

Cities and towns in Massachusetts have a long history of independence. This has led not only to the creation of a great many unique and distinctive places, but also to increasingly fragmented decision making, purchasing and service provision. Financial strains felt by municipalities around the region, and the desire to make government more efficient at all levels, are leading to increasing calls for regional collaboration. Communities are realizing that the problems they face are shared by their neighbors, and that collaboration and cooperation across municipal boundaries can benefit all involved.

MetroFuture will include a series of recommendations designed to foster regional thinking, to encourage collaboration among municipalities, and incentivize municipalities to make more decisions on a regional basis. Participants in this breakout session will discuss strategies for regionalizing purchasing and service provision, including public safety services, as well as ways to advance those recommendations.

## **12.C Increase Regional Purchasing and Service Delivery**

### **12.C.8\* Facilitate joint procurement through MAPC**

Several RPAs including the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), Pioneer Valley Planning Council (PVPC) and Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) already coordinate regional purchasing collaboratives that buy tens of millions of dollars in equipment and supplies annually. However, a simple change in MGL Chapter 7, section 22A would enable municipalities to purchase equipment, supplies, and services directly through contracts issued by a RPA, in the same way that they can purchase through the “statewide blanket contract” issued by the Commonwealth. Giving municipalities the option to purchase off an RPA “blanket” contract would provide yet another opportunity for cities and towns to purchase high-quality supplies or services at an excellent price without having to go through a redundant 30B procurement process at the municipal level.

### **12.C.9 Regionalize public health services**

Massachusetts is one of the few states in the nation that has no county or regional public health system, and no direct state funding for local boards of health and health departments. As a result, there is a striking disparity between public health resources available in larger and smaller municipalities.

There are already examples here in Massachusetts – including the delivery of regionalized public health services through the FRCOG and through Barnstable County – which demonstrates that public health services can be delivered inter-locally in a way that respects municipalities but provides both economies of scale and increased technical sophistication.

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\* Recommendations are numbered in reference to the larger outline of Implementation Strategies. They can be cross-referenced as follows: (Strategy number).(Sub-Strategy letter).(Recommendation number). For example, this recommendation is from Strategy 12, “Build Regional Collaboration,” Sub-Strategy C, “Increase regional purchasing/service delivery,” and is the eighth recommendation in the Strategy.

In addition, RPAs have been involved in public health issues in other ways, such as MAPC's development of emergency plan templates for municipalities in Region 4A of the Department of Public Health (DPH).

DPH should create a state-funded regional structure for equitable delivery of local public health services across the Commonwealth. The Massachusetts Public Health Regionalization Project has done the groundwork to begin setting up pilot programs to demonstrate the efficacy of providing essential public health services through regional clusters as a way to provide more uniform public health services.

Per the recommendation of DPH, Massachusetts should streamline the authorization of regional public health districts, and allow communities to experiment with a variety of organizing models to meet regional public health needs.

#### **12.C.10 Create a grant/incentive program to foster inter-municipal collaboration**

Other states have created promising grant and incentive programs that promote regional collaboration and service delivery. New York devotes \$25 million annually to incentivize regional service delivery, Connecticut just launched an \$8.6 million program to promote consolidation of facilities and municipal services, and New Jersey enhanced its Sharing Available Resources Efficiently (SHARE) program, which provides up to \$5 million annually toward feasibility studies and implementation assistance to promoted shared services.

Massachusetts should consider creating a program modeled on the experience in these other states to provide a significant incentive for municipalities to work together and create regional efficiencies. Eligible applicants should include groups of municipalities, RPAs, and other regional governmental entities. We suggest calling it the Regional Efficiency Assistance Program (REAP).

#### **12.C.11 Increase shared services and consider consolidation of municipal functions**

There are already many examples of shared services and facilities in Massachusetts, such as successful law enforcement councils that provide specialized services across member communities, regional educational collaboratives that allow school districts to provide special education services more efficiently, and regional library networks that allow local libraries to leverage the resources available to their users. In addition, there are many examples of shared facilities like regional vocational high schools and regional water and wastewater infrastructure.

Still, the vast majority of goods needed to operate local government are purchased on the local level, and the vast majority of services are provided by individual municipalities, costing millions of dollars in redundant administration, equipment, supplies, facilities, and personnel. In many cases, substantial dollars could be saved – and the quality of services improved – by regionalizing purchasing or service delivery.

As the state lowers barriers to regional collaboration by, for example, passing reforms to the intermunicipal agreements laws, local officials will need the vision and leadership to creatively consider shared services, shared departments, and shared facilities. There are many departments that could collaborate more or even consolidate services including assessing, veterans' services, animal control, weights and measures, specialized public health duties, and public works. Even greater benefits could be achieved, among certain municipalities, by consolidating more costly and extensive municipal services such as fire, emergency medical, public safety, and education. Creatively leveraging regional solutions

will require leadership at the local level among administrators, political leaders, and unions representing municipal workers. All of these parties must step forward to consider consolidating services, sharing services, or even consolidating departments in the future, as the state lowers barriers to collaboration.

## **12.D Work Together to Make a Safer Region**

### **12.D.12 Regionalize emergency dispatch**

MAPC is playing a lead role in helping Essex County municipalities to set up a regional emergency dispatch center. Regionalizing dispatch centers is an enormous opportunity to consolidate services. While it will be difficult to achieve, it is an important move away from inefficient, often fragmented, local systems.

There will be a tremendous opportunity to move this agenda forward when 911 surcharges are reauthorized, and the Massachusetts Major Police Chiefs Association are working to direct those funds (approximately \$55 million last year) toward local 911 centers. These modest surcharges are part of our telephone bills and help fund 911 services across the state. This opportunity to reauthorize the 911 surcharges create an opportunity to introduce extraordinary incentives outside of larger cities to consolidate emergency dispatch operations by providing direct grants for planning, equipment, and startup costs. We see no reason for Massachusetts to have hundreds of dispatch centers when New Hampshire is able to operate with one dispatch center.

State agencies should make regionalization of emergency dispatch centers a major priority for grants and funding that result from the proceeds of 911 reauthorization.

### **12.D.14 Establish a structure for the use of Mutual Aid agreements**

Unlike other states, Massachusetts does not have a comprehensive system in place to provide mutual aid, the ability for municipalities to cross boundaries to assist their neighbors, during emergencies. Although there are formal structures in place for fire mutual aid and, in some cases, for police mutual aid, there are no formal structures or rules in place for other disciplines, such as public health, public works, building inspections, or even emergency managers, to provide mutual aid.

In contrast, states like North Carolina have developed a legal framework for mutual aid in the event of emergencies like hurricanes, and this legal framework resolves issues such as supervision, liability, indemnity for employees, cost reimbursement, and other potentially thorny issues. Massachusetts must develop a statewide, comprehensive mutual aid law that allows city and town employees – first responders and others – to cross municipal boundaries to assist their neighbors during declared emergencies.