



Rural Policy Plan

for the Commonwealth of
Massachusetts

Prepared by the
Rural Policy Advisory Commission

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Rural Policy Plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Economy

This Presentation

- Rural Policy Plan Background
- Economy Focus Area
 - Economic Development
 - Land Use & Working Lands
 - Population Trends
 - Workforce
- Top Recommendations



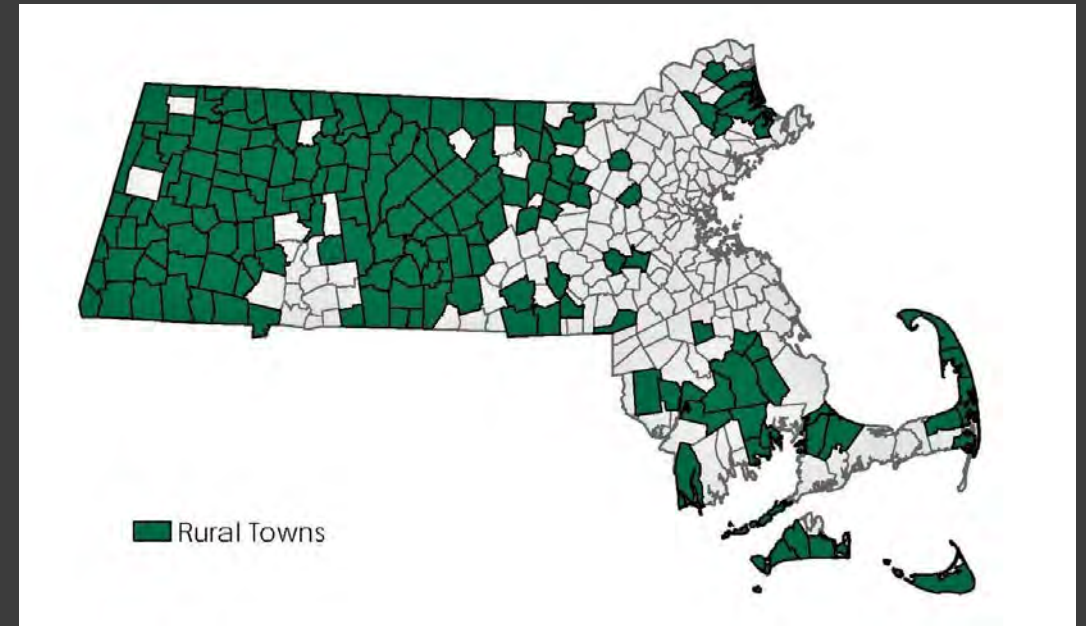
Rural Policy Advisory Commission

- 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



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 (170) of all municipalities in Massachusetts are Rural Towns
- Massachusetts Rural Towns have a total population of 830,000
 - 13% of the state and equivalent to the combined population of Boston, Worcester, and Lexington
- 59% of the State’s total land area



Rural Policy Plan Goals and Timeline

- 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

Timeframe	Milestone
Nov. – Dec. 2018	Statewide listening sessions to confirm focus areas
Jan. – Mar. 2019	Plan Format
Apr. – Jun. 2019	Focus area stakeholder meetings to develop policy recommendations and draft focus area content
Jul. 2019	Prioritization of recommendations
Sep. 2019	Plan Completed
Oct. 2019	Public Rollout

Economy



Economic Development: Goal

“Expand programming and resources to strengthen the economic vitality of rural Massachusetts through small business technical support, sector-specific initiatives, and municipal infrastructure and long-term capacity building.”



Economic Development: Challenges

- Stagnant population trends and shortage of available and qualified workers
- Limited investment in small business support and basic infrastructure including broadband, sewer, and water
- Vulnerability to business closures
- Inability to be competitive for discretionary grants
- Climate change



Economic Development: Existing Programs

- Opportunity Zone Program
- Small Business Technical Assistance Program (SBTA)
- MA Small Business Development Center (MSBDC) Network
- Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFI)
- Partnerships For Growth
- Community Investment Tax Credit (CITC)
- Collaborative Workspaces Program



Economic Development: Recommendations (1)

1. Ensure that the statewide economic development plan, Partnerships for Growth, recognizes and plans for the unique economic development needs and issues of rural MA
2. Target economic development strategies to rural sub-regions and sectors, similar to the Transformative Development Initiative
3. Sustain and further increase funding to the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation's Small Business Technical Assistance (SBTA) budget
4. Review application, selection and funding protocols for state-funding municipal infrastructure and capacity grants to remove barriers to access for small towns.
5. Enact the Rural Jobs Act



Economic Development: Recommendations (2)

6. Create an infrastructure fund for safe drinking water and septic installation in rural areas
7. Create and Office of Outdoor Recreation
8. Increase funding to assist farmers with aggregation, marketing, and delivery of products
9. Provide resources to plan and implement creative economy and natural resource-based tourism event in rural Massachusetts
10. Support the creation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)



A scenic landscape photograph featuring a red barn on the right, a dense forest of green trees in the middle ground, and rolling hills or mountains in the background under a blue sky with scattered clouds. The foreground shows a grassy field with a large tree on the left and a stone wall near the barn.

Land Use & Working Lands

Land Use & Working Lands: Goal

“Empower rural areas with policies and programs to make proactive land use decisions that support resilient development, maintain working lands and recognize their value, and manage the interconnectedness of rural, urban, and suburban lands.”



