we also found common concerns that have only common solutions.

We will be using values, data, and analysis from many sources to develop the regional plan. But what we found in the region's local plans is the bedrock on which we build MetroCommon 2050.

Findings and Conclusions Summary

In order to complete a consistent analysis of local planning information, the master plan was chosen as the most appropriate document type for the purpose of gaining insight into a municipality's local planning priorities. This research examined 47 master plans, or equivalent plans, from municipalities throughout the region and cataloged the priorities those plans set forth. The plans reviewed were from a well-distributed variety of geographies and community types.

The priorities identified by the local plan review are supported by direct quotes from each of the plan documents reviewed. The plan quotes have been compiled into a database that is sortable by priority, theme, subregion, or community type. This analysis is being used to inform the development of the goals, and strategies for MetroCommon.

Having reviewed the local plans, MAPC was able to identify a list of the most frequently repeated 20 priorities (represented by the underlined phrases below). We grouped those priorities to define the following four themes that are evident in local planning priorities throughout the region and that should be examined as part of the regional plan.

Shape Positive Investment. This theme is focused on guiding growth and development to shape positive change through revitalization, redevelopment of underutilized areas or assets, strengthening sustainability, addressing housing needs, and enhancing municipal assets. Several of the priorities that comprise this theme focus on guiding private investment, such as encouraging revitalization in locations with a concentration of activity, focusing redevelopment in locations that are underused or well-served by infrastructure, and encouraging commercial growth. Several other priorities that comprise this theme focus on guiding private and public investments, such as encouraging sustainable development, investing in municipal facilities and property to serve the needs of the community, producing more housing that is affordable, and expanding the types of housing available.

Care for the Environment. This theme is centered on stewardship and care for the environment, natural resources, historic assets, and open space systems that support healthy communities. Many priorities that elevate this theme were repeated across the local planning documents reviewed, including preserving and managing open space, protecting water sources and quality, protecting natural resources, and expanding recreation and programs for use of open space and natural assets. Another priority for stewardship is preserving history through the buildings, sites, and significant monuments that are important to many communities.

Improve Transportation Choices. This theme is concerned with improving how people get around and strengthening the choices people have for how they travel. The most frequently repeated priority is included in this theme with the priority of improving multimodal connections for walking and biking found in most of the plans reviewed. Several other top priorities focus on transportation, including improving transit service, access and operation, addressing traffic congestion and lessening its negative impacts, and improving walkability as a safe, reliable and healthy form of travel.

Strengthen Cooperation and Action. This theme is focused on the coordination and collaboration needed to advance community goals and effectively deliver municipal services. Several of these priorities focus on strengthening partnerships, such as coordinating regionally around the many issues that cross municipal borders, collaborating with partners to include a full range of private sector, public sector, non-profits, and others in solutions, and improving communication and engagement. Coordination and collaboration will assist with achieving the final frequently stated priority, efficiently delivering municipal services.

Other observations about the local priorities identified through this research:

- The most frequently referenced priorities fall within the Inclusive Growth and Mobility category. This category is most closely aligned with the priorities that would fall under "Smart Growth" and are focused on physical infrastructure and the built environment of sidewalks, roads, buildings, and open space amenities.
- Studying the differences in priorities between subregions and community types is interesting. Shifts in the priorities are evident between different subgroups. One example of this is affordable housing as a priority. Affordable housing is not elevated into the top five of the overall priorities, but is the number one priority of the community type of regional urban centers. This highlights the development patterns, assets, and roles these types of municipalities share throughout the region.
- Transportation is a high priority regardless of a municipality's subregion or community type. Improving how people get around and their mobility choices are fundamental priorities for all municipalities. Some variation occurs within this general priority and is connected to the location of the municipality, the type of transportation assets available, and the development patterns of the municipality.

- While several priorities emerge that would address issues of equity in the region, equity is not a word frequently used in the local plan documents. Equity is not frequently addressed directly as a local plan priority.

Local Plan Priorities and Themes

MAPC's review, sorting, and compiling of the 42 master plans and the five additional plans of 47 municipalities has resulted in the following lists of prioritized themes. We based the prioritization on the number of plans that reference the same or similar idea and the frequency that idea was referenced in the individual plans. We organized the priorities across several distinct groups in order to spot any differences among the groups.

The first grouping represents the overall regional priorities, and it includes all plans we reviewed. The second category of groupings represent the subregional priorities, and include only those plans from municipalities in a particular subregion. The third category represent community type priorities, and include only those plans from municipalities in a particular community type.

Regional

Order of priority based on number of entries for each topic and then sum of the frequency count.

The Top 20 Overall Local Planning Priorities include priorities that are highlighted in a majority of the plans reviewed. Each priority in this list was highlighted in at least 55% of the 47 municipalities' plans. The other local plan priorities outlined beyond the Top 20 did not reach this threshold of being included in a majority of the plans reviewed. The highest priority, "improve multimodal connections," is highlighted in 87% of the plans reviewed.

The Top 20 Overall Local Planning Priorities – Unclassified Throughout Region

1. Improve multimodal connections *(94) (The number of rows in the compiled spreadsheet of local plan priorities is 94. This number, a measure of the frequency of this priority across the plans reviewed and has been used to rank the list of priorities.)*: Nearly all of the plans highlighted the need for improved sidewalk and bicycle facilities to encourage walking, biking, and the use of public transportation in their communities. Improvements for walking and biking were consistently framed as improving connectivity and the ability to get around without a car, or to provide a diverse set of travel options. Some communities framed this priority as expanding inclusiveness and enhancing mobility for people of all ages and abilities. Pedestrian and bicycle connections between important local destinations were highlighted and were discussed as part of the street system and as part of an independent system of trails and paths.

This quote from Framingham's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "Provide pedestrian connections between residential neighborhoods and adjacent commercial and industrial areas by providing high quality pedestrian and bicycle access." Watertown's Comprehensive Plan expands on this priority: "Promote alternative transportation options in town by further improving intermodal access and connections." Watertown's plan highlights the "potential for the Watertown Community Path to bring a multimodal opportunity to travel to and through the square … [and to pursue] transportation demand management measures employed to reduce automobile use." Another perspective is provided with this quote from Milton's Master Plan: "Promote walking and biking. There is a significant increase in the awareness of the connection between planning and health and wellness. Milton residents placed a high priority on making improvements to the ability to walk and bike in a safe and pleasant manner." Gloucester's Harbor Economic Development Plan also prioritizes the

improvement of multimodal connections, including "improve[ing] access and circulation," as well as "land access and water access," and "extending the Harborwalk."

2. Preserve and manage open space *(88)*: Another highlight of many local plans was the preservation and management of open space in order to protect natural resources, meet the needs of residents, preserve habitats, and to preserve scenic beauty and character. For many cities and towns, this priority focuses on the identification and acquisition of additional open space or conservation land. Others focus this priority on responsible management and maintenance of lands under the municipality's control or responsibility.

