

## **Strategy # 6: Improve City Life and School Quality**

Urban communities in Massachusetts offer a wealth of history, diversity, and convenience. What's more, they are critical to the success of MetroFuture's land use and development plan. That plan calls for more housing and job growth in urban areas, where it can benefit from existing infrastructure, bring new amenities to existing residents, and reduce the pressure for development elsewhere in the region.

However, many urban communities are viewed more negatively than their suburban counterparts. This can be linked to real and perceived issues with underperforming school systems, youth violence and other criminal activity, and insufficient resources for operations and maintenance. In order to foster revitalized interest in urban living and a trend of growth in urban communities, the region must address underperforming schools, expand crime prevention and youth violence programs, and reinvest in urban quality of life and place.

### **A. Ensure high quality educational opportunities in urban communities**

High quality urban education is fundamental to Metro Boston's future. The current inequality in educational outcomes across the region disproportionately affects minority and low income students, and discourages middle class families of all races from living in urban communities. Greater equity in education quality across the region means that fewer students would attend underperforming schools, more graduates would be ready to participate in the region's high-skill economy, and families would have more choices about where to live. Achieving this vision will require excellent teachers, capable administrators, supportive guidance, engaged families, and adequate funding.

It is critical to build capacity within public schools through training and professional development for teachers and administrators. The private sector has a critical role to play, through sustained partnerships that provide staff support and access to resources. Schools also need a more graduated and responsive system of support, administrative flexibility, and state intervention that will help to reverse negative trends for schools before they are officially failing, and continuing to support them through their improvement. Measuring student performance is necessary to document success, apply responsive curriculum, and ensure accountability, but the current system of testing fails to accomplish the objectives that a more integrated assessment method might.

Parental engagement is a fundamental component of success, especially for low income students, students with special needs, or English language learners, all of whom face particular challenges in the classroom. Strong parental engagement efforts can also benefit parents and families, building community fabric and increasing access to health and social services that are a precondition for educational attainment. Finally, it is important to recognize the importance of school choice opportunities, so long as those opportunities are available to all, and do not exacerbate existing problems by drawing resources away from public school districts.

The recommendations described here are not intended to be a comprehensive strategy for educational reform in Massachusetts. Such efforts are already underway, both through the

Governor's Readiness Project and various private sector initiatives. Most importantly, many urban school districts are already making strides toward improvement. As a regional planning agency, MAPC does not possess the expertise to develop an exhaustive and definitive set of recommendations about public education. However, MetroFuture would be deficient if it lacked some attention to the critical importance of education. MAPC staff consulted with allied organizations, reviewed the recommendations of other recent efforts, and assessed the initial findings of the Readiness Project to identify approaches consistent with those elsewhere in the plan: develop capacity, strengthen partnerships, use data to guide policy, and address issues within a regional context.

There are many issues that this section does not directly address: how to balance the need for assessment and monitoring in so called "core" subject like reading and math with the value of enrichment courses such as music, arts, physical education that are often eliminated or underfunded in favor of preparation for high-stakes testing; how to improve science, technology, engineering, and math performance critical to tomorrow's economy; how to best support students with special education needs; and others. These are critical challenges, and may benefit from regional solutions; MAPC will continue to work with allied organizations to evaluate potential solutions and advance those consistent with MetroFuture's goals and objectives. It should also be noted that while the recommendations focus on urban school districts, not all urban schools are underperforming, and not all suburban schools are trouble-free. The application of these recommendations need not be limited to urban communities.

### **1) Build teacher and school capacity through trainings and partnerships**

Building high quality schools requires building capacity of skilled teachers and effective administrators. Building this capacity will require investments from both the public and private sector in partnerships, training, and support.

High quality teachers are a prerequisite for educational success, especially in urban schools where many students come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teacher recruitment, training, and ongoing professional development must be addressed in a comprehensive way. Loan forgiveness, mentoring, and financial incentives can help attract skilled educators. Teacher residency programs that include all three of these elements have demonstrated considerable success and should be expanded, perhaps on a regional level where they would benefit from economies of scale.

Ongoing training and professional development are necessary for all staff to sustain and increase their effectiveness, particularly in subjects such as math, science, and technology and strategies for special education students and English language learners. Such training can be provided through the modest expansion of pre-existing summer content institutes the Commonwealth already offers, and creation of additional state-funded opportunities for professional development. For staff in underperforming schools, professional development plans should be coordinated with the school-wide improvement plan. Performance pay can also help to retain the most effective teachers, and is addressed in the next recommendation.

Leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring school performance, but underperforming schools have a great deal of trouble attracting and retaining qualified and talented administrators. Leadership development programs and training are needed to build a strong corps of administrators; the greatest need for such programs will be with younger administrators, administrators in low-performing schools, and veteran administrators up for re-certification. Defining the content of leadership training and breaking it into a small number of core components are critical steps toward improving the work of the next generation of school leaders. The Commonwealth School Leadership Project is one program designed to create high-quality alternatives to traditional administrative training programs and generate a pipeline of aspiring administrators.

Partnerships with community members, nonprofits, and local businesses can provide deeper links to the community and additional resources to schools that need them. These partnerships can take the form of internships, work study programs for students, or formal arrangements where the partner is integrated into the administration. Metro Boston has a rich and underutilized supply of potential school partners such as colleges and universities that can provide expertise, professional development, and even instruction to students; or businesses who can be part of school-to-work experiences. Examples of recent successes include the Longwood Medical Association's partnership with the John D. O'Bryant High School to expose students to careers in health and science. In the School Support Organization model, an external partner works alongside the school administration to identify key issues and collaboratively develop solutions. An expansion of this approach creates social partnerships to provide additional social and counseling services to students and schools in need of extra support.