Land Use & Working Lands: Challenges

- Inadequate zoning flexibility and limited sewer and water infrastructure
- Climate change adaptation
 - Funding for extension services and technical assistance from universities and conservation districts has diminished significantly.
- Limited expansion of the local tax base
- Disconnect between local zoning bylaws and state incentives to accomplish statewide goals, such as moving to clean energy.



Land Use & Working Lands: Existing Programs

- Community Priority Area Initiatives' Priority Development Areas and Priority Preservation Areas.
- MassWorks STRAP grants
- 40R Program
- Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit, Municipal Vulnerability Program Action Grants and EEA Municipal Planning Grants
- Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR)
- Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program



Land Use & Working Lands: Recommendations (1)

1. Develop a State Land Use/Growth Management Strategy
2. Provide assistance and funding to rural communities for revision of local zoning to encourage smart growth and low impact development
3. Create a dedicated funding stream for the provision of water and sewer infrastructure in rural town centers
4. Significantly expand UMass technical assistance services for farms and forests
5. Expand or develop an alternative to the PILOT framework that values the full array of nature-based solutions and ecosystem services provided by rural lands



Land Use & Working Lands: Recommendations (2)

6. Prioritize policies that address farmland and fishery adaption to climate change and new market conditions
7. Increase the engagement of farmers and foresters in Municipal Vulnerability Program work, open space, and other planning projects
8. Model the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund as a method for coupling the goals of affordable housing development and land conservation
9. Strengthen the working lands economy by focusing on the economic development potential of the agricultural and woodlot processing sector
10. Remove rollback taxes when moving land into permanent protection as part of cluster development projects



An aerial photograph of a city street, likely in a mountainous region. The street is wide and runs vertically through the center of the frame. On either side of the street are various buildings, including multi-story brick structures and a large, light-colored building with many windows in the foreground. The city is surrounded by green hills and mountains in the background under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The text "Population Trends" is overlaid in the center of the image.

Population Trends

Population Trends: Goal

“As a Commonwealth, we should encourage more balanced, sustainable, population growth across the State, especially reversing stagnant and declining population trends by working to retain and attract a younger and more diverse population in rural areas of Massachusetts.”



Population Trends: Challenges

- Stagnant and/or declining population trends for the last 20 years
- Lack of jobs, basic services, and dwindling fiscal resources
- Fewer young workers and school-age children versus older populations create challenges for housing prices, school enrollment, workforce, and service delivery



Population Trends: Existing Programs

- Population-Based Funding Formulas
- S.208 - An Act Establishing the Western Massachusetts Remote Worker Relocation Incentive Program



Population Trends: Recommendations (1)

1. Create the MA Office of Rural Policy
2. Develop a statewide land use plan/growth management strategy
3. Expand racial and ethnic diversity in rural Massachusetts
4. Replicate Maine and Vermont relocation strategies targeted to rural areas of Massachusetts
5. Study the feasibility and equity of a rurality factor in statewide funding formulas



Population Trends: Recommendations (2)

6. Support rural Young Professional Societies
7. Ensure that every rural Massachusetts resident is counted in the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census
8. Prepare rural communities for the aging of their population
9. Promote a diversity in housing stock so that older homeowners can comfortably downsize, freeing up single family homes young people
10. Rural municipalities should assess and reconsider any municipally-imposed barriers to housing development such as stricter Title 5 regulations or land use regulations



A large group of approximately 30 healthcare professionals, including nurses and doctors, are posed in three rows outdoors. They are standing on a grassy area with a dense line of green trees in the background. The group is diverse in age and ethnicity. Many are wearing medical scrubs in shades of green, blue, and purple. The word "Workforce" is overlaid in white text in the center of the image.

Workforce

Workforce: Goal

“Massachusetts should better address the unique needs of employers and current and prospective employees in rural areas through education and workforce system support that reduces barriers to employment.”



Workforce: Challenges

- Fewer educational institutions providing workforce support
- Social safety net services located in urban centers that are not easily accessible
- Limited public transit access, few childcare options, lack of broadband, and a dearth of healthcare and mental healthcare services
- Few options for vocational and occupational education, or adult basic education, including English as a second language
- Rural career centers struggle to secure funding



Workforce: Existing Programs

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- Workforce Training Fund Program
- Workforce Skills Cabinet
- Massachusetts Skills Capital Grants Program
- Community College and Career Center TRAIN (Training Resources and Internship) Program
- Career Education for Youth



Workforce: Recommendations (1)

1. Provide state funding to stabilize core services of rural MassHire Career Centers
2. Ensure an equitable distribution of workforce funds and program opportunities to rural areas
3. Foster greater collaboration among public education and training institutions
4. Develop and invest in Massachusetts universal pre-K and childcare



Workforce: Recommendations (2)

5. Address unique rural barriers that prevent workers from joining the workforce
 - a. Invest in non-traditional transit models in rural areas to enhance workers' ability to commute to jobs and training
 - b. Increase the Commonwealth's childcare reimbursement rate policies



Top Recommendations



1. Expand PILOT for ecosystem value of land.
2. Target economic development strategies to rural sub-regions and sectors.
3. Foster greater collaboration among public education and training institutions.
4. Fund revisions to smart growth and low impact development in local zoning bylaws.
5. Increase the MA Growth Capital Corporation's Small Business Technical Assistance budget to \$4 million