This quote from Littleton's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "The Master Plan recommends that the Town creates individual management plans for town-owned open space and agricultural lands to determine the best use of these assets and to make sure these assets are maintained over time." Burlington's Comprehensive Master Plan frames this priority as "Preserve open space through acquisition or other measures to protect and link natural resources to contribute to the Town's character." Another perspective is provided with this quote from Southborough's Master Plan: "Southborough has worked to protect its natural resources through conservation restrictions, land acquisition, and zoning initiatives. Perhaps most important, the Town has supported the purchase of key open space parcels. The recent adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) will allow the Town to allocate money for the purchase and protection of key open space resources."

3. Encourage revitalizing investment *(82)*: Many plans outlined priorities to encourage investment to revitalize downtowns, town centers, village centers, and neighborhood centers. The municipalities recognize the importance of these centers of activity from historic, social, civic, cultural, and economic perspectives. The revitalization efforts highlighted included expanding range of activity, goods and services in these centers and strengthening the civic realm, shared amenities, and programs.

This quote from Somerville's SomerVision Comprehensive Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "Strengthen and support neighborhood commercial centers that integrate residential uses, offer lively destinations and contribute to Somerville's unique identity." Dedham's Master Plan provides a similar perspective on the priority: "Encourage and support the revitalization of neighborhood commercial centers such as East Dedham, Dedham Square, Oakdale Square, and the Route 109/Bridge Street area." Another perspective is provided in Concord's *Envision Concord* Plan: "Renew and improve Concord's village centers as vital pedestrian-friendly, economic, and social hubs that enable community engagement on a wider scale."

4. Invest in facilities and property *(73)*: This priority is focused on municipally-owned facilities and property and typically includes two related approaches to investment. The first includes investments in municipal facilities and property to preserve and maintain the asset while enhancing the use of the asset to support municipal services. The second includes the strategic assessment of municipal facilities and properties to leverage the assets for use by others, or to align with other municipal goals and objectives.

This quote from Franklin's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "Maintain, update and expand the Town's utilities, infrastructure and facilities to satisfy the demands of the Town into the future, without infringing on previously established plans for conservation or preservation." The Hudson Master Plan highlights investment in municipal facilities with this quote: "Improve the comprehensive planning process for short- and long-term capital improvements for all town facilities and services. … Given the often conflicting demands,

establish priorities for building and facility upgrades and replacement." Another perspective is provided in Malden's Master Plan: "Malden's community facilities and services support community needs and enhance quality of life. We will implement, maintain, and upgrade essential community facilities and services to meet existing demand and support growth where feasible and appropriate. Our community facilities will be high quality public spaces for all to enjoy and access."

5. Preserve history *(66)*: This priority more specifically relates to the preservation of historic and cultural assets in a municipality. The assets highlighted include buildings, sites, documents, archaeological resources, landscape features, viewsheds, and other local features. Preservation is pursued through tools such as zoning, the Community Preservation Act, demolition delay bylaws, documentation of assets, expanding public awareness, and other strategies.

This quote from Belmont's Comprehensive Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "Broaden preservation and protection of Belmont's historic buildings, sites and neighborhoods." Belmont's Plan outlines similar approaches: "[E]ducate the public on the benefits of historic preservation … [C]onsider adoption of demolition delay by-law … [C]onsider adoption of the Community Preservation Act… [U]pdate national Register of Historic Places … [E]nact density bonuses, flexible dimensional and parking standards to facilitate preservation." Middleton's Master Plan offers this perspective on the priority of preserving history: "Enhance efforts to protect and maintain Middleton's historic and cultural resources. Create, maintain and update inventory list of properties with historical significance and highlight those properties that may be at risk. Form Preservation or Restoration Committees for primary historic building resources, such as the Flint Library or Old Town Hall. Form a support network for historic home owners to promote awareness of historic homes and connect homeowners to resources." Another perspective can be found in Medway's Master Plan: "Preserving buildings and places of historical and/or unique and significant architectural character was important. A structure is of significant historic value in its either architecture or relation to a prominent person in the history of Medway or the Commonwealth. The Town needs to be more pro-active in the preservation of these sites."

6. Efficiently deliver services *(66)*: This priority generalizes many specific and related municipal goals and strategies that pertain to the efficient delivery of municipal services, including interdepartmental communication and coordination, supporting municipal boards and committees, and aligning municipal services with community needs.

This quote from Natick's Comprehensive Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "As Natick's population changes, invest in facilities and staff that will provide services to meet residents' needs." Hingham's Master Plan Update provides the following perspective on the efficient delivery of services: "Clarify maintenance responsibilities for town-owned facilities, properties and recreational sites to ensure timely and cost-effective maintenance." Another perspective comes from Stoughton's Master Plan, "Departments should continue to find ways to enhance service and increase efficiency." The plan offers approaches to this priority, including "increasing opportunities for cooperation and collaboration…" and "establishing protocols for inter-department/board/committee coordination and communication."

***7.* Focus redevelopment *(59)*:** This priority highlights directing growth and investment to specific locations in the municipality including concentrating development in existing commercial or industrial areas, clustering development near infrastructure, or locations that would strengthen smart growth in the community, and investing in underutilized properties, buildings, or districts.

This quote from Cambridge's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "Promote redevelopment and/or rehabilitation of areas currently

characterized by obsolete commercial buildings, surface parking lots, automobile-oriented patterns of development, and other development that is inconsistent with the city's urban design objectives." Boxborough's Master Plan provides the following quotes related to focused redevelopment: "Encourage economic development which will improve the quality of life for residents, such as supporting development of a village-like area with restaurants, pubs, shops, fitness and health services, and other amenities. … Economic development will be focused in existing commercial areas." Another perspective can be found in Randolph's Comprehensive Master Plan: "To minimize the strain on environmental and municipal systems, new development should be located and concentrated to use existing infrastructure."

8. Produce affordable housing *(53)*: Housing affordability and rent-burdened households are recognized as an issue in many of the local plans. Increasing the supply of affordable housing is discussed by many of the plans as a way to address this issue through inclusionary zoning, other innovative zoning approaches, working with the municipal housing trust, or pursuing local initiative units. Other techniques to produce affordable housing include creating a municipal housing plan, or retaining housing stock that is currently affordable. Many plans relate discussion of housing affordability to Chapter 40B requirements and the subsidized housing inventory.

This quote from Hanover's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "Support the creation of housing units that are affordable to a broad range of incomes, including both rental units and owner units. Identify locations to encourage development of diversified affordable housing opportunities including infill housing and adaptive reuse of any abandoned, underutilized, or obsolete property." Another perspective is in Melrose's Community Vision and Master Plan: "Encourage the creation of housing units that are affordable to a broad range of incomes. Promote regulations that permit a variety of residential types, ensuring Melrose residents of all ages and incomes can remain in Melrose. Identify opportunities where the City will encourage new housing affordable to a broad range of incomes."

9. Improve transit *(51)*: Regardless of the level of public transportation service in a community, many local plans identified improvement of public transit as a priority. This improvement was typically linked to the type of existing transit services and may include improvements to commuter rail, better bus and shuttle connections to activity centers or transit stations, or improved subway service. Even communities with limited public transit options outlined strategies for increasing public transit options. Most of the priorities recognize that the municipality is not responsible for the transit system, but focus on the responsibility for advocacy around the desired improvements.