**1.a The Department of Education should establish regional or statewide teacher residency programs, focused in urban communities and underperforming schools**

The Boston Teacher Residency program was created by a partnership of the Boston Public Schools; the Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools, a nonprofit with the mission of supporting the Boston Public Schools through reform; and the University of Massachusetts-Boston. This program provides education students with rigorous, full-time classroom experience for a year, while they are simultaneously working on the coursework needed to receive their Masters in Education at UMass. Teachers are provided with a stipend, and loan forgiveness for the cost of their degree after three years of teaching in Boston public schools.

The Boston Teacher Residency has been hailed as a national model, and is expanding in the 2008-2009 academic year to provide teacher trainees for the struggling Randolph schools as well. However, its cost – nearly \$30,000 per teacher resident – is cited as a primary reason for its failure to expand more. As recommended by Governor Patrick's Readiness Project, the state Department of

Education should work with the Commonwealth's teacher colleges to develop a statewide teacher residency program.

**1.b The Department of Education should expand pre-existing summer content institutes it already offers to teachers and offer similar programs during the school year**

Standards for what students should learn in each grade are becoming clearer all the time, but there is still little support for individual teachers as they work to reach these standards. This is a particular problem in low-performing schools and in areas where theories about teaching are changing rapidly, like math, special education, and English for Speakers of Other Languages. The Commonwealth can play an important role by expanding its "Content Institute" programs for teacher development and, as a result, student performance.

**1.c The Department of Education should establish a pilot program for School Support Organizations in underperforming districts**

**2) Modernize school administration and intervention strategies**

Achieving the goal of high-quality urban schools will require new models of administration and greater support for responsive solutions. The recommendations here include increased administrative flexibility, greater use of assessment data to guide interventions, and a graduated and supportive intervention process in struggling schools.

Administrators and teachers must have the flexibility and incentives necessary to improve student achievement. In this age of accountability, administrators now have the incentive to apply innovative solutions, but their flexibility is often limited by bureaucratic obstacles and restrictive labor agreements. Similarly, staff can benefit from leadership opportunities and salary structures that reward high performance. Cooperation among administrators, labor, municipal officials, and state agencies can support policies that allow administrators to make personnel decisions based on merit, while still protecting teachers from arbitrary and capricious staffing decisions. Differential pay structures help to attract and retain talented teachers and create incentives for high performance. Options for differential pay might include incentives for teachers who:

- Work in underperforming schools,
- Demonstrate progress in student achievement,
- Take on additional responsibilities,
- Expand their knowledge through extra professional development, or
- Teach in high-need areas such as science and math.

The Patrick Administration also favors incentive pay as a method for encouraging the best teachers to work with the students most in need of high-quality instruction. Administrators should also have the authority to mandate professional development to improve deficiencies in underperforming teachers and administrators.

Administrative flexibility, financial resource, and state intervention can also be more effectively graduated to reverse negative trends for struggling schools, and support those schools that are improving. Currently, administrators in struggling schools are given little extra support or flexibility until the school has been underperforming for multiple years, at which point the intervention and resources are dramatic. This “all or nothing” approach does not provide school leaders with the support or resources they need to turn around a school on the wrong track until it is already failing. Then, as performance improves, schools see those supports drop away, threatening the early successes and providing little incentive to improve.

A graduated system of intervention, innovations, and support would do more to prevent school failure, and to encourage success. The state could define this process through a menu of credible, clearly defined options from which districts would select those most appropriate to their needs. Such a program would recognize the different needs across schools and districts, while ensuring that schools are using innovations with a record of success. Such a system might include increasing flexibility for administrators in struggling schools, access to technical assistance, support for implementation of a state-defined default curriculum, targeted funding to support specific improvements, and continued support for schools that have come “back from the brink.”

Interventions, administrative decisions, and individual teaching strategies will be most effective when they are informed by useful data about student performance. Teachers currently have the ability to analyze test scores of students they taught the prior year, but the existing diagnostic tools do little to identify at-risk students, assess student improvement over time, provide feedback the effectiveness of specific techniques, or provide details on students at either end of the performance spectrum. MCAS data measures knowledge against curriculum frameworks, but not against progressive critical thinking and knowledge base.

“Formative assessment systems” involve multiple shorter, computer-adaptive tests that help teachers evaluate a student’s current progress; while “value added” testing provides data on how much one student’s (or a class of students’) achievement changes over time. This is a more precise measure of student progress than the state’s current system, which compares the scores of one cohort of fourth graders to the next cohort of fourth graders. Rather than providing a “snapshot in time” on a single test, value-added analysis reveals an academic growth trajectory.

- 2.a The Department of Education should acquire formative assessment systems for a small number of urban districts and support their use**
- 2.b The Department of Education should offer planning grants and technical assistance to support the implementation of differential pay structures**

### **3) Support students and engage their parents and communities**

Parental involvement is a critical ingredient for student success. In schools that demonstrate more success, parents are involved and expectations are communicated when the child first enters the school and consistently reinforced throughout the school year. The connections between parents and schools can be strengthened by integrating health and social service outreach into parental engagement programs. Schools do not necessarily need to become health or social service agencies, but coordination of efforts between school, health, and social service departments might yield greater effectiveness and economies of scale. Efforts to engage parents must also recognize the barriers they face. Lack of English language skills currently prevents many parents from helping their children with schoolwork. Greater access to English language classes will help those parents to be stronger resources for their children as well as more economically successful.

A model for building more effective parental engagement might be found in the Family and Community Outreach program, a pilot program of the Boston Public Schools. Family and community outreach coordinators work to create welcoming school environments and enhance parents' ability to participate in their children's educations. Coordinators accomplish this by building relationship with parents, advocating for them and helping them advocate for themselves, helping to bridge language and cultural barriers, and other related activities.

