

MetroFuture Strategy Dialogue Meeting Notes

Framingham, MA, July 14, 2008, 6:30-9:00 PM

Subregions: MetroWest, MAGIC, and SWAP

Questions and comments from the attendees following a presentation by Marc Draisen, MAPC Executive Director, on the MetroFuture process, goals, and overview of the draft implementation strategies:

- **Question:** Does MetroFuture consider that the job-skills mismatch will adjust itself in the market by salary increases?
- **Response:** Yes, a lot of adjustment will occur in the marketplace, however, it is still a good idea to determine other issues and potential problems that will contribute to the job-skills mismatch. For example, firms may raise salaries to make up for a shortage of employees, or on the downside, they may just move elsewhere. MetroFuture focuses on education and skills-building, so that employees have the opportunity to gain skills that are more likely to match job needs. MetroFuture aims to capitalize on our region's strengths, such as brainpower.
- **Question:** What does MetroFuture emphasize in order to minimize the job-skills mismatch?
- **Response:** MetroFuture emphasizes that everyone has the opportunity to graduate with degrees and the public education is available for advanced degrees.
- **Comment:** The attraction of many companies in the region, such as Dell, is most likely due to graduate degrees and PhDs, not an increase of high school or college degrees.
- **Response:** MetroFuture is also aiming to get people back into the labor market that may have obstacles such as transportation or child care needs. The question is should MetroFuture focus on the lower end of education or the higher end? The higher end is not necessarily the best *public* investment. For example, if there is a surplus of high school-only graduates, it could be a greater cost to society if they are unemployed.
- **Comment:** The MetroFuture plan is updating a plan that previously existed, MetroPlan 2000. Part of the plan is guess work, just like the old plan, and the MetroFuture plan has been developed to the best of everyone's ability.
- **Response:** During the initial stages of the MetroFuture plan development, three scenarios were voted on, and the middle one, "Winds of Change", was selected by a large majority. This is MAPC's plan, and MAPC is only an advisory agency.
- **Question:** How accurate were the old plan's predictions and recommendations?
- **Response:** The predictions and trends from the previous plan generally happened, but the implementation of the recommendations did not happen to the desired degree. Therefore, with the MetroFuture plan, MAPC is making significant efforts for outreach and participation so that the recommendations will more likely be implemented.
- **Comment/Question:** Expediting transportation solutions should be the number one priority. Will MetroFuture recommend widening roads?
- **Response:** MAPC is not in agreement with the majority of roadway widening projects (unless it is a safety issue) due to the fact that it won't solve the underlying problem.
- **Comment/Question:** The website is too general and in some cases the recommendations appear incorrect. For example, how is the housing buildout going to happen in specific towns?

- **Response:** The housing market does fluctuate, but over the long-term this region has a shortage of housing and high prices. The MetroFuture plan asks every community for its fair share in expanding housing, such as more units in a building, near existing services and infrastructure, and on smaller lots. Large lot zoning is in fact a problem in that it encourages more sprawl, therefore MetroFuture recommends more compact housing.
- **Comment:** Comments made at previous MetroFuture sessions do not appear to be incorporated into the current plan. Communication efforts should be increased to make sure town meeting members and residents are aware of these meetings. Linguistic minorities should be included in the data.
- **Response:** With regards to the data, MAPC used the most accurate data available, which was the 2000 U.S. Census.
- **Additional Comment:** Neighborhoods need to know about streamlined permitting and realize the implications ahead of time. Smart Growth communities will always have transportation changes, stores change, etc. The recommendation to increase freight may result in more freight traffic and noise in someone's backyard. Overall, there is a concern that the MetroFuture plan will overburden an already dense community.
- **Question/Comment:** Has the subject of illegal immigration been addressed at any previous meetings or in the development of this plan? The Federal government is making an effort to reduce illegal immigration and the local governments should too.
- **Response:** The issue has been raised, although not often, but generally with regards to how immigrants can contribute to their communities.
- **Comment:** There is a feeling that the MetroFuture plan was already set and that previous input was not included in this plan. There is also a feeling that the plan may not be applicable to Framingham. Housing is in fact affordable in Framingham (the commenter provided a data sheet on housing prices in Framingham to the attendees).
- **Response:** MetroFuture is not trying to tell each community what they should do. Framingham may in fact already have many of the recommendations incorporated.
- **Question:** A couple of numbers presented in the plan appear to be incorrect – such as the projection of 549,000 people, the number of persons per household and the need for a certain number of houses – this housing prediction seems too high. In addition, the property tax predictions appear incorrect.
- **Response:** MAPC staff will reevaluate these numbers and can get back to you with a response to these specific questions.
- **Comment:** In the initial visioning sessions, it appeared the data was skewed to get the desired outcome. The plan says smaller lots translate to more affordable housing, but this is not always the case. Affordability can only be achieved through subsidies. Making housing more affordable to some will make housing less affordable to others. What if the more developed areas do not want the more developed housing? The only options are to modify state statutes or factor this issue into the Commonwealth Capital scores – if you don't play, we don't pay. So it does seem like enforcement.
- **Response:** Smaller lots alone are never a solution to affordability, but comparing a small lot with a large lot with all other factors equal, the smaller lot will be more affordable. Three factors contribute to affordability: size, level of government subsidy, and the overall market conditions.

