

Governing Greater Boston

The Politics and Policy of Place

Charles C. Euchner, Editor

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6. *Planning the Fragmented Metropolis: Acting Regionally and Locally*

Anthony Flint

MIDDLEBOROUGH HAS A RURAL AND FOLKSY FEEL. The landscape is characterized by scrub oak and pine barrens, cranberry bogs and family restaurants, and simple gas stations along two-lane roads. The local police department recently stepped up enforcement of an ordinance forbidding playing loud music on car stereos. But the town's tranquility faces an unprecedented challenge in the coming years. Middleborough's zoning allows for a volume of development that would fill two-thirds of downtown Boston, according to the state's new "build-out" analysis, which assesses how cities and towns would grow under current zoning rules. The development, however, would not look at all like downtown Boston. The development would be spread out across vast acres of now-undeveloped land, not built along pedestrian-oriented streets with easy access to a wide variety of business, social, educational and social activities. Middleborough is poised to become an "edge city," a community of nondistinct structures surrounded by roads and parking lots.

Like many communities along Interstate 495 outside of Boston, Middleborough is intent on increasing its commercial tax base, to pay for schools and basic services. Zoning permits a potential 31 million square feet of additional commercial and industrial development—strip malls, large-scale retail, hotels, conference centers, golf courses, office parks, warehouses, assembly plants, and light manufacturing facilities. Housing is in the mix, too, but the modern single-family subdivision is the preferred design; some 10,588 new units could be built across 21,255 acres, so families with children are spread out over the maximum area of land. Some would prefer no new children at all because of the costs associated with public education, so large-lot zoning is used to keep the numbers down. Even so, a maximum level of development would add 5,900 students to the existing 3,400-student school system, according to the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. Overall the population would rise from its current 19,700 to 50,000.

Planners assessing development patterns believe that those who live, shop, and work in Middleborough will get around almost exclusively by car, on secondary roads and the convenient interstate highways of I-495 and I-195. Commuters can be in Boston in less than an hour by commuter rail—but first they must get themselves to the station, almost always by car. In the build out, an estimated 90 miles of new roads will be required. New infrastructure must also be built to satisfy the anticipated 4.6 million more gallons of water needed per day. Solid waste disposal is projected to increase by 15,500 tons per year.

The nearby community of New Bedford, meanwhile, has plenty of existing infrastructure for water, sewer and transit—only 33 miles of new roads would be required in its maximum build-out—but vacant lots go wanting. Retail has long since migrated outside city limits, to Dartmouth and other nearby towns where new shopping areas have led to abandonment of earlier generations' stores and parking lots. Some efforts at revival of older communities have been successful, with the rehabilitation of theaters, attraction of tourists, immigration growth, and an attractive and affordable housing stock. But the old whaling capital has been struggling to confront high unemployment and dropout rates. New Bedford struggles with a lingering reputation as a center of crime and poverty. Like many such communities, the city has debated the ultimate last-ditch strategy for revival: a casino.

The contrast of towns like New Bedford and Middleboro can be found throughout Massachusetts. “Infill”—a strategy for community revitalization that encourages developers to build on vacant parcels in older communities—is out of favor. There are exceptions. Salem is encouraging development near mass transit, and Somerville is trying to build a cluster of different activities near a new transit station at its massive Assembly Square site. But for the most part, redevelopment of existing urban centers is viewed as quaint, a relic from the 1970s and the first administration of Michael S. Dukakis. Big employers like Cisco are simply not interested in Lowell; the company plans a sprawling campus on 300 fresh acres in Boxborough.

Other attempts to spark “infill” development often face resistance from communities. Planners for TeleCom City, a joint development venture of Medford, Malden, and Everett, eliminated plans for new housing when neighbors complained about traffic and school impacts. The same kind of community resistance occurred at the Northpoint development site off the McGrath Highway in Cambridge, near the Lechmere Green Line station. When developers proposed building on parcels vacated by Monsanto and General Electric, neighbors said no to housing.