Schools can also help support students through longer school days. The Expanding Learning Time to Support Success Initiative involves a longer school day for students to take additional classes, receive tutoring, or participate in extracurricular activities.

Extra support for students who are struggling or at risk of dropping out is also critical. High dropout rates in urban schools affect individual social and financial well-being, as well as the region's economic competitiveness. School systems need early intervention strategies to find and support students before they drop out. These strategies may include the more effective use of data (tracking absences and other risk factors) and greater access to tutoring, alternative schools, and other social service programs.

**3.a The Department of Education should expand the Family and Community Outreach Coordinator (FCOC) project**

**3.b The Legislature should provide funding for the Massachusetts Expanding Learning Time to Support Success Initiative**

### **4) Increase school choice in underperforming districts**

Even as the region moves to increase the quality of public education for all students in underperforming schools, there may be benefits to increased school choice in urban districts. Parents who are concerned about poorly performing

schools may choose to move to suburban communities, exacerbating the region's racial and economic segregation. Additional school choices will help to retain those families while also providing opportunity for students from low income families with less ability to move out of urban areas.

While an expansion of school choice models may provide benefits for participating students, it must be implemented carefully to ensure equitable access to charter or pilot schools and a fair funding system that does not cripple the sending district's ability to improve performance.

The region also needs to take steps to improve the durability of the METCO program, which allows more than 3,000 Boston students of color to be educated in suburban school districts. This program has demonstrated considerable success, with high educational outcomes for participating students and increased integration in receiving school districts. However, this program may face legal challenges, as similar race-based desegregation programs in Seattle and Louisville have already been struck down by the courts. Alternatives to a race-based assignment might include some combination of socio-economic status, academic skill levels, race and ethnicity, language background, and neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics.

## **B. Improve urban public safety**

The region's urban communities can thrive only if they are safe places to live. MetroFuture seeks a reduction of crime rates in all municipalities, while calling for the biggest improvements in urban areas where crime rates are now worst. This can be accomplished through application of innovative youth violence prevention and community policing programs, increased use of crime analysis, and prisoner reentry programs that will help to reduce rates of recidivism.

Currently, there is considerable regional disparity in crime rates. Violent crime rates in the Inner Core (7.6 per 1,000) are four times as high as violent crime rates in Maturing and Developing Suburbs (1.8 & 2.0 per 1,000, respectively.) Property crime rates follow a similar pattern.

While there are many different reasons for higher crime rates in urban communities, youth violence is a particularly troubling and prominent problem. Recent experience has demonstrated that a multi-pronged approach involving police, community groups, service agencies, and youth can successfully help to prevent youth violence. Similar collaboration is the cornerstone of community policing, which can demonstrate great success if it has the necessary financial and organizational support. A more robust information infrastructure for crime data will help police departments to address crime issues proactively and assess their performance. More public access to crime data, through web-based crime mapping tools, will help to correct misconceptions and foster more effective community-based solutions to crime. Preventing recidivism is a critical component of crime prevention in urban areas and requires a more systemic and evidence-based approach to offender reentry, including collaboration with non-traditional partners such as community leaders and service providers.

## **5) Support proven youth violence prevention programs**

In order to be safe and welcoming places for residents and families, Metro Boston's urban communities must deal with the problem of youth violence, which disrupts the fabric of urban neighborhoods and contributes to negative perceptions about the safety of urban areas. Preventing youth violence will help at-risk youth to lead more productive and fulfilling lives and will allow more families to live in urban areas with less fear of random violence.

The problem of youth violence is large and complex. Youth violence can take many different forms in different places, and youth crime problems often are caused by several underlying factors, involve multiple groups, and occur in many locations. Overcoming this challenge will require concerted partnerships among public safety officials, community-based organizations, schools, the judicial system, and residents. Best practices for youth violence prevention include five components: social intervention, opportunity provision, suppression, community mobilization, and organizational change.

Many communities in Metro Boston are implementing these practices through funding from the Charles Shannon Community Safety Initiative Grant program. The Shannon Grant program was created in 2006 to support regional and multi-disciplinary approaches to combat gang violence. The program funds coordinated programs for prevention and intervention, including anti-gang task forces, targeted enforcement, focused prosecution efforts, and programs aimed at successful reintegration of released prisoners. The program also funds local action research partners and a statewide youth violence research center in Northeastern University. The statewide research center conducts assessment of the program, provides technical assistance to communities, and disseminates youth violence best practices. This initiative has demonstrated considerable success and should be sustained and expanded to more communities.

### **5.a The Legislature and Governor should fund the Charles Shannon Community Safety Initiative at progressively increasing levels**

## **6) Increase community policing efforts**

Application of community policing strategies can both deter crime and improve relationships and interaction between police and the public. Community policing employs partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address crime and the underlying causes of crime. It is also contingent on organizational transformation of police departments to reflect modern management practices, including performance assessment and accountability.

The state's Community Policing Grant Program was developed to support these programs, but was reduced considerably due to budget constraints. This program should be fully funded.

**6.a The Legislature and Governor should fully fund the Community Policing Grant program**

**7) Increase the analytical use of crime statistics**

Increased availability and analytical use of detailed crime data is important for two reasons: it can increase the effectiveness of crime prevention efforts; and it can correct misperceptions about the safety of urban neighborhoods. State of the art crime analysis can help police departments to identify and manage crime problems before they get out of hand. Access to data can also help community groups to have a better understanding of the crime problems in their neighborhood, so they can be more effective partners with law enforcement.

Currently, law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth are required to submit crime data to the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security NIBRIS system. However, this data is not easily interpreted because of inconsistencies in formatting, reporting, and quality. Much of this inconsistency arises due to out-of-date software and lack of consistent data entry protocols. NIBRIS data also lack geospatial information, so they cannot be used for crime mapping analysis that can identify patterns and support strategic distribution of resources. This lack of mapping capacity is especially problematic for efforts to coordinate enforcement across municipal boundaries.