This quote from Woburn's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "Improve access to transit. Study and establish a shuttle service between Anderson RTC and major employment areas. Investigate feasibility of establishing or partnering with a transportation management organization or association. Construct a footbridge between Anderson RTC and Merrimac Street. Improve bus stops." There is another perspective in Peabody's Downtown Brownfield Revitalization and Economic Development Plan: "Encourage expanded utilization of bus transit and improve existing facilities" and "Explore the Feasibility of Trolley Line or Light Rail to Salem Station."

10. Improve communication and engagement *(50)*: This priority focuses specifically on communication from and within the municipality, and engagement between the municipality and its citizens. Many plans highlight priorities to improve communication and coordination between departments, boards, and committees as well as between the municipal government and its citizens. Improving engagement is focused on broadening and deepening citizen participation in governance and improving the transparency of decision-making processes.

This quote from Manchester's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "… the working together theme as being an important key to helping the town and its residents identify issues, share information, work through making decisions in a transparent manner, and find ways to keep people involved with the town governance, planning, and initiatives ... importance of improving communications and coordination to create efficiency and improve the decision making process." Another perspective comes from Duxbury's Draft Master Plan: "Prioritize effective communication and collaboration within town government and with the public. … Clarify roles and responsibilities between boards, committees, and professional staff. … Continue to disseminate important information through a variety of channels and refine outreach strategies when appropriate."

11. Expand housing type diversity *(46)*: A majority of the housing stock in many of the region's municipalities is resident-owned single family homes. A priority defined as expanding housing type diversity is focused on providing housing different from single family homes. This may be achieved through different housing types (townhouses, apartments, micro-housing units), differences in size of housing (tiny houses and accessory dwelling units), or different housing tenure (rental versus owned). Many municipalities have identified that not enough of these other types of housing are available in their community.

The following quotes from Bellingham's Master Plan are consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority, "(T)he town may need additional smaller housing, attached or multi-family units as older residents often prefer smaller units with lower costs and maintenance responsibilities. … More variety is needed to meet the needs of older residents, smaller households and lower-income households. … Different types of housing, such as smaller homes or apartments, can provide diverse housing for residents other than families." Another perspective appears in Cohasset's Draft Master Plan identifying the "need for more housing options in Cohasset, whether that be increased affordability, additional rental opportunities, more housing appropriate for smaller households, or more options for seniors."

12. Coordinate regionally *(46)*: More than two-thirds of the municipal plans refer to the priority of coordinating regionally to address issues that extend beyond the boundaries of a single city or town. Many of these topics included addressing issues with the transportation system connections across municipal boundaries, the economic development and housing market dynamics that are not constrained to municipal borders, or leveraging additional resources that cannot be offered by a city or town alone. MAPC provides support for this regional coordination and connects municipalities through partnerships such as the Metro Mayors Coalition, the Subregional Meetings, coalitions such as the Mystic River Watershed, or shared issues and topics such as suburban mobility improvements.

This quote from Stow's Master Plan Update is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority, "Plan regionally: Where possible, coordinate intermunicipal and regional planning to produce better outcomes that recognize that economic development, water, transportation, and housing are regional in nature; they don't stop at the Town boundary." Another perspective is in Foxborough's Master Plan: "Foxborough needs working relationships with [regional and state entities] to partner on economic development initiatives and to leverage its limited staff and volunteer leadership resources." The Swampscott Master Plan highlights the importance of regionalization of critical services, such as Police and Fire Departments, where "efficiency can be improved upon through regionalization of some services." It goes on to say, "Both departments have some shared dispatch services with the City of Lynn and access to Lynn's lockup for the police and police are looking to continue regionalization, the Town is a member of regional law enforcement councils."

13. Encourage sustainable development *(43)*: More than half of the plans highlight the need for investments in new and existing buildings and sites to follow best practices that have been established for sustainable development. The priority applies to both municipal facilities and private facilities. Many municipalities position public investments as a way to lead by example and encourage similar private commitments to sustainable development; or to encourage new incentives or regulations that would encourage sustainability.

This quote from Wellesley's Unified Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "Promote green and sustainable building practices in the private sector through the Town's development standards." Marshfield's Master Plan says, "Lead by example in community facilities and operations by establishing sustainability principles and initiatives."

14. Collaborate with partners *(43)*: This priority highlights the need for effective partnerships between the municipality and an external entity. Many plans call for public-private partnerships between the municipality and businesses, institutions or non-profits; and for the collaboration to be around a specific topic, such as development, privatization of services, public safety, support services, or housing. Some partnerships refer to a specific stakeholder, such as the U.S. Air Force, when such an entity is present in the community. Several of the priorities discussing partnerships are focused on partnering with the community through engagement with specific stakeholder groups, leveraging the collaborative efforts of citizens, or partnering with local nonprofits to leverage action in a specific area of focus.

The City of Boston's Master Plan discusses expanding partnerships as part of several priorities. Several examples from this plan include a broad range of collaboration with partners, including: "Encourage partnerships among district, charter, religious and independent schools. … A collaborative waterfront is planned … through partnership with relevant jurisdictions. … We will support and coordinate with nongovernmental organizations as well as religious and community organizations that strengthen community fabrics and break the cycle of violence." Another perspective is provided by Lincoln's Master Plan: "Maintain communication with non-profit organizations and institutions in Lincoln in order to integrate their long-range plans with the town's plans." The plan continues to call for "establishing regular meetings between non-profits and other governmental agencies with a working group of town officials …" and that "many local cultural organizations cite needs for improved communication with each other, the town, and the public."

15. Address traffic congestion *(42)*: The only surprise to many drivers is that this is not higher on the list of priorities. Since the previous regional plan in 2008, traffic congestion has become an even more common occurrence and issue. Two-thirds of the plans that were reviewed identified addressing traffic congestion as a major priority. While the issue is easy to recognize, the solutions were not as resoundingly identified. Options ranged from improving roadway efficiency, strengthening alternatives to driving, and reducing the need for auto trips, among others.

This quote from Arlington's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for addressing "significant traffic congestion" as a priority. "Manage congestion safely and efficiently by improving traffic operations." A very straightforward statement that is difficult to achieve. Another perspective comes from the Town of Sherborn's Master Plan: "[O]ptimize traffic safety for all users on primary, secondary, and tertiary roads throughout town." The plan continues with a more specific priority to "invest in a traffic study to identify ways to facilitate the flow of traffic."

16. Protect water sources and quality *(40)*: The protection of water sources and quality in this priority broadly covers surface water features (coastal municipalities, lakes, ponds, rivers) and drinking water sources (wells, aquifers, reservoirs) in the region. Those features are associated with

municipal concerns for contamination from wastewater, untreated stormwater runoff, pesticides, herbicides, or other development impacts.

The Town of Dover's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority and covers the range of priorities that are typically emphasized including "preserve and protect the groundwater water supplies. … [S]trictly enforce regulations to guard against any commercial activity which would adversely affect Dover's aquifer and endanger our water supply. … [C]ontinue to research methods, policies, and regulations to reduce the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and road salt." Another perspective is in Acton's Master Plan. "Protecting its water resources ... avoiding the need to later remediate impacts to the Town's drinking water. … [C]onsider a sewer extension and/or advanced package wastewater treatment with groundwater recharge in order to ... better manage wastewater in West Acton."