The major exception is Boston itself, though the city's planning process and management of the building boom is continually criticized. In a way, the

city suffers too much of a good thing. The wealthiest residents, including young professionals, empty-nesters and retiring baby boomers, are flocking back to gentrifying neighborhoods for the urban experience — and driving housing prices out of reach for everyone else. Traffic congestion, too, is badly straining the local street system, and many residents worry the city is emphasizing development that will cater to conventioners and visitors at the expense of middle-class residential neighborhoods. The school system continues to founder, as affluent residents send their kids to private schools, or don't have kids to worry about at all.

In the suburban towns outside of booming Boston and the struggling, medium-sized inner-core cities, meanwhile, a localized and fragmented approach to planning prevails. Building is accommodated on a town-by-town basis: across the state, 351 separate entities, each ushering in growth as local leaders see fit, secure in home rule and a century of unchanged land-use policy. The framework virtually guarantees a continuation of post-World War II development patterns: low-density, spread out, and car-dependent. Such sprawling development consumes land at a rate of 40 acres a day, according to the Massachusetts Audubon Society. As farmland has diminished by 50 percent since 1950, land used for subdivisions, office parks and malls has increased 200 percent over the same period.

Half the states in the nation—most notably, Maryland, New Jersey, Vermont, Oregon, Washington and Utah—have adopted some kind of statewide growth management plan in the last decade. But Massachusetts leaders have created no similar, concerted effort to get a handle on growth on a statewide basis. State environmental secretary Robert Durand has said that a “top-down” regional or statewide planning effort will never work in Massachusetts. Instead, Durand argues, localities should be given tools and some funding to plan better individually. Others disagree. Senate President Thomas F. Birmingham, a candidate for governor in 2002, appears interested in more centralized strategies. The quasi-governmental Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the Boston Society of Architects have convened informal planning processes to develop growth-management strategies.

True to Durand's toolkit approach, the state has adopted a number of local initiatives to address sprawl. In these experiments, cities and towns have established “compacts” to discuss new development projects, the regional impacts of growth, and infrastructure needs. The Cape Cod Commission, which possesses the rare power to approve or reject projects based on a set plan for 15 communities on the Cape, is the most powerful such effort. Its predecessor is the Martha's Vineyard Commission. North of Boston, the Telecom City project brought local officials in Malden, Medford

and Everett together to promote office development across municipal borders, including an innovative revenue-sharing scheme to replace the conventional town-against-town competition for tax dollars. Abington, Rockland and Weymouth have banded together to play major roles in the redevelopment of the South Weymouth Naval Air Station. Plymouth, Wareham and Carver have done the same in the face of the A.D. Makepeace Company's three-town, 6,000-acre planned-community proposal. The towns around the former Fort Devens have come together, too.

But in the meantime, development barrels ahead. Massachusetts has not experienced the kind of urban abandonment and suburban growth as communities in the Sunbelt. But Massachusetts sprawls on.

Issues Facing the Region

At first glance, Massachusetts seems positioned well to absorb building and development within the fabric of its existing urban infrastructure. The Commonwealth's landscape, settled in Colonial days, lacks the wide-open spaces of Florida or Utah. Instead, the landscape is dotted with urban centers outside the core of Boston and Cambridge—Somerville, Chelsea, Lowell, Lawrence, Brockton, New Bedford, Fall River, and Worcester. Each of these cities boasts an abundance of infrastructure for transportation, housing, and water and sewer service, as well as land that can be redeveloped to revive old neighborhoods. In fact, viable models exist for that kind of development. Communities like Brookline and Newton—dubbed “urban villages” by the historian Sam Bass Warner, Jr.—offer a mix of building types, business and residential spaces, parks and civic spaces, and transit access.