The state's Executive Office of Public Safety and Security is in the process of addressing these challenges by implementing a Statewide Information Sharing System database to remedy the problems of previous crime databases. This "incident tracking warehouse" will support a variety of public safety related activities, including municipal use of a spatial statistics program for the analysis of crime incident locations. However, the statewide system will only be as good as the data in its warehouse. All municipalities should participate in the program, which may require them to increase their in-house crime reporting capacity, including staff, hardware, software, and protocols.

Regional collaboration on crime analysis is important because many criminal entities such as gangs operate with little regard to political boundaries. Collaboration can also increase the resources available to municipalities through shared equipment or staff. Regional crime mapping centers currently exist in the MAPC region (Boston, Lynn, and Framingham), but their coverage does not currently include every municipality (or even every urban municipality.) These centers can provide a venue for formal coordination and exchange of data, which currently occurs on an ad hoc basis through personal relationships and incident-specific efforts. Municipalities, MAPC, the Northeast Region Homeland Security Advisory Council, and state agencies should also evaluate the potential for a truly regional system managed by MAPC, which has extensive GIS, data, and public safety capacity.

**7.a The Executive Office of Public Safety and Security should complete development and implementation of the Statewide Information Sharing System (SWISS)**

- 7.b Municipal police departments should participate in the Statewide Incident Sharing System**
- 7.c Every urban municipality should establish a crime analyst position or collaborate with a regional crime analysis center**
- 7.d Municipal police departments and regional crime mapping centers should establish websites for public access and mapping of crime data**

**8) Expand prisoner re-entry programs to reduce recidivism**

Since many crimes are conducted by recidivists, increased attention to re-entry programs is critical to reduction of crime rates regionwide, and especially in urban communities. A more systemic approach to offender reentry would involve traditional agencies as well as more involved collaboration with non-traditional partners such as community leaders and service providers.

Almost 20,000 inmates are released every year in Massachusetts, but do not have access to a strong system of supports and preparation for reentry. More than 50% of released offenders are arrested or re-incarcerated within three years of release. Reducing recidivism requires a combination of strategies affecting sentencing, prison services and assessment, reentry planning, post-release supervision, and data collection.

Increased coordination among relevant agencies is also necessary, since different agencies manage arrest, incarceration, release, and support. These agencies – the Departments of Health and Human Services, Public Safety and Security, Labor and Workforce Development, and the Department of Probation and the Court system – should work together to build implement a more unified system that provides inmates with the support and training they need to become productive members of society.

- 8.a The Governor should establish an Offender Transition Task Force to address issues of prisoner reentry into their communities and recidivism**

**C. Foster sustainable neighborhood redevelopment**

**9) Support neighborhood redevelopment initiatives of Community Development Corporations**

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) play a critical role fostering the redevelopment of urban areas in Metropolitan Boston. CDCs are attuned to the unique needs of urban neighborhoods and practice a distinct form of “community building” that involves a broad range of potential strategies: development of housing and commercial space, community organizing and neighborhood planning, technical assistance to small businesses, and cultural programming. CDCs often create opportunity for women and minority contractors and low-income residents through contracts and employment.

As community controlled non-profit developers, CDCs are in a unique position to turn community visions into a reality, and are often willing to participate in challenging and high-risk ventures in weak markets. Their developments often help to pave the way for more investment from the for-profit sector, creating additional housing and economic opportunities.

Since their inception more than 30 years ago, Massachusetts CDCs have developed over 24,000 homes and attracted several billion dollars of investment to low- and moderate- income neighborhoods, mostly in urban municipalities.

CDC innovation at the local level requires resources from a variety of private and public sources. All too often, it is easier for CDCs to identify money to pay for new programs than it is to find funding to pay rent, buy basic supplies, or pay for important ongoing services and community organizing. New state funding streams are needed to provide a stable and predictable foundation to support the ongoing work of CDCs and help them leverage other funds.

**9.a The Department of Housing and Community Development should create a program to provide significant annual funding and technical assistance for CDC core organization operations**

**10) Return foreclosed, vacant, and abandoned properties to productive use**

While many urban communities have a limited supply of undeveloped land, there are many redevelopment opportunities in the form of vacant, foreclosed, and abandoned properties. Municipalities need new programs to speed the rehabilitation of vacant and abandoned properties, in order to prevent neighborhood destabilization and jumpstart neighborhood revitalization.

Properties can become abandoned in a variety of ways: owners may “walk away” during the foreclosure process; lenders may fail to assume title for properties valued at less than the lien; or owners with clear title may simply stop maintaining the property and paying taxes. Even empty properties that are not truly abandoned may have a destabilizing effect on neighborhoods. Concentrations of vacant, lender-owned properties can significantly depress surrounding property values and may attract crime and vandalism.

New strategies are needed to take advantage of the opportunities presented by vacant properties, by transferring them to community-based developers that will bring them back to productive use as affordable or mixed-income housing, commercial space, or open space. At the very least, municipalities should adopt foreclosure ordinances that require bank owners to register and maintain foreclosed properties and provide contact information to the municipality.

Challenging conditions exist when lenders fail to complete the foreclosure process, leaving properties in legal limbo; public/private partnerships might pursue clear title by completing the foreclosure action or pursuing title through forfeiture or nuisance proceedings. Partnerships may be needed to address this issue as demonstrated by the Homeownership Preservation Initiative (HOPI) in

Chicago, an organization working with servicers and the city to reclaim properties that remain owned by a financial institution that has not completed a foreclosure, and therefore cannot transfer title directly to the nonprofit.