17. Encourage commercial growth *(40)*: This priority is most often associated with a two commonly shared and related perspectives. First, commercial growth is typically encouraged in a targeted area that has been previously developed with some commercial uses or is a historic center of commercial activity. Second, the encouraged commercial growth is often associated with a discussion of tax benefits to the municipality.

This quote from Bedford's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority. "… its employment and business base still needs to expand to stabilize the residential tax burden. … [A] strong employment base and property tax revenues are essential." From Beverly's Strategic Plan for Downtown: "Strengthen Cabot Street's role as a commercial center for the community, colleges, and tourists. Cabot Street has historically served as Beverly's primary commercial corridor, and many of the key components that made it a strong, community-serving commercial corridor are still in place and can be augmented with new businesses."

18. Protect natural resources *(36)*: This priority is similar to the priority of protecting water sources and quality, but expands to include other natural resources, and focuses on natural features, scenic views, and wildlife habitats. The natural resources generally include wetlands, forests, water features, open spaces, and conservation lands.

This quote from Wilmington's Open Space and Recreation Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "[P]rotect the Town's natural resources and open space areas that support water protection, flood management and essential wildlife habitat ecosystems." As is this, from Lincoln's Master Plan: "Save natural landscapes and farms, protect wetlands and water supplies, and preserve scenic views. ... [S]aving land from development is only one aspect of stewardship. Like any other asset, land needs to be managed. … It takes a culture of public responsibility, effective regulations and enforcement, and stewardship to ensure high quality land and water resources and plentiful wildlife habitat."

19. Improve walkability *(34)*: Improving the ability to walk between destinations or as a primary way of getting around is identified as a priority in more than half of the plans reviewed. This priority is typically associated with a specific location in the municipality and is often associated with a compact area that is active with a variety of uses or desirable destinations, including open space or recreation activities.

This quote from Reading's Economic Development Action Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority: "[E]nhance walkability and connectivity within and between the priority redevelopment areas (PDAs). … Make infrastructure investments that will create a safe and welcoming pedestrian environment between the PDAs and between the PDAs and the Commuter Rail station." Reading's Bicycle Network and Pedestrian Priority Plan

emphasizes the need to "prioritize sidewalk investments proactively – the Town should review its approach to prioritizing sidewalk construction and repairs. One consideration for prioritizing sidewalk construction and improvements could be the Neighborhood Walks Map." The Town of Ashland's Master Plan says, "[C]reate sidewalk connectivity and linkages between neighborhoods and key amenities. … [S]trengthen existing commercial/shopping plaza nodes on Route 126 by adding new uses, enhancing walkability and adding open space and landscape amenities."

20. Expand recreation and programs *(34)*: A complement to priorities related to conservation and preservation of open space, this priority's focus was to provide facilities, improvements, and programs to activate the natural and recreational assets that a municipality has available.

This quote from Hopkinton's Master Plan is consistent with language used by many of the other plans for this priority. "Provide a balanced recreation program that meets the growing needs of the community. … Demands for active and passive recreation have changed with household and population growth, and the Town has at times found it difficult to accommodate them." Burlington's Master Plan frames the priority in a similar way: "Provide diverse recreational opportunities including both passive and active recreation. … [while] looking for more organized recreational facilities and more access to communal open spaces. … [to provide] equal access to a variety of opportunities for physical exercise and social gathering. … [In response to the] greater demand on the [Parks & Recreation] department … provide more [facilities and programs]."

Below is a simplified list of the same 20 local planning priorities that were most frequently identified in the local plans reviewed.

List of the Top 20 Local Planning Priorities

1. Improve multimodal connections *(94)*
2. Preserve and manage open space *(88)*
3. Encourage revitalizing investment *(82)*
4. Invest in facilities and property *(73)*
5. Preserve history *(66)*
6. Efficiently deliver services *(66)*
7. Focus redevelopment *(59)*
8. Produce affordable housing *(53)*
9. Improve transit *(51)*
10. Improve communication and engagement *(50)*
11. Expand housing type diversity *(46)*
12. Coordinate regionally *(46)*
13. Encourage sustainable development *(43)*
14. Collaborate with partners *(43)*
15. Address traffic congestion *(42)*
16. Protect water sources and quality *(40)*
17. Encourage commercial growth *(40)*
18. Protect natural resources *(36)*
19. Improve walkability *(34)*
20. Expand recreation and programs *(34)*

Exemplar Plans

Considering the Top 20 priorities that have emerged from this research, it is interesting to reflect on the collection of plans that were reviewed and identify those that showcase many of these most

common priorities. Below is a list of the plans reviewed from each subregion that includes the most common priorities identified. The list is in descending order for the number of Top 20 priorities that are highlighted in the plan, starting with Arlington, who's Master Plan integrated and featured all 20 of the mostly frequently highlighted shared priorities. The number of top priorities found within each plan are included after the municipality and subregion abbreviation.

- Arlington, ICC, (20 of 20)
- Lincoln, MAGIC, (19 of 20)
- Burlington, NSPC, (18 of 20)
- Framingham and Southborough, MetroWest, (17 of 20)
- Hopkinton, SWAP, (17 of 20)
- Stoughton, TRIC, (17 of 20)
- Marshfield, SSC, (16 of 20)
- Swampscott, NSTF (15 of 20)

The Top 5 Local Planning Priorities by Theme

When classified into the preliminary planning themes, or categories, used to organize research and information at the beginning of the MetroCommon process, additional priorities rise to the top of the lists. The preliminary planning themes include "Equity of Wealth and Health," "Climate Mitigation and Resiliency," "Homes for All," "Inclusive Growth and Mobility," and "Dynamic and Representative Government." An "Open Topic" category was also added for local planning priorities that did not match one of the theme categories. As the local plans were reviewed, the themes were helpful in classifying and organizing information. These preliminary planning themes were determined independent of this research and were not based on the local plans review.

Classifying the information into themes presents an opportunity for comparison of the thematic priorities of the local plans. The highest priorities, based on frequency and prevalence in the local plans, fall under the "Inclusive Growth and Mobility" theme. These are mostly smart growth topics, and express priorities relating to the physical environment, infrastructure, mobility, and development patterns. The next highest priorities fell under the "Climate Mitigation and Resiliency" and "Dynamic and Representative Government" themes. The themes with the lowest level of priorities but with significant representation in the reviewed plans, based on frequency and prevalence in the local plans, fell under "Homes for All" and "Equity of Wealth and Health."

In addition to providing these insights into the themes of overall priorities, the set of 25 local plan priorities organized by theme reveal differences from the overall set of the Top 20 Overall Local Planning Priorities. New priorities not previously shown in the list of Top 20 emerge in this listing. This sorting by theme categories also highlights the finding of higher priorities clustering under certain themes. In the "Open Topic" category, the priorities are focused on preservation, events, programming, and arts and culture.

