Introduction to the
Rural Policy Plan
for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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This Presentation:

- Overviews of:
  - Rural Policy Advisory Commission function and composition
  - Demographic and socio-economic trends in MA
  - Rural Policy Plan goals, process and timeline

- Highlights of the Rural Policy Plan

- Top Priorities
Rural Policy Advisory Commission

- Created by the Legislature in 2015
- Membership of the Commission is:
  - A representative from the House and a representative from the Senate
  - Secretary of EOHED
  - 12 gubernatorial appointments including from RPAs serving rural communities – BRPC, CCC, CMRPC, FRCOG, MVC, MRPC, NPEDD, PVPC and SRPEDD

The mission of the Commission “shall be to enhance the economic vitality of rural communities”.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

- The definition of “rural” is a municipality with a population density of less than 500 people per sq. mile
- Nearly half of all municipalities are Rural Towns
- Population of Rural Towns is 830,000 (13% of state)
  - Equivalent to the population of Boston + Worcester + Lexington
- 59% of the State’s total land area

170 Rural Towns

Of these 170, 84 are in four western counties, and 86 are in nine eastern counties
Economic & Demographic Trends in Rural Massachusetts
Population is Declining in the Most Rural Areas

2000-2010% Population Change:
- 3% growth Statewide
- 5% growth in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns with population decline in west, than in east

Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census Program
Median Income is Higher in Urban, Eastern MA

Median Household Income (MHI):

- $68,653 for Massachusetts
- Data not available for aggregate of Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns above statewide MHI in east, than in west

Housing Costs Are Lower in Most Areas of Rural MA

Average Single Family Home Value:

- Statewide average not available
- Median of the municipalities’ average is about $306,000
- More Rural Towns above municipalities’ median in east, than in west

But the Combination of Housing and Transportation is Often Higher for Rural Households

Percent of income spent on housing and transportation for a median income household in Berkshire County: 54%

Percent of income spent on housing and transportation for a median income household in Suffolk County: 38%
Employment by Industry:
Employed in Professional, Scientific, & Management Services
- 13% Statewide
- 11% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns in east with a high percentage, than in west

There are only two full-time career centers serving the 2,315 square mile geographic area encompassing Franklin, Hampshire and Berkshire counties. That equals 30% of the state’s total land area.

Workforce support systems are lacking in rural Massachusetts

- Limited public transportation
- Few career centers, technical high schools, public colleges and universities
Rural Policy Plan
Goals, Process and Timeline
Plan Goals

- Identify rural assets and challenges
- Describe how rural areas differ within the state
- Highlight best practices underway in Massachusetts and beyond
- Identify a series of action-oriented policy, investment and regulatory recommendations prioritized for implementation
## Process and Timeline

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Milestone</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. – Dec. 2018</td>
<td>Statewide Listening Sessions to confirm Focus Areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. – Mar. 2019</td>
<td>Plan Format Development Consultant Secured Focus Area lead developers identified</td>
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<td>April – June 2019</td>
<td>Focus Area stakeholder meetings to develop policy recommendations and draft Focus Area content for plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>Prioritization of Recommendations</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td>Plan completed</td>
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<td>October 2019</td>
<td>Public Rollout</td>
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Rural Policy Plan
Highlights
Rural Areas Have Strong Assets

- Natural beauty and physical landscapes that are conducive for outdoor recreation and tourism

- Full participation in the movement towards small-scale farming, and locally made food and beverage products

- Strong small businesses and economic sectors, albeit different than those inside 128

- Smaller scale that is focused on problem-solving, innovation and collaboration

- Land and housing stock that could ease the Massachusetts housing crisis

- A quality of life that still attracts new residents and visitors

With more dedicated and focused support, rural Massachusetts can be a much stronger contributor to the Massachusetts economy.
But Rural Areas Also Have Serious Challenges

• **Demographic trends** are the single biggest overall challenge for rural areas