Many vacant properties are not foreclosed but tax delinquent. However municipal procedures for seizing and rehabilitating these properties can be outdated and excessively onerous. There are innovative models to accelerate and streamline the foreclosure process for tax-delinquent properties, while still protecting tenants and minimizing financial impact to delinquent property owners.

**10.a Municipalities should adopt ordinances regulating the maintenance of vacant residential property in the foreclosure process**

**10.b The Department of Housing and Community Development should identify strategies to streamline the tax lien foreclosure process**

**11) Prevent displacement of existing urban residents**

Urban neighborhood revitalization efforts can provide existing residents with expanded housing choices, improved public services, new amenities, more nearby jobs, less crime, and other benefits. As property values increase, homeowners (including low- and moderate income homeowners) see the value of their assets increase. However, revitalization efforts can also have the unfortunate side effect of displacing residents and businesses due to increasing rents or rising property taxes.

Urban revitalization strategies should be paired with comprehensive anti-displacement efforts so that current residents and entrepreneurs have the option to stay and benefit from revitalization. Current residents should be involved in neighborhood planning through meaningful participation. All deed-restricted affordable units lost through revitalization should be replaced by permanently-affordable units; and new affordable housing should be located in close proximity to market-rate development.

A comprehensive, client-oriented strategy is needed to link existing residents and merchants with housing, business and employment opportunities, services, and healthcare. MAPC is currently participating in an effort to implement such a coordinated strategy through a Human Development Overlay District in Boston's Chinatown neighborhood. If successful, this pilot project, funded and created by the Environmental Simulation Center and the Ford Foundation, might provide a model that can be replicated elsewhere in the region.

**11.a MAPC and the Asian Community Development Corporation should establish a pilot Human Development Overlay District in Chinatown and make recommendations for its replication elsewhere**

## **D. Improve urban services, maintenance, and accessibility**

### **12) Increase the use of municipal performance monitoring and benchmarking to improve service delivery**

Providing municipal services is especially challenging in urban environments with high densities, aging infrastructure, and diverse populations. There are numerous emerging techniques and technologies that support municipal efforts to improve service delivery through tracking, benchmarking, and evaluation. These systems can operate across all departments citywide (e.g., the “Stat” programs described in (#3C Cost-effective service delivery), or they can target a particular neighborhood and focus on specific elements such as public works.

Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking (ComNET) is a tool that allows residents to document physical infrastructure deficiencies and hazards, such as potholes or faded cross walks, in their neighborhoods. The resulting inventory includes information about the location and nature of the problem, helping municipal agencies to stay informed of needs and enabling residents to hold municipalities accountable for repairs. Such a program has been applied with some success in Worcester and should be replicated in other urban communities.

#### **12.a Municipalities should seek opportunities to apply Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking**

### **13) Increase bicycle, pedestrian, and transit accessibility and safety**

MetroFuture recommends focusing more growth in urban communities where residents will have better access to shops, services, and employment. The high densities of urban communities mean that more destinations are located in close proximity, so people have less distance to travel. This facilitates walking, biking, or taking transit more often, but only if those choices are safe and convenient.

Municipalities can take many steps to improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure; many of these recommendations are described in Strategy 4 (Transportation). Urban communities face a special set of challenges and opportunities, and should have dedicated staff concerned with non-motorized access. The City of Boston recently created “Boston Bikes,” a city office charged with focusing on comprehensive bike planning. This model could be replicated in other municipalities, and might also be secured regionally, through a municipal employee or MAPC staffperson shared by multiple municipalities.

Municipalities can also improve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians by reducing speed limits on city streets and increasing enforcement of traffic violations. Current Massachusetts laws set the “prevailing” speed limit at 30 miles per hour on streets without speed limit signage. Legislative action could reduce this prevailing speed limit to 25 miles per hour (and 15 miles per hour in school zones), an important step in promoting safer driving in urban areas. Widespread

application of red light cameras would also help to deter red-light running and improve safety at intersections.

- 13.a Municipalities should establish a coordinating entity to focus on non-motorized transportation**
- 13.b The Legislature should reduce the prevailing speed limit from 30 mph to 25 mph in urbanized areas**
- 13.c The Legislature should permit the use of “traffic control signal violation monitoring system devices” (red light cameras) in all cities of the Commonwealth.**

### **E. Foster urban vitality: arts, culture, shops, and services**

The region’s urban communities boast an abundance of shops, services, culture, and amusement within easy reach. Neighborhood business districts, historic neighborhoods, museums, galleries, and performing arts are all powerful resources that can help to attract and retain residents in urban areas. Urban neighborhoods in the metropolitan Boston region are home to thousands of arts and culture related organizations, facilities, and resources. Ranging from impromptu musical groups to major fine arts museums, these resources are highly diverse in their size and mission. Collectively, they play an important social, civic, and economic role in our urban neighborhoods

#### **14) Strengthen downtown and neighborhood business districts**

The presence of local business districts provides vitality and convenience to urban residents. In order to function well, those districts should be safe and have an appropriate mix of businesses. Some districts will focus more on the needs of nearby residents and employees. Others will attract visitors and shoppers from far and wide.

There are numerous strategies that communities can use to support business districts. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Economic Development operates the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, which offers a range of services and assistance to communities seeking to revitalize their downtowns. The primary mission of the MDI is to make downtown revitalization an integral part of community development in cities and towns across the Commonwealth. MDI’s guiding principles are that the most effective approach to downtown revitalization is holistic; that it addresses economic and community development needs; and that it provides a framework of interrelated activities that promote positive change in a downtown to keep it healthy and prosperous.

Another model for business district revitalization is the National Trust for Historic Preservation “Main Street” program. This model encompasses a four point approach that addresses economic restructuring, design, promotion, and community organizing. The most prominent local application of this program is in the City of Boston, which has 19 Main Street Districts. Each district receives

financial and technical assistance and intensive training in the Main Street approach from the City of Boston Main Streets office and the National Main Street Center.