<u>Equity of Wealth and Health</u>

1. Provide economic development resources (32)
2. Improve public health and safety (31)
3. Support education programs (25)
4. Support small businesses (25)
5. Expand local job opportunities (23)

Climate Mitigation and Resiliency
1. Preserve and manage open space (88)
2. Encourage sustainable development (43)
3. Protect water sources and quality (40)
4. Protect natural resources (36)
5. Reduce and manage energy use (32)

Homes for All
1. Produce affordable housing (53)
2. Expand housing type diversity (46)
3. Preserve housing and character (28)
4. Concentrate location of housing investment (28)
5. Expand housing resources (26)

Inclusive Growth and Mobility
1. Improve multimodal connections (94)
2. Encourage context appropriate development (82)
3. Focus redevelopment (59)
4. Improve public transit (51)
5. Address traffic congestion (42)

Dynamic and Representative Government
1. Invest in facilities/property (73)
2. Efficiently deliver services (66)
3. Improve communication and engagement (50)
4. Coordinate regionally (46)
5. Collaborate with partners (43)

Open Topic
1. Preserve history (66)
2. Expand recreation and programs (34)
3. Encourage arts and culture (28)
4. Preserve community character (26)
5. Protect rural features (13)

All Local Planning Priorities Identified by Theme

The previous list of local priorities by theme included only the Top Five for each category of preliminary planning themes. Below is a list of all local plan priorities organized by the same theme categories.

Equity of Wealth and Health
1. Provide economic development resources (32)
2. Improve public health and safety (31)
3. Support education programs (25)
4. Support small businesses (25)
5. Expand local job opportunities (23)
6. Encourage diversity (21)
7. Support senior populations (14)
8. Support workforce development (14)

9. Grow innovation/creative economy (13)
10. Improve services (12)
11. Improve accessibility (10)
12. Support local businesses (10)
13. Strengthen tax base (9)
14. Support home occupations (7)
15. Strengthen community (3)
16. Improve access to healthy food (2)
17. Strengthen social equity (2)

Climate Mitigation and Resiliency

1. Preserve and manage open space (88)
2. Encourage sustainable development (43)
3. Protect water sources and quality (40)
4. Protect natural resources (36)
5. Reduce and manage energy use (32)
6. Raise environmental awareness (29)
7. Prepare for climate change (27)
8. Manage surface water (22)
9. Protect wildlife (19)
10. Increase renewable energy use (18)
11. Increase open space access (15)
12. Protect air quality (14)
13. Improve infrastructure (12)
14. Protect and care for trees (10)
15. Reduce and manage waste (10)
16. Increase sustainability of facilities (9)
17. Protect coastal areas (9)
18. Promote sustainable farming (8)

Homes for All

1. Produce affordable housing (53)
2. Expand housing type diversity (46)
3. Preserve housing and character (28)
4. Concentrate location of housing investment (28)
5. Expand housing resources (26)
6. Increase senior housing (22)
7. Support vulnerable populations (17)
8. Preserve affordable housing (14)
9. Increase housing supply (12)
10. Promote mixed-use housing (11)
11. Improve housing quality (10)
12. Expand special needs housing (10)
13. Allow accessory units (9)
14. Align zoning (8)
15. Promote homeownership (7)
16. Continue public outreach (7)
17. Develop multifamily housing (6)
18. Work with housing partners (5)
19. Attract new residents (4)

20. Control housing production (4)
21. Promote walkable housing (3)
22. Increase rental housing (3)

Inclusive Growth and Mobility

1. Improve multimodal connections (94)
2. Encourage context-sensitive development (82)
3. Focus redevelopment (59)
4. Improve public transit (51)
5. Address traffic congestion (42)
6. Encourage commercial growth (40)
7. Improve walkability (34)
8. Align zoning approaches (34)
9. Address parking (32)
10. Improve streetscapes (27)
11. Encourage mixed-use development (25)
12. Encourage sustainable growth patterns (20)
13. Attract investment (20)
14. Encourage bicycling (19)
15. Balance growth and impacts (18)
16. Encourage transit-oriented development (16)
17. Implement complete streets (14)
18. Mitigate technology impacts (14)
19. Encourage retail and restaurant growth (13)
20. Improve roads (11)
21. Increase infrastructure capacity (11)
22. Reuse remediated sites/brownfields (7)
23. Encourage reuse and redevelopment (4)

Dynamic and Representative Government

1. Invest in facilities/property (73)
2. Efficiently deliver services (66)
3. Improve communication and engagement (50)
4. Coordinate regionally (46)
5. Collaborate with partners (43)
6. Strengthen finances (24)
7. Support staff resources (20)
8. Improve technology (12)
9. Align regulations (11)
10. Seek alternative funding (11)
11. Coordinate long term (7)
12. Promote public awareness of resources (7)

Open Topic

1. Preserve history (66)
2. Expand recreation and programs (34)
3. Encourage arts and culture (28)
4. Preserve community character (26)
5. Protect rural features (13)
6. Promote and manage tourism (9)

7. Maintain or improve aesthetics (4)
8. Promote coastal improvements (2)
9. Reinforce high quality of life (2)

The Top 5 Local Planning Priorities by Subregion

The distribution of the master plans reviewed across the region allowed a categorization of the results by subregion to review geographic differences or similarities across the eight subregions that comprise the region. The top 5 priorities for each subregion are shown below.

The Top 5 Local Planning Priorities by Subregion

Inner Core Committee (ICC)
1. Improve multimodal connections (19)
2. Encourage context-sensitive development (17)
3. Preserve and manage open space (15)
4. Preserve history (15)
5. Improve communication and engagement (13)

MetroWest Regional Collaborative (MetroWest)
1. Improve multimodal connections (17)
2. Efficiently deliver services (15)
3. Focus redevelopment (10)
4. Preserve and manage open space (9)
5. Encourage commercial growth (8)

Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC)
1. Invest in facilities/property (18)
2. Improve multimodal connections (16)
3. Improve public transit (16)
4. Preserve and manage open space (15)
5. Focus redevelopment (15)

North Shore Task Force (NSTF)
1. Preserve and manage open space (11)
2. Improve multimodal connections (9)
3. Attract investments (7)
4. Preserve history (6)
5. Improve walkability (5)

North Suburban Planning Council (NSPC)
1. Improve multimodal connections (10)
2. Preserve and manage open space (10)
3. Produce affordable housing (7)
4. Invest in facilities/property (4)
5. Efficiently deliver services (4)

South Shore Coalition (SSC)
1. Invest in facilities/property (13)
2. Reduce and manage energy use (12)
3. Preserve history (10)
4. Improve multimodal connections (9)
5. Improve communication and engagement (7)

South West Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP)

1. Preserve and manage open space (9)
2. Coordinate regionally (8)
3. Encourage commercial growth (8)
4. Encourage sustainable development (7)
5. Preserve history (7)

Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC)

1. Preserve and manage open space (15)
2. Efficiently deliver services (14)
3. Encourage downtown investment (12)
4. Preserve history (10)
5. Invest in facilities/property (10)

The Top 5 Local Planning Priorities by Community Type

The distribution of the master plans reviewed across the region allowed a categorization of the results by community type to differences or similarities across the four generalized types of communities that comprise the region. The top 5 priorities for each community type are shown below.