- **Comment:** There is concern that the further away from Boston a community is, the less likely they are to be listened to.
- **Response:** Every community has representation on the MAPC Council.

- **Question:** Based on the website, it is hard to see where Framingham fits into the MetroFuture plan. Does the plan have linkage with the state legislature? What if the community says no to the plan? Are there incentives or disincentives?
- **Response:** The plan does not tell each community what to do. Each community should spend time to determine what is most applicable to them. If a community says no, there are not repercussions. If the state were to adopt the plan as policy, there may be an impact.

- **Comment/Question:** Train traffic is a concern. How is MetroFuture good for me? Will there be more people and more congestion?
- **Response:** What can we do for Framingham? Framingham as a town has to help. Growth will happen, and MetroFuture suggests communities all contribute to help determine the most responsible way to handle growth. For example, MetroFuture recommends that impact fees be allowed by state statute. If communities accept growth, they should be compensated for it.

- **Comment:** Framingham is not being compensated. The MetroFuture plan assumes Framingham can handle growth. Framingham has only one vote and the other smaller communities also have one vote.
- **Response:** We agree that communities should be compensated for growth, and if that is not clear in the plan, it should be added.

- **Comment:** Some see MAPC as having a credibility problem and do not trust their recommendations.

- **Comment:** MAPC is a good resource and provides valuable data and analyses. Some of MAPC's recommendations are good, such as equity of tolling on the MassPike and suggestions on revamping the MTA to encourage more involvement of the free market in addition to the unions. MAPC needs to consider the free market more often in its recommendations. The MetroFuture recommendations for revenue enhancement are not favorable, such as removing proposition 2.5, adding open road tolling, and adding a gas tax.

- **Comment:** Framingham is interested in where it's going in the future, but some items in the plan make people not trust the recommendations, such as inter-municipal agreements. Either the plan needs to back off on some of the recommendations or it needs to explain more in order to gain trust.
- **Response:** The plan recommends that cities and towns should be encouraged to enter into inter-municipal agreements, with the legislative body overseeing the budget.

- **Question:** The plan should take timing and sequencing into account. Some ground work needs to be laid before certain projects go forward. For example, projects can't go forward competently when infrastructure is not in the condition it needs to be. State funding needs to go to infrastructure and transportation first – these are both issues that everyone in the region shares. The document should also be sensitive to the fact that communities should not be penalized for not adopting or conforming to the plan.
- **Response:** Sequencing is something that should be explored more in the plan. In order to grow, infrastructure does need to be updated.

- **Comment:** If citizens would like to get more involved, they should attend meetings for the subregion for their city or town. Framingham is part of the MetroWest subregion.
- **Comment:** Framingham has its unique set of problems, but a plan is a plan, and no agency can enforce it upon the town. Framingham has to recognize other towns in Massachusetts. Infrastructure needs to be addressed regionally.
- **Comment:** Everyone with concerns should get involved with their subregions and reach out to their local government officials and state legislators.