**14.a Municipalities and corporate partners should create public-private partnerships to create sustainable Main Street-style programs**

**15) Support arts and culture to build community and civic engagement**

The vitality of urban areas derives in large part from an abundance of arts and culture, in the form of museums, music venues, galleries, art studios, cultural organizations, and festivals. Not only do these assets provide enrichment to individuals, they also help to build community, foster civic engagement, and establish a positive identity for urban neighborhoods. The more people participate in arts and culture events, the more likely they are to participate in other activities that support community life.

Public arts events, including concerts, festivals, open studios, and happenings (such as Providence’s WaterFire) can bring people together, boost tourism, and transform how a city is perceived by visitors and residents. Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and other neighborhood-based community organizations have long recognized the power of culture to build community, often organizing cultural events to support ongoing community organizing and development initiatives. Municipalities should seek opportunities to apply these lessons to planning projects and other efforts at civic engagement, in order to build broader and richer participation. A particular focus should be on exposing young people to arts and culture.

**15.a Civic, business, artistic, and municipal stakeholders should collaborate to plan public arts-related events**

**15.b Municipalities should involve arts groups in civic engagement and outreach efforts**

**15.c Arts and cultural organizations should provide adults with amateur art making opportunities to expose children to the arts**

**16) Support arts districts through public policy**

Artistic and cultural ventures are often most successful when clustered together, so they can share resources, capitalize on each other’s success, and create a “scene” that will attract attention. While such clusters are most vibrant when they develop organically, public policy can support the development of arts districts and help to protect those that already exist.

Many communities have designated “arts districts.” These districts can encompass a wide range of public and private actions, and can include tax subsidies, zoning changes, community-developed arts district plans, and marketing and branding campaigns. Whether formally designated or not, arts

districts provide a range of benefits: they raise the visibility and marketability of the arts to the public, provide a forum around which cultural coalitions can coalesce, create opportunities for social cohesion, and can stimulate new real estate investments. Municipalities seeking to achieve one or more of these goals may consider creating an arts district, tailored to the unique local context.

Public resources are one important component of the funding needed to develop new facilities in arts districts. In particular, the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund provides grants to support the acquisition, design, repair, rehabilitation, renovation, expansion, or construction of nonprofit cultural facilities in Massachusetts. By requiring matching funds, the CFF helps to leverage private resources; however, state allocations have declined each year since the fund's creation. The Legislature should stabilize and eventually increase support for this fund.

Artistic and cultural establishments have diverse transportation needs. Artist studios and galleries may only generate occasional visitors, though may attract large crowds during major events such as open studios. Other large institutions may experience large crowds on a regular basis. A 2002 household survey in Metropolitan Boston found that 23% of respondents said "difficulty or cost of getting to or parking at events" was a "big reason" they did not attend more performing arts events. This does not necessarily mean that art and cultural organizations need an overabundance of parking. Local planners should seek innovative strategies to meet the needs of arts facilities, through shared parking or transportation demand management strategies. The state should also provide financial support public transit access and transportation demand management plans for new facilities funded through the Cultural Activities Facilities Fund.

Artists contribute greatly to neighborhood vitality, but they need places to live and work. They frequently move from one "frontier neighborhood" to another, always just a step ahead of the wave of displacement. Efforts must be undertaken to build more artists' housing and to provide artists with greater security against displacement. Excellent opportunities for such housing exist not only in core communities like Boston, Cambridge and Somerville, but in smaller cities within the Inner Core as well as Regional Urban Centers.

**16.a Municipalities should adopt zoning incentives to incentivize the creation and clustering of arts facilities**

**16.b The state legislature should stabilize and increase allocations to the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund**

## **F. Improve urban parks and the urban environment**

In order to attract and retain residents in the region's urban communities, Metro Boston must ensure access to open space and a healthy urban environment. Urban residents benefit greatly from access to a safe, well-maintained, and interconnected urban park system. Good urban open spaces increase the quality of life for surrounding areas and the desirability of

urban living in general. A healthy urban environment and robust “green infrastructure” provides innumerable public benefits as residents breathe cleaner air, are more physically active, have access to more locally-grown food, are exposed to fewer pollutants, and experience less intense summer heat.

The open space needs of urban residents are diverse, ranging from pocket parks and tot lots to athletic fields, greenways, community gardens, and urban wilds. The demands and preferences for open space are also changing, due in part to growing immigrant populations that bring new concepts regarding the use and form of open space. Connections between open spaces are also a critical element of the urban system; they create more access to larger areas for a wider variety of residents, and they improve the bicycle and pedestrian experience for people moving through the city.

Creation and preservation of urban open space is often a challenge due to development pressures, especially in areas where the need is greatest (i.e., in areas where neighborhoods are most dense). In these areas, open space needs might be met through better connections to nearby open spaces, and opportunistic development of publicly accessible open spaces on plazas, through set-asides, or on rooftops. Other underserved neighborhoods have less development pressure and a larger supply of vacant land, due to past disinvestment. In these areas, urban park stakeholders should identify networks and opportunities, acquire land, and adjust development controls in advance of future growth, in order to create a park system that precedes and helps to stimulate investment. Innovative financing strategies such as linkage fees, betterments, or value capture tools can help to reduce direct costs to municipalities. Increased real estate values that occur as a result of park-adjacent development may in fact yield a financial benefit to municipalities.