The Top 5 Local Planning Priorities by Community Type

Inner Core

1. Improve multimodal connections (18)
2. Encourage context-sensitive development (17)
3. Preserve and manage open space (15)
4. Preserve history (12)
5. Invest in facilities/property (11)

Regional Urban Centers

1. Produce affordable housing (10)
2. Preserve and manage open space (8)
3. Improve multimodal connections (8)
4. Efficiently deliver services (8)
5. Encourage context-sensitive development (7)

Maturing Suburbs

1. Improve multimodal connections (45)
2. Preserve and manage open space (38)
3. Invest in facilities/property (35)
4. Preserve history (30)
5. Efficiently deliver services (30)

Developing Suburbs

1. Preserve and manage open space (28)
2. Efficiently deliver services (25)
3. Improve multimodal connections (23)
4. Invest in facilities/property (23)
5. Focus redevelopment (21)

Full Listing of Local Plan Priorities

In addition to the top 20 priorities and the variety of ways that the top priorities can be sorted, this research produced a longer list of priorities that emerged through the review of local plans. Below is an uncategorized list of the local planning priorities identified. It includes 100 local planning priorities with the least frequently referenced at the bottom of the list.

1. Improve multimodal connections (94)
2. Preserve and manage open space (88)
3. Encourage context appropriate development (82)
4. Invest in facilities/property (73)
5. Preserve history (66)
6. Efficiently deliver services (66)
7. Focus redevelopment (59)
8. Produce affordable housing (53)
9. Improve transit (51)
10. Improve communication and engagement (50)
11. Expand housing type diversity (46)
12. Coordinate regionally (46)
13. Encourage sustainable development (43)
14. Collaborate with partners (43)
15. Address traffic congestion (42)
16. Protect water sources and quality (40)
17. Encourage commercial growth (40)
18. Protect natural resources (36)
19. Improve walkability (34)
20. Expand recreation and programs (34)
21. Align zoning approaches (34)
22. Provide economic development resources (32)
23. Reduce and manage energy use (32)
24. Address parking (32)
25. Improve public health and safety (31)
26. Raise environmental awareness (29)
27. Preserve housing and character (28)
28. Concentrate location of housing investment (28)
29. Encourage arts and culture (28)
30. Prepare for climate change (27)
31. Improve streetscapes (27)
32. Expand housing resources (26)
33. Preserve community character (26)
34. Support education programs (25)
35. Support small businesses (25)
36. Encourage mixed-use development (25)
37. Strengthen finances (24)
38. Expand local job opportunities (23)
39. Manage surface water (22)
40. Increase senior housing (22)
41. Encourage diversity (21)
42. Encourage sustainable growth patterns (20)
43. Attract investment (20)

44. Support staff resources (20)
45. Protect wildlife (19)
46. Encourage bicycling (19)
47. Balance growth and impacts (18)
48. Increase renewable energy use (18)
49. Support vulnerable populations (17)
50. Encourage transit-oriented development (16)
51. Increase open space access (15)
52. Protect air quality (14)
53. Support senior populations (14)
54. Support workforce development (14)
55. Preserve affordable housing (14)
56. Implement complete streets (14)
57. Mitigate technology impacts (14)
58. Grow innovation/creative economy (13)
59. Encourage retail and restaurant growth (13)
60. Protect rural features (13)
61. Improve services (12)
62. Improve infrastructure (12)
63. Increase housing supply (12)
64. Improve technology (12)
65. Promote mixed-use housing (11)
66. Improve roads (11)
67. Increase infrastructure capacity (11)
68. Align regulations (11)
69. Seek alternative funding (11)
70. Improve accessibility (10)
71. Protect and care for trees (10)
72. Reduce and manage waste (10)
73. Support local businesses (10)
74. Improve housing quality (10)
75. Expand special needs housing (10)
76. Strengthen tax base (9)
77. Increase sustainability of facilities (9)
78. Protect coastal areas (9)
79. Allow accessory units (9)
80. Promote and manage tourism (9)
81. Promote sustainable farming (8)
82. Align zoning (8)
83. Support home occupations (7)
84. Promote homeownership (7)
85. Continue public outreach (7)
86. Reuse remediated sites/brownfields (7)
87. Coordinate long term (7)
88. Promote public awareness of resources (7)
89. Develop multifamily housing (6)
90. Work with housing partners (5)
91. Attract new residents (4)
92. Control housing production (4)
93. Encourage reuse and redevelopment (4)

94. Maintain or improve aesthetics (4)
95. Promote walkable housing (3)
96. Increase rental housing (3)
97. Strengthen community (3)
98. Improve access to healthy food (2)
99. Strengthen social equity (2)
100. Promote coastal improvements (2)

Methodology

What is the local priorities and themes review?
This local priorities and themes review looked at what individual municipalities in the region most value. Priorities and themes are inherent in the programs and policies advanced by cities and towns, in the way they direct and shape investments, and in the actions they choose to undertake; but that indirect expression is difficult to quantify and analyze. However a more overt definition of priorities and themes is available in the planning documents that a municipality has produced. This review, then, is a compilation of local priorities and themes as set forth in the planning documents the municipalities themselves have created.

What is the context for this work?
This review is part of MetroCommon 2050, Greater Boston's next long-range regional plan. MetroCommon plan will let those of us who live, work, and play here imagine and create the common future we want – together. The first phase of the development of MetroCommon is visioning. During this phase, we are asking a wide range of people throughout the region – including state and local leaders, residents, and commonly underrepresented groups – what they want for the future of Greater Boston. This review complements those conversations. Examining local plans reveals shared themes: these commonalities will be the basis for MetroCommon's goals.