Despite these venerable models, new development has spread out around these existing urban centers and beyond first-ring suburbs. Development has surged in the region's hub (Boston and Cambridge) and on the rim (the “sheetrock suburbs” along Route 128, I-495 and beyond). Interstate 495—originally built through pig farms solely to move trucks and cars through the state without having to go through the congestion of Boston—provides a magnet for the rim development. So much of the development has already occurred that some experts believe that planning must be focused on the state's few untouched places. Others believe that innovative approaches to planning can help overwhelmed communities such as Franklin create policies to control commercial and residential development. Planning also can help residents and civic leaders get a better understanding of the benefits of managed growth in communities such as Bolton, where a backlash against all development is in full force.

The problem of sprawl and uncoordinated development has many dimensions in Greater Boston. First, business and residential development is spreading out, making coordination of development and common infrastructure and services difficult. Second, the search for quality of life is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, people seek the ideal of the classic New England village, apart from the congestion of the more urbanized parts of the region; on the other hand, this search has exacerbated the region's sprawl and made it more difficult to foster communities that bring people together. Third, the system of local government finance has led to a practice known as "tax farming," which favors office parks and malls over housing. Finally, the region is a checkerboard of unequal communities, which creates competition to attract business and to keep out housing and other kinds of development that are considered undesirable.

Spreading out

Any analysis of building and development in Massachusetts must start with people—the people living, working, shopping, and recreating in the cities and towns across the state. Unlike the Southeast, West or Southwest, development patterns in Massachusetts are not driven by significant increases in population. Compared to the fastest-growing states in the 1990–2000 period—Arizona, Nevada and Colorado, where the population grew by 30 percent—the Massachusetts population grew by only 5.5 percent. The Commonwealth was home to 6,016,425 people in 1990 and 6,349,097 in 2000, according to the US Census. That is an increase of 5.24 percent.

The low rate of population growth and the high rate of land consumption—a classic indication of sprawl—fits the longstanding urge to "Go West, young man" in American history. In Massachusetts, people and business move out in concentric rings along Boston's beltways, Route 128 and Interstate 495. Single-family subdivisions are followed by retail and services, which in turn creates the congestion that residents sought to escape in the first place. A process of leap-frogging occurs again and again, with population moving steadily further out from Boston. Amazingly, the Boston metropolitan area is now considerably less urban than Los Angeles, according to the Boston Society of Architects Civic Initiative for a Livable New England. While 2,700 people live in the average square mile of Greater Boston, 5,400 people live in the average square mile in L.A. Overall, population density is down a full 50 percent from 1950 to 2000, according to the BSA.

The state's most sterling story of urban living—Boston—could ironically contribute to the problem of sprawl. Boston has reversed a 30-year decline in its population, according to the 2000 Census. The population did

not quite hit 600,000, as many had anticipated, but the city has succeeded in attracting immigrants, young professionals, and even retiring baby boomers who raised children in the suburbs but are now flocking back to urban neighborhoods. Affluent urbanites, new and old, crave the excitement of the city and move into brownstones or the city's famous three-decker homes. But Boston might have too much of a good thing. The most affluent people establish beachheads in attractive and convenient neighborhoods, sending less affluent people scrambling to establish themselves elsewhere. Gentrified neighborhoods in Boston, first-ring communities such as Brookline and Newton, and communities farther out ranging from Hamilton to Weston and Concord to Hingham are, generally speaking, claimed by the affluent. The rest of eastern Massachusetts is for everybody else, and moderate-income families find they must search farther and farther from these wealthy areas to find affordable housing.

A working-class family, for example, may have discovered in the 1980s that they can no longer afford rents in the South End. If they moved to Roxbury, by 2001 the rents are escalating there as well, so they must consider living in Lynn, which is not experiencing the same kind of urban revival as Boston. Or, they might try to buy a single-family home in the only place they can afford it—not Brookline, not Concord, but a town such as Bellingham or Franklin, one of only four communities in the commonwealth where the median home sale price matched the median income, according to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

Since the quest for affordability invariably means looking farther afield, owning a car—often two—becomes a necessity. And that is the chokepoint where moderate-income earners and their more affluent counterparts join together again: the roads and highways and arterials. The affluent and moderate-income earners are spread around for different reasons, but they share a common, long commute, often from a home in the suburbs to a job in the suburbs. And so the phenomenon of spreading out has its ultimate manifestation: the traffic jam.