• Rural competitiveness depends on upgrading the **infrastructure**

• **Economic opportunities and workforce needs** are different in rural areas

• Rural areas have unique **housing** needs which are not being met

• **Education and healthcare** – known as strengths statewide – can be challenges in rural areas

• Municipalities lack the **financial resources and staff capacity** to invest in rural areas
And Rural Areas Are Not All the Same

- Rural areas vary across the state; three typologies identified:
  - Suburbs / Bedroom Communities
  - Areas of Economic Distress
  - Concentrations of Second Homes
Focus Area Categories

**INFRASTRUCTURE**
- Broadband & Cell Service
- Transportation Mobility
- Transportation Infrastructure
- Water & Sewer

**ECONOMY**
- Economic Development
- Land Use & Working Lands
- Population Trends
- Workforce

**COMMUNITY**
- Education
- Housing
- Public Health & Healthcare

**GOVERNANCE**
- Boards & Staffing
- Finance
- Shared Services

**CLIMATE**
- Climate Change & Resiliency
Each focus area is given four pages. The first two pages provide:

- **Issue context** with local examples including how issues vary across rural areas within Massachusetts;
- An **overarching goal** for the focus area;
- Regional/national **best practices**;
- **Existing policies and programs** that address the focus area.
The final two pages provide specific **policy, investment & regulatory recommendations** for state, regional and local leaders to implement in the near-term and longer-term to address issues and realize opportunities in rural areas.
Focus Area Recommendations

- **Specific** to address the Focus Area challenges
- **Action Oriented**
- **Varying Scale/Scope** – some large, some small; some low hanging fruit, some more ambitious
- Sometimes **funding** *(but not always!)*, sometimes **policy**, sometimes an **administrative** fix
Examples of Infrastructure Recommendations

- Perform an equity assessment of Chapter 90 apportionments
- Utilize broadband to accelerate economic activity and growth in rural areas
Examples of Economy Recommendations

Economic Development / Land Use & Working Lands
Population Trends / Workforce Development

- Expand PILOT for ecosystem value of land
- Target economic development strategies to rural sub-regions and sectors, similar to the Transformative Development Initiative
Examples of Community Recommendations

Education / Housing / Public Health and Healthcare

- Revise the Community Scale Housing Initiative to be more useable in small towns
- Revise chapter 70 formula to achieve better equity for rural school districts
Examples of Governance Recommendations

Municipal Boards and Staffing / Finance / Shared Services

• Invest in training programs for municipal roles
• Enact legislation that increases revenue and improves equity for rural municipalities
Examples of Climate Recommendations

- Expand watershed-based resiliency planning
- Streamline permitting for sea level rise mitigation
RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTION PLAN

- Top Priorities
- Core Strategies
- Sustained Implementation
- Action Plan
Top Priorities

- Expand diversity and implement relocation strategies to boost population in rural Massachusetts

- Develop a statewide land use plan/growth management strategy

- Determine and create a rural factor to adjust state funding formulas
Core Strategies

• Develop municipal capacity and incentives for service sharing

• Create a dedicated funding stream for water and sewer infrastructure

• Redesign public transportation provision in rural Massachusetts
Core Strategies

- Develop **targeted economic development strategies** for rural sectors

- Ensure **equitable and quality education** to children in rural Massachusetts

- Address the impacts of **climate change** in rural Massachusetts by enhancing capacity of rural lands to provide mitigative solutions
Sustained Implementation

- Create an **Office of Rural Policy** with permanent staff capacity to:
  - provide a consistent, productive focus on rural issues in the Commonwealth
  - help implement the recommendations of this rural policy plan
Action Plan

- Establish an **Office of Rural Policy**

- **Pass current legislative proposals** in support of rural areas

- **Continue the Rural Policy Advisory Commission** with a focus on implementation and progress monitoring

- **Approve and fund key studies and research** to help advance rural issues
Comments/Questions?

Thank You!