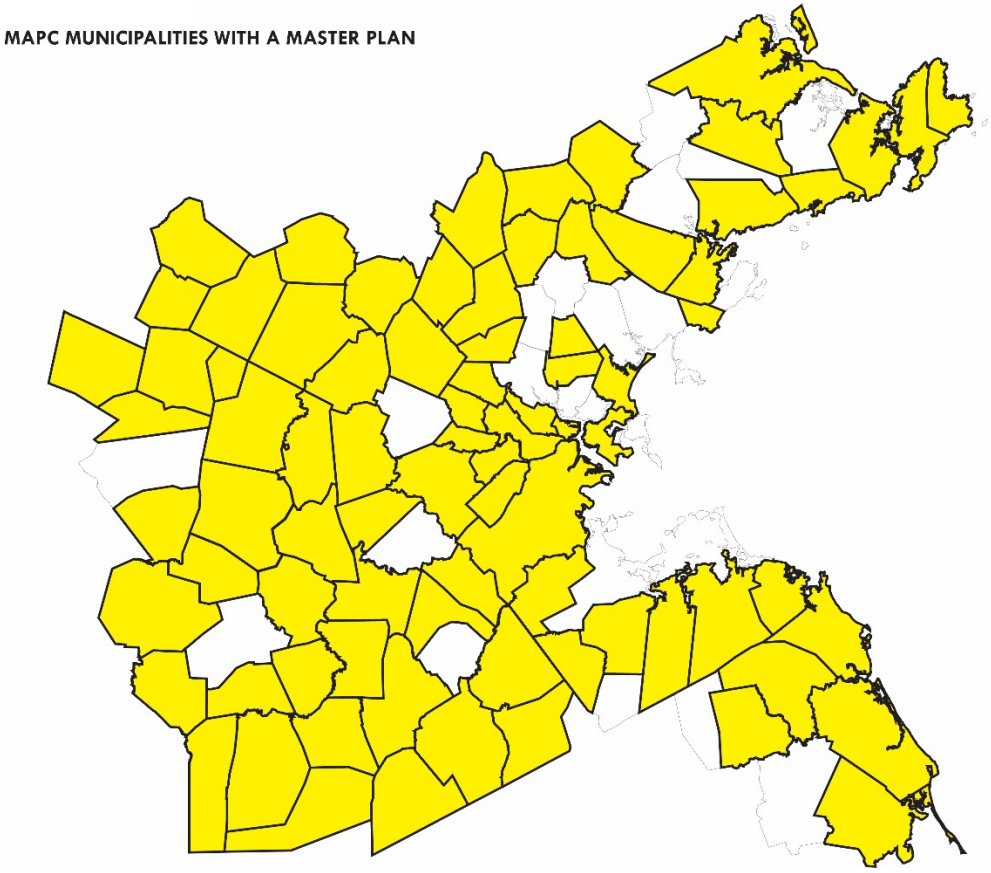
Why review local plans?
During the process design phase, the plan's External Advisory Committee (EAC) and others pointed to the importance of building on the wealth of available local planning knowledge and information that is available. The advice followed the rationale that in order for the regional plan update to be both efficient and effective, it must leverage the time, expertise, and effort already expended at the local level and capture the good ideas that have already been discussed and supported in the communities. In order to do this, a process for review, compilation, and reflection on local planning efforts needed to be devised. This local priorities and themes review is the outcome of that effort.

What is the best type of local plan to review?
As a first step, MAPC inventoried the types of local plans available in the region. We found the following types: comprehensive/master plans, open space and recreation plans, housing plans or housing production plans, community block grant consolidated plans, hazard mitigation or climate adaptation plans, local capital improvement plans, economic development plans, district or neighborhood plans, public health plans, arts and culture plans, historic preservation plans, municipal harbor plans, and other plans specific or unique to a municipality.

For ease of compilation and comparison, and in order to make common threads and priorities easier to spot, MAPC set out to find a common plan type that would offer the most comprehensive and comparable representation of local priorities and themes. A clear candidate for a comprehensive type of plan is the municipal master plan. Municipal master plans are defined by Massachusetts General Law as comprehensive and consistent products. Chapter 41 Section 81D

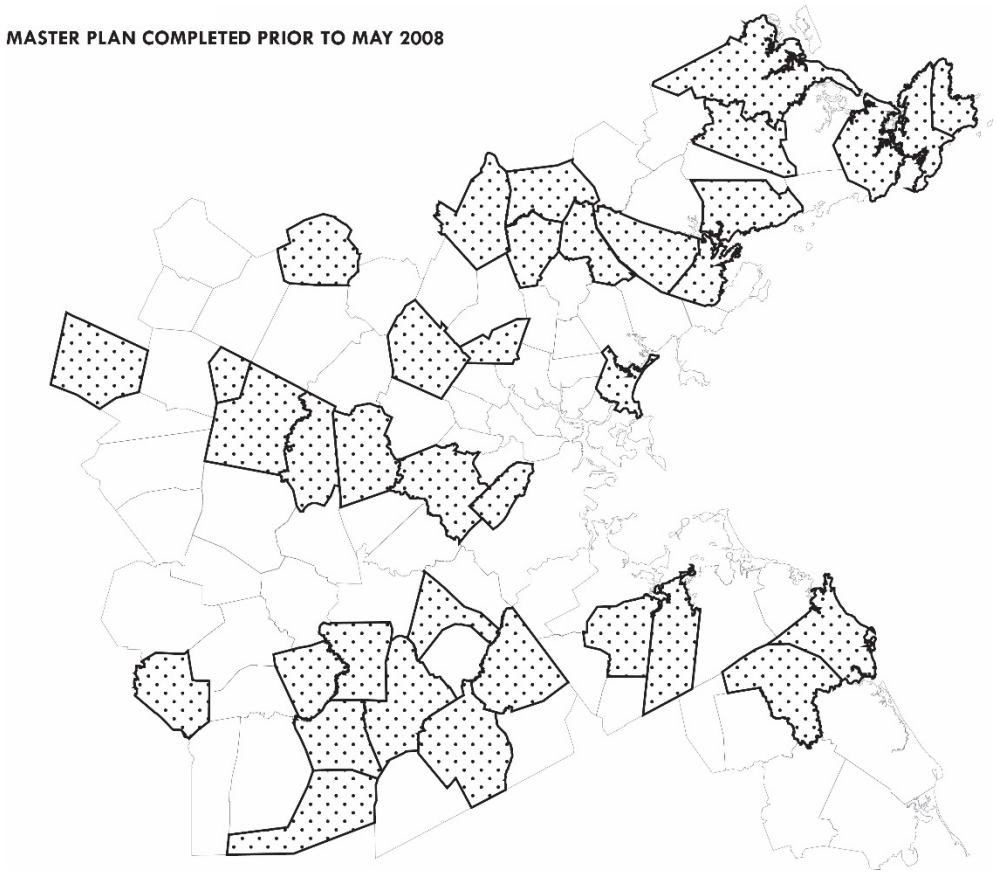
defines that they shall include the following elements: goals and policies statement, land use plan element, housing element, economic development element, natural and cultural resources element, open space and recreation element, services and facilities element, circulation element, and implementation program element.

By far the most commonly available type of plan across the region is the master plan. The figure below shows every MAPC community that has completed a master plan. A total of 77 municipalities have completed master plans, representing 76% of the municipalities in the region.



How were plans selected for review?

