

MetroFuture Strategy Dialogue - North
North Shore Community College, Danvers
6/24/08, 6:30-9 pm

Amy Cotter, MAPC Senior Program Manager, made a presentation on MetroFuture goals and overview of the draft implementation strategies.

Participants' comments and questions on MetroFuture Implementation Strategies:

- Trying for 40R and intensive zoning in village area, but get resistance from developers.
- Regional input into permitting process is crucial.
- Uncertainty of municipal funding a major stumbling block. Particularly in terms of local aid and school funding (special education), costs and revenues are unpredictable; no unfunded mandates! Special ed should be a function of the state, not something localities should be responsible for. It is outside of local control and such state mandates should be taken over by the state.
- Regional control over local permitting process necessary to counterbalance local financial constraints' influence on permitting.
- Local option revenue sources? Hotel tax good for areas where they have strong tourism.
- There is so much in the MetroFuture plan that we could lose focus from anything that is achievable – how to engage communities on making this happen? How do we focus and distill our goals?
 - MAPC engage partners on specific topics, e.g., elder services. People need to take bite-sized pieces as they can.
 - Look to create windows of opportunity to advance the agenda.
- Add a “politics” category to the implementation strategy, getting people involved in implementing the plan. Political leaders and the public need to be involved. MAPC should make presentations in every community at each town meeting – advertising!
- Develop mechanisms at the sub-regional level to get motivated individuals engaged and networking on accomplishing MF together. Get citizens involved in acting on their own independent of MAPC – regular gatherings at a local level.
- Produce a MetroFuture map of the region – where are there open space and development regions going across municipal borders? Things that local municipalities can actually use. Done in MVPC, but easier on a smaller level than it would be in the MAPC region.
- State hasn't undertaken any serious planning itself. Hard for regions to act without real state leadership.
- Government is remaining static, doesn't grow in pace with the growing economy. Needs to be room for investment in government growth and service.

- A lot of the draft recommendations in Strategy 10 are tied to state initiatives. Tough for municipalities to act on their own while the state is inactive. E.g., CPA funding. State leadership necessary.
- Changing our approach to zoning is a crucial part of achieving these open space goals. “Home rule is here to stay”; this is the issue that we need to tackle, particularly in terms of zoning and land use issues. Communities think that by not opting into the zoning system, they will have a competitive advantage economically. Need state leadership to change the distribution of powers between state and local leadership.
- Home rule is actually working. Money is the thing that enables decisions to be made, accomplishing things. Tools like CPA and ANR enable results, even communities that have rejected CPA have other tools. E.g., public-private partnerships. We have to be clear about what our goals are, then we can come together to accomplish it. Need to direct dollars to the problem at hand. It seems like we’re losing ground, but we are achieving our open space goals because we have better tools.
- Each community has a unique tradition, need to ensure that those aren’t shoved aside.
- Keep in mind that CPA has been terrific, but is peripheral to the essential issues of running a town. Doesn’t distract from the fact that property tax is the main source of funding. Progressive funding comes from local aid, which was cut off a few years ago. Income tax reflects capacity to pay, property tax does not – use progressive taxation and ensure that legislature doesn’t play games with local aid. Towns can make themselves more efficient, but fundamentally just need more resources. Hamilton had a joint meeting with Wenham to discuss 40R, hearing that that is the new source of funding from the state. How do they get from reliance on local aid to the reliance on 40R funds?
- Greater Lynn Senior Services in the same situation as the funding for the towns, but can’t blame the legislature, which has to deal with revenue demands on the state and other financial situations beyond their control. Ballot initiative this year to eliminate the income tax may pass, state funding is shrinking anyway.
- Many participants in Dialogue support a more progressive tax structure.
- Open space residential design was a way that Gloucester was able to protect open space without spending a huge amount of money it didn’t have.
- MetroFuture provides a plan to help people think outside of the box, use best practices from other areas in region. Plan can provide the continuation of ongoing thought process around areas like open space preservation. Yearly updates crucial to the plan important. Sub-regional meetings a place to delve into issues and creatively use ideas from around the region.
- Make sure bond money goes to support MetroFuture plans and priorities.
- Boil recommendations down into a guidebook for voters, work recommendations into the electoral process in able to get things moving. Make sure that the rising costs of gas and heating oil are incorporated into plan, that shifting priorities as a result of

these changes are reflected. Ensuring that people can eat and heat their homes is first priority.

- Looking for priorities for MAPC action or champions to emerge for each set of recommendations?
 - Both. Many are long-term solutions, but need local people who have passion for a certain issue to pick it up and run with it. MAPC's role is still being worked out in implementing this plan. Public education and conversations will still be a large part of our role. Helping people figure out what they as people and businesses can do. Make plan more digestible, its breadth is too much to take in all at once.
- Create a suburban caucus to counteract the influence of urban legislators on the hill. But suburbs are so different, finding areas of agreement between suburban legislators' priorities is almost impossible. We (public officials) assume that because we have the resources, we create and identify the problems. MAPC helps reinforce priorities. Need to pick a few key priorities and band together to get things done. E.g., replacing property tax entirely with a local income tax. Ability of cities and towns to fund education is the single largest issue that municipalities face today. More forums for communication and consensus building, areas where legislators can meet with local officials.
- MAPC Sub-regional meetings bring info to local officials and planners, get local perspective on issues of importance.
 - North Shore Task Force deals with planning and land use every fourth Thurs of the month. Next meeting July 10, Peabody Institute Library 8:30-10:30 am.
 - North Suburban Planning Council deals with more bottom line issues, goes more to mayors and town managers. New 40R site in N Reading the site of the meeting in July.