'Quality of Life' and its Discontents

The fundamental dilemma of contemporary development patterns can be traced back to expectations for a good "quality of life." Whether in Boston's Back Bay or rural Bolton, residents fight fiercely to protect their quality of life. Robert Yaro, executive director of the New York-based Regional Plan Association, calls this impulse the "pull-up-the-drawbridge" response: saying "no" to any new projects and major increases in density.

But what do people mean when they talk about the quality of life? The classical ideal is the New England town. People seek out homes along quiet

roads, but even more they crave the center of town—which carries evocative names like town center or the village green—and the sense of belonging and excitement that these configurations provide. Alex Krieger, chairman of the Department of Urban Planning and Urban Design at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, calls this ideal the "middle landscape." The blend of town and country offers human-scaled buildings, a cozy street network, home-grown businesses, recognizable landmarks, and a sense of history. Towns all over Massachusetts—inner-core communities like Cambridge, Newton, Somerville, Quincy, and Watertown, as well as more suburban communities like Natick, Framingham, Lexington, Concord, and Weston—all offer versions of this middle-landscape ideal. But many of them have been overwhelmed by automobile traffic and large-scale construction that does not respect historic values. Planners and developers are struggling to recover the ideal as the region sprawls.

Many new developers following the "New Urbanism" model strive to recreate a place like these traditional towns. This neo-traditional development has been particularly successful in low-density areas that do not have a center, as in Mashpee Commons, created by filling in an old shopping center site to create a village from the ground up. The "urban village" theme is seen in several new development proposals, including the proposal by A.D. Makepeace Company for 6,000 acres in Plymouth, Wareham and Carver; Canalside Commons in Bourne; the South Weymouth Naval Air Station; and Somerville's Assembly Square area.

Assembly Square is a telling place to analyze the inner tensions of the quality-of-life ideal. Next to the proposed transit station will be an Ikea, Home Depot, Kmart, and Circuit City, with abundant parking to accommodate automobile traffic from Interstate 93 and other nearby arteries. On the one hand, residents like the sense of place and vitality found in urban villages. On the other hand, they want the modern conveniences and trappings of suburbia.

Without clear policy direction by planners and politicians, the pull of the suburbs—and their less distinctive streets, buildings, and parks—is likely to win out. In Massachusetts as in the rest of the U.S., retailers aggressively build "big-box" stores in outlying areas. At the same time, a process of "job sprawl" continues unabated. A recent Brookings Institute study showed that 75 percent of jobs were outside the core of downtown—increasingly in suburban office parks. In Greater Boston, the highest rates of job growth occurred along Interstate 495. While the region's "hub" of Boston and Cambridge gained jobs in the 1990s, the rate of growth was below the region as a whole.

The commute to work, whether from communities along I-495 to Route 128, or from the South Shore into Boston, is a lonely and drawn-out experience. It can mean two hours a day on increasingly clogged roadways—time that is not spent with family. Data from the 2000 Census shows that almost 75 percent of Massachusetts commuters drive to work alone—approximately on a par with the national average—and that car-pooling has dropped by a few percentage points over the last decade. Jack Clarke of the Audubon Society often cites the statistic that Americans spend a full two weeks' time in their cars each year. While no formal polls have been conducted, planners and environmentalists sense an increasing unhappiness with the current system for how most people live. Some of that unease stems from the isolation, boredom and placelessness of suburban settings. But the core of complaints begin with the time spent in cars. "When I think of how much time I've spent on Route 3—it's just not rational," says veteran land-use lawyer Don Connors.