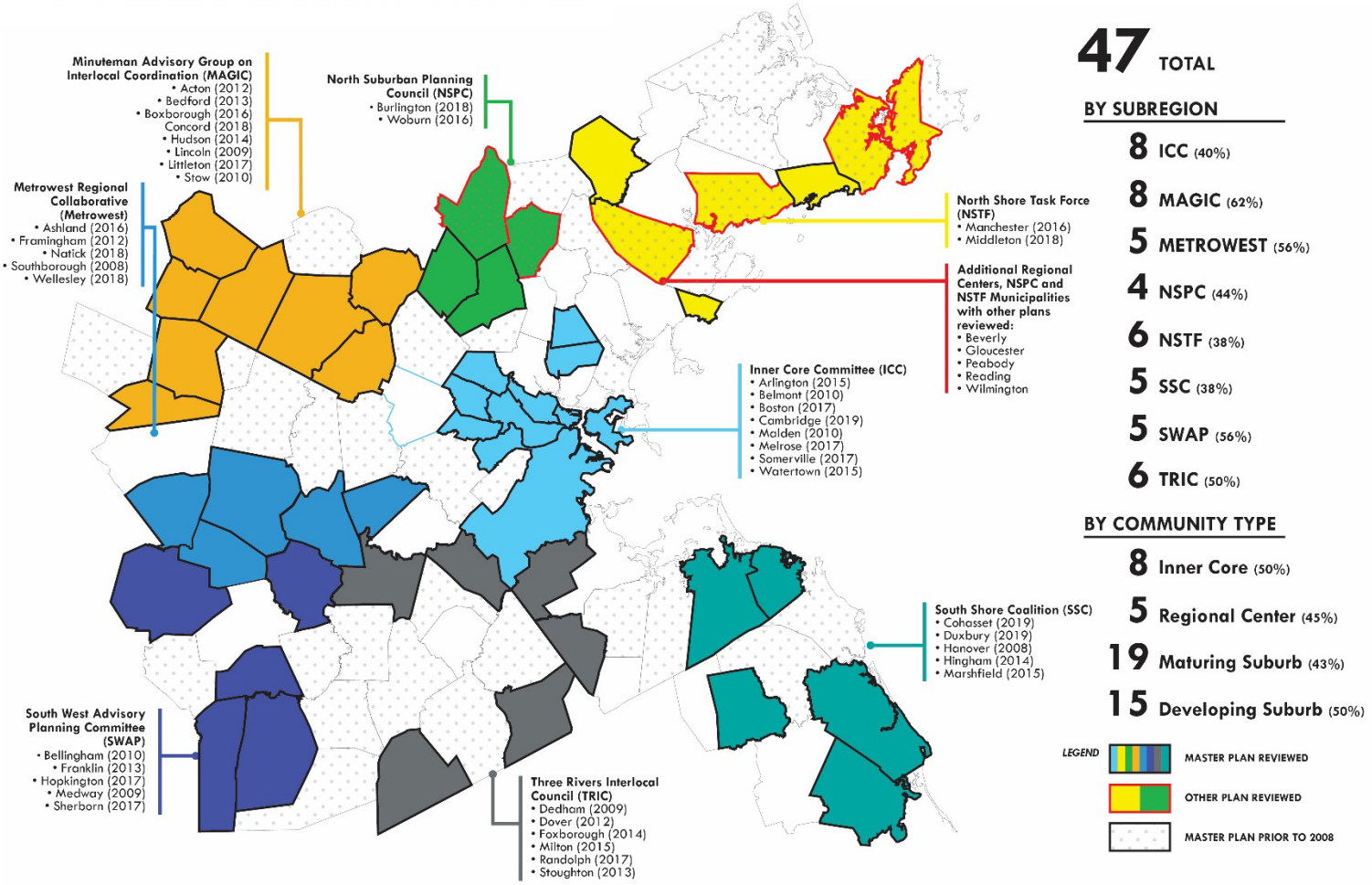
MetroCommon is a regional plan update of the previous regional plan, MetroFuture. MetroFuture was completed in May 2008. Part of that previous process was the review of all available Master Plans from the MAPC region, and that review formed the foundation of MetroFuture. Therefore, May 2008 was used as a threshold to qualify plans for review for the regional plan update. The 26 plans completed prior to May 2008 were not reviewed. Those plans are shown below.



MAPC then looked at the 42 master plans completed since May 2008 and the distribution of those plans around the region to better understand how representative this sample of plans would be of the region. In order for the local plan review to offer compiled priorities and themes relevant to the entire region it was important that the plans represent the diversity of the region's municipalities. The diversity of the sample of plans was measured across both MAPC Subregions and MAPC community types.

Each of the eight subregions (Inner Core Committee, MetroWest Regional Collaborative, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination, North Shore Task Force, North Suburban Planning Council, South Shore Coalition, South West Advisory Planning Committee, and Three Rivers Interlocal Council) in the MAPC region includes at least four municipalities that have plans reviewed that were developed since 2008. Each of the four community types (inner core, regional center, maturing suburb, developing suburb) in the MAPC region includes at least five plans reviewed that were developed since 2008.

To improve our sample, MAPC identified five additional communities that didn't have recently completed master plans, but did have other post-2008 complementary plans types (housing plan, opens space plan, economic development plan, etc.). When these were added to the sample, these plans improved the representation of subregions and community types. In total, 47 municipality's plans were included in this review.



How were the plans reviewed?

MAPC designed the local plans review to use a consistent and methodical approach to identifying shared themes and priorities. MetroCommon will look at many topics that overlap directly with the topics included in town- and city-wide master plans.

The plan review was based on a Microsoft Excel template that provided categories for the sorting of information by the regional plan update topics. The topic categories included the most pressing issues concerning the region: equity of wealth and health, climate mitigation and resiliency, housing, growth and mobility, and dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative governance. In addition to these categories of topics, the review template included an open topic for themes that did not fit into one of the others. The review template was divided into two separate sets of information. The sorting of vision statements by regional plan update topics and the sorting of the body of the plan document occurred separately. Each plan reviewed has a sorted summary template that distills a

hundred or more pages into a few pages of rows of quotes with the supporting information outlined above.

The review methods have involved gathering all plan documents in PDF formats. Assessing the outline and content of the plan by quickly reviewing the table of contents and scrolling through the plan document. Determining the most effective approach to filtering the plan into the template, including which sections to focus on for review. Each plan was read to identify the priorities that were most frequently referenced in the document. Those priorities were copied as quotes from the plans into a spreadsheet. The content of each master plan reviewed was sorted into this template using quotes from the plan to describe the priority. A shorthand description of the priority was added in line with the quote with the plan source and page reference for the quote. The line also includes tags for the municipality, the Subregion, and the community type for the tracking and sorting of information. The frequency of references to the same idea later in the plan document are also tracked.

This process was repeated for each plan reviewed to create a substantial database of plan priorities that were represented by plan quotes and tagged with other information to make the plan information sortable. The plan compilation process combined all summary templates into a single spreadsheet for each regional plan update topic. The same or similar quotes were then grouped together. These groups were then given a summary phrase that captures the basic theme. Each plans summary rows were organized into these growing sets of themes or created a new theme if they were not the same or similar to one already established. Once all rows of themes had been sorted in this compiled set of the themes, the number of rows for each compiled theme were counted to assign a frequency and priority for that theme. Additional frequency information was found in the frequency by document counts. The prioritized order of each theme is based on this ranking of frequency.

How will the local plans review be used?

The local priorities and themes review is an initial product of Phase 1 of the MetroCommon process. It is intended to provide a clearly documented review that directly connects shared themes and priorities back to local plan documents. The local plans review resulted in a list of priorities. These priorities were used as one of three primary inputs in the creation of the MetroCommon goals. The other two primary inputs were the previous regional goals of the MetroFuture plan and a compilation of the input received at Phase 1 listening sessions and subregional meetings.

The summary of local plans will bring forward past efforts in a way that can be more readily used in the regional planning process. The local plan review also highlights the language that local plans use to describe themes and priorities, and this review suggests language to use for framing regional themes and priorities, such that local municipalities can recognize their voice in the regional plan. These aspects of the local plan review will all be used in the initial phases of the MetroCommon process. The local plans review will also provide a useful database for use in later phases of the MetroCommon process. The database of local themes and priorities enables a direct comparison between local planning and regional planning priorities once the regional priorities have been established. This database will be useful to determine the alignment of local and regional priorities and to offer guidance to how local themes and priorities could combine to support regional themes and priorities through priorities that have already been identified locally.