### **17) Coordinate urban park planning, development, administration and regional connections**

Urban open space in Metro Boston comprises a diverse network of properties owned by various public and private entities: the Commonwealth (Department of Conservation and Recreation, Massachusetts Turnpike Authority), municipalities, land trusts, nonprofits, institutions, cemeteries, and for-profit interests. Each agency and organization has a distinct mission and portfolio. Greater coordination among all these entities can reduce redundancy, identify gaps, and create economies of scale. This constellation of stakeholders should be largely preserved, but slight restructuring of interests and responsibilities, among public agencies in particular, might yield greater efficiencies in service delivery.

The focus of the coordination efforts and restructuring should be to increase the quality of the park system and efficiency of service delivery. There should be particular focus on developing parks, playgrounds, community gardens, and greenway connections in areas that are (or will be) underserved by open space (less than 50 acres of protected open space per 1,000 residents.) Regional planning should also be a key focus since, in urban areas especially, waterways and parks often span municipal boundaries.

Greenways are the most common linkages. Continuous and contiguous pathways along urban riverfronts and waterfronts also should be planned. Gaps in existing networks should be identified and filled, for example, the Charles River Inner Basin pathways are missing a waterfront link behind the Museum of Science garage. When the Museum expands, public access to this area needs to be assured to help complete a continuous loop. As the public agency with the largest portfolio of parks, parkways, and greenways, the Department of Conservation and Recreation should take the lead in ensuring master plans for all of its major properties.

Municipalities can also make efforts to ensure that development is coordinated with open space. Zoning and development controls can be used to shape the form and function of properties adjacent to and along parks and greenways. Conventional zoning can specify lot coverage, building height, and setbacks; form based codes can be even more detailed with regard to circulation and the visual relationship between building and open space.

- 17.a MAPC should develop a network of urban open space stakeholders and seek funding to support ongoing communication**
- 17.b The Governor should establish a task force to evaluate management of Metro Boston’s urban parks and develop options to enhance service delivery**
- 17.c The Department of Conservation and Recreation should develop and implement master plans for all its major urban parks, parkways, and greenways**
- 17.d The Legislature should adopt legislation “Relative to Protecting the Natural and Historic Resources of the Commonwealth” (Public Lands Protection Act)**

Article 97 of the Constitution seeks to protect public parkland and open space from development, but such restrictions can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of the Legislature. Such votes have become increasingly common, as municipalities seek to convert open space for economic development or public buildings. Losing such parcels can be particularly devastating in urbanized communities with limited parkland. The Public Lands Protection Act seeks to stem the tide of such losses, keeping both the “public” and the “park” in public park land. This legislation supports the goals of MetroFuture, and deserves to pass.

## **18) Leverage partnerships and private funding to improve maintenance of urban parks**

Residents and property owners benefit greatly from a good urban park system, in the form of increased property values and quality of life. The private sector has an important role to play in park development and maintenance, from planning

through financing and maintenance. Avenues of participation may be as informal as “friends” groups and park clean-ups, or as formal as conservancies and land trusts; they may be voluntary (organization membership) or compulsory (betterments.)

The most successful new parks and rehabilitations are those where sufficient thought has been given to four key principles:

- Visioning and organization
- Design and permitting
- Construction and supervision
- Stewardship and programming

Without these efforts, the result will be poorly conceived designs, little community buy-in, and no long term commitments to maintenance or programs on the part of neighborhoods or government agencies. Projects will begin to degrade the day the ribbon is cut and will fail to reach and benefit a broader audience. This is not a good use of limited private or public dollar.

Park management and maintenance is a more complicated, onerous, and expensive task than restoring parks in the long run. In special cases, maintenance endowments should be considered to support private maintenance crews with specialized skills.

Public-private partnerships on park development and maintenance have demonstrated great success in Metro Boston and elsewhere. Innovative financing tools that benefit from and reinforce real estate development trends have been a key tool for urban park development for many years (the development of Boston’s Franklin Park and the Emerald Necklace were funded through betterments and that era’s equivalent of District Improvement Financing.) Special linkage fee structures can be used to support park development in those areas currently underserved by open space.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation Partnerships Matching Funds Program in the Office of External Affairs and Partnerships is creating new models of stewardships to protect and sustain the natural, cultural, historical, and recreational public resources of the Commonwealth for future generations. Through the provision of a dollar-for-dollar match for private, non-state funding, partners can contribute to capital projects needed to maintain our Commonwealth's parks system. Contributing to organizational capacity building by enabling private partners to work closely with DCR, the Partnerships Matching Funds Program strengthens working relationships between DCR and its Friends groups, civic organizations, institutions businesses and individuals.

Municipalities should also seek opportunities to direct youth jobs programs to service in parks and playgrounds or training programs focused on horticulture and open space. The benefits of youth jobs programs extend beyond the work experience and the physical improvements to open space; such programs help

to educate youth, create awareness of parks issues, and build an open space constituency.

- 18.a Property owners and residents should create and support conservancies and friends of parks groups**
- 18.b MAPC, advocacy organizations, and municipalities should develop a model for using linkage or impact fees to support park development in underserved areas**
- 18.c MAPC, advocacy organizations, and municipalities develop a model for value capture tools such as a “Park Improvement District”**
- 18.d Municipalities and organizations should direct more youth jobs programs to service in parks and open space**

### **19) Increase the urban tree canopy**

Especially in urban communities, trees are vital to the health of a neighborhood and its residents. Trees lower temperatures by providing shade, and they remove air pollution, especially particulate pollution that has been linked to asthma and other respiratory diseases that are more common in urban areas. According to the Natural Resources Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 100 mature trees remove five tons of carbon dioxide and more than 1,000 pounds of other air pollutants each year. Urban forests are also known to dramatically reduce the “urban heat island effect.” On a household level, one large shade tree can reduce air conditioning cost by 30% and reduce heating cost by 10-25% by blocking wind. Trees have also shown to have dramatic effects on the neighborhoods they are planted in through their capacity to help foster a sense of community by creating attractive and engaging meeting places.

