



BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCIES

Who We Are: The Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA) is a statewide organization of the commonwealth's 13 regional planning agencies (RPAs). Each RPA, in turn, comprises representatives of the member cities and towns constituting its geographic region. Although Massachusetts' RPAs are public service agencies, they are not direct arms of the federal or state governments. Rather, they are consortia of local governments that have banded together under the provisions of state law to address problems and opportunities that are regional in scope. The regional planning areas delineated for each of Massachusetts' 13 RPAs are designated by state enabling legislation as special state districts.

Each RPA is governed by a board formed of representatives from its member communities. Planning professionals on RPA staffs work with their boards and with many public agencies and officials to define and direct solutions to area-wide problems that cannot be solved by member communities working alone.

What We Do: The regional planning agencies in Massachusetts are public organizations that encompass a multi-jurisdictional regional community. These RPAs serve the local governments and citizens within their planning districts by dealing with issues and needs that cross city, town, county, and even state boundaries through planning, policymaking, communication coordination, advocacy, education, analysis, and technical assistance. The 13 regional planning agencies that form MARPA are advisory bodies to member communities, private business groups, and state and federal governments, providing research and analysis services and helping to implement planning in areas such as economic development, community and rural development, infrastructure development and maintenance, environment and land use, regional and municipal services, solid waste management and recycling, historic preservation, transportation and transit, GIS mapping and graphics services, technical assistance to member communities, housing, bikeway planning and development, and regional information.

Where We Are: Massachusetts' 13 regional planning agencies cover the entire state with planning areas of varying sizes. There are approximately 600 similar planning organizations nationwide.

When We Were Created: In 1955, Massachusetts became one of the first states in the nation to enact statewide enabling legislation that allowed for the creation of regional planning agencies. Within a decade and half, all 13 Massachusetts RPAs had been legally established, encompassing a majority of the commonwealth's 351 cities and towns. Today, more than 40 years later, all but a handful of the state's municipalities are active members of their regions' RPAs and are fully engaged in a regional planning process that exists wall-to-wall across Massachusetts.

Why We Were Created: Massachusetts' Regional Planning Law, MGL Chapter 40B, was designed "to permit a city or town to plan jointly with cities or towns to promote with the greatest efficiency and economy the coordinated and orderly development of the areas within their jurisdictions and the general welfare and prosperity of their citizens." In essence, city and town governments within each of the 13 state-designated regional planning districts were authorized to voluntarily join together in order to address problems as well as opportunities of regional scope. Regional planning agencies are the umbrellas under which these cities and towns have come together.

Massachusetts' RPAs promote regional collaboration among their member communities. They are also the primary agencies responsible for increasing communication, cooperation, and coordination among all levels of government as well as the private business and civic sectors in order to benefit their planning regions and to improve their residents' quality of life.

How We Operate: Massachusetts' RPAs are funded through modest annual assessments from their member communities, state and federal grant programs, private sector contributions, and service fees, among other sources.