MetroFuture supports efforts to increase the region’s urban tree canopy, such as the City of Boston’s goal of increasing canopy coverage from 29% to 35% by planting 100,000 trees before the year 2020. Assuming that other urban municipalities have canopy coverage comparable to that of Boston, MetroFuture identifies a need for 1.2 million trees in order to achieve 35% canopy coverage in the region’s urban communities. Studies show that planting and maintaining 100 urban trees will cost \$82,000 over the lifetimes of the trees while generating \$225,000 in economic benefits, specifically storm water and air pollution control and increased real estate value.

Regional urban forestry efforts will require a more comprehensive understanding of Metro Boston’s existing urban forest canopy and the condition of existing trees and forests. A recent study of the forest canopy in Boston’s Franklin Park found that many of the trees in the forest are nearing the end of their lifespan and there are not enough younger and mid-sized trees to replace those that will be lost. Such research is critical to guiding effective planting and forestry management programs.

Tree and forest inventories are one important component of a comprehensive “community forestry program” through which public and private tree canopy efforts are coordinated. Existing models for such programs include Grow Boston Greener, a public private partnership comprised of City of Boston and its partners in Boston’s Urban Forest Coalition (BUFC). The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation is one such partner and provides support for community forestry programs.

Municipalities can also retain and increase tree canopy through regulatory means. There are a variety of tree preservation ordinances that help to protect existing trees on public and private property; zoning and site plan review guidelines can also require tree planting and establish baseline planting and maintenance standards so that trees will flourish.

- 19.a The Commonwealth and private funders should support efforts to catalog and increase the urban forest canopy**
- 19.b Urban municipalities should establish community forestry programs based on the criteria of the US Forest Service and Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation**
- 19.c Municipalities should adopt tree preservation ordinances and mitigation programs**
- 19.d Municipalities should establish baseline planting and maintenance standards (through zoning or site plan review) for trees in new development or redevelopment**

## **20) Expand urban farms and community gardens**

Community gardens are green spaces that are communally cultivated and cared for; these spaces may consist of individually worked plots, communally tended areas, sitting areas, and small-scale children's play areas. Urban farms are similar, but are cultivated by a single individual or organization. Community gardening is an effective community-building strategy that contributes to neighborhood revitalization, beautification, crime deterrence, and enhanced property values.

Community gardens are a source of fresh and healthy food for the gardeners, often food that is a critical supplement to a family’s resources. In 2008, the Boston Natural Areas Network completed a 3 year study indicating that \$1.2 million of food is grown each year in approximately 300 garden plots in the City of Boston, equivalent to \$431 per gardener. Community gardens are especially important to seniors and immigrants, who value community gardening for social benefits and opportunity to grow culturally appropriate food. Gardens are integral to the active living of residents, providing a source of recreation and increasing appreciation of natural beauty.

Most community gardens are supported by resident advocates and volunteers, some of whom benefit from the support of organizations such as the Boston Natural Areas Network. New and expanded networks of community gardens and gardeners, with increased support from organizations and municipalities, can support advocacy, collaborative resource development, and dissemination of best practices.

While some community gardens are permanently protected through ownership or easement, others have no such protection (including many publicly-owned community gardens). Municipalities should enact policies (such as a zoning designation) that prohibit or restrict the development of community gardens. There is also a need for safe gardening and soil remediation strategies to lower pollutant levels of contaminants that may exist in garden soil due to the use of railroad ties and pressure-treated lumber as plot dividers.

- 20.a Create local and regional community garden networks**
- 20.b Municipalities should adopt Urban Garden Zoning to designate and protect community gardens.**
- 20.c Municipalities, nonprofits, and institutions should collaborate to apply best practices for remediation of contamination at community gardens and urban agriculture sites**
- 20.d Municipalities should partner with immigrant advocacy organizations to develop new community gardens**

## **21) Protect and restore urban wilds, waterways, and urban ecology**

While the region's urban areas are highly developed, they still retain many remnants of the natural environment that preceded human development. There are a variety of strategies to protect these urban wilds and restore other elements of urban ecology.

Undeveloped areas in the city retain a special character and ecology that can enhance neighborhood character and quality of life. These "urban wilds" vary in size and in character: small wooded areas, rock outcroppings, waterways, ponds, meadows. Anne Whiston Spirn wrote in *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* of urban wilds, "They place the city in its regional context and differentiate it from other cities, rather than setting it apart from the surrounding landscape." They are, she added, "frequently more expressive of the special character of a particular city- its geological origins, topographic setting, indigenous vegetation, and history- than are its manicured parks."

The ownership and protection status of urban wilds varies greatly. Some are owned by parks departments and advocacy groups, and are permanently protected; others are owned by non-parks agencies or departments or by private owners, and might yet be developed. More comprehensive inventories of urban

wilds are necessary to plan for their preservation and integrate these features into open space plans.

Many of the waterways in urban areas have been redirected to engineered channels culverts, or other underground pipes. Recent efforts in other cities have demonstrated the positive benefits of uncovering and/or restoring buried waterways in urban environments, a process known as “daylighting.” Daylighting efforts and the use of “green” stormwater management techniques can improve water quality, reduce flooding, and create more awareness of the natural environment. Municipalities and developers should seek opportunities to leverage new development to restore the “green infrastructure” in urban areas. Through its “Blue Cities” initiative, the Charles River Watershed Association has developed “Green Street Guidelines” that incorporate low-impact stormwater management practices as well as pedestrian and bicycle accommodations. Municipalities should develop and adopt comparable guidelines.

- 21.a Municipalities and advocacy organizations should establish partnerships to inventory and document urban wilds**
- 21.b Urban municipalities should establish site specific “green street standards” similar to those developed by the Charles River Watershed Association**