The typical Massachusetts resident cannot do much to respond to prospect of increased time spent on roadways and in traffic jams. Following the advice of the noted social scientist Anthony Downs, many surrender. Car dealers in Massachusetts report an increase in DVD and video-screen installations in sport-utility vehicles and roomy, high-end sedans, along with other comforts of home, including refrigerators and cradles for handheld computers. People are making the most of the place where they spend so much time.

The Problem of 'Tax Farming'

The financial needs of municipalities create a landscape that is, by necessity, at odds with the "urban village" ideal. Towns limited by Proposition 2½—the property-tax limitation law enacted in 1979—seek expansion of their commercial tax bases in a process known as "tax farming" or the "race for rateables." By soliciting large commercial projects and steering developers toward undeveloped land, these towns increase their ability to raise revenues for basic services like schools, police, streets, and parks. Strip malls and office parks are highly desirable revenue-producers for cash-strapped towns, especially in communities with mostly residential development. Commercial development pays the bills, does not burden school systems with new children, and provides convenient shopping available to time-strapped residents.

Office parks are even more desirable from a financial standpoint, all things being equal. Towns often lure companies with tax incentives and large plots of land to build campuses. Companies such as Cisco Systems, which proposed a 10-building, 350-acre office park campus in Boxborough, find it cheaper and easier to build on "greenfields" close to a major highway than

in urban centers with established infrastructure. Thus the landscape ringing Boston between Route 128 and I-495 is dotted with these office parks, inhabited by Cisco, EMC Corporation, and Lucent Technologies.

Unlike a Wal-Mart, office parks for high-flying technology companies generally have the added bonus of raising land values nearby. But whether cities drive big box or big office development, the only real down side is the strain on the local road system, which often just leads to political pressure on the state to widen roads or improve intersections and interchanges.

Towns only “tax farm” for commercial development. Residential development means more school-age children to be educated, which absorbs the revenues that commercial development generates. Many communities believe that new residents actually end up costing them money—as much as \$500 per household. In some cases, such as the South Weymouth Naval Air Station, area residents resist the prospect of new schoolchildren so strongly that they insist that any housing units be limited to retirees. In Wareham, the local newspaper fueled alarm about a wave of new students in the Makepeace project with a front-page cartoon that showing a half-dozen packed school buses rumbling out from a walled development—schoolchildren portrayed like a sinister onslaught that would overwhelm the local system. Ultimately, resistance to residential development in suburban communities worsens the state’s already chronic affordable housing shortage.

The focus on commercial development intensifies the fierce competition among municipalities, which in turn speeds building and paving. Strip malls and office parks built just 10 years ago have been abandoned—most prominently, in Mashpee—as developers exploit incentives to build new malls and office parks. The focus on commercial development also works against attempts to plan and manage growth on a more regional basis. It is every town for itself. Supporters of the proposed Canalside Commons mixed-use project in Bourne threatened to lead an effort to secede from the Cape Cod Commission, complaining that Bourne simply cannot compete with nearby Plymouth, which is outside the commission’s jurisdiction. The Chelmsford town manager has little incentive to work with Lowell to direct development to infill parcels there, to cite another example; he has a school system to worry about, and a new strip mall or office park will help.

The town-against-town competition for strip malls and office parks skews the market, setting rural, land-rich towns against each other and leaving most existing urban centers hopelessly out of the running. Urbanized areas struggle to compete even when they band together, as in the case of Telecom City, the Malden-Everett-Medford alliance for a 200-acre high-tech office-park complex. The downturn in the technology sector has damaged an

already difficult project; as of November 2001, the project had failed to attract a single tenant.

Inequity Among Cities and Towns

The goal of redeveloping struggling older cities—the best-known efforts being in Lowell, guided by the late Senator Paul Tsongas and former Governor Michael Dukakis—continues to be elusive. Even as negative images of crime and blight fade away, Chelsea, Brockton, and Lawrence have not found the formula for making themselves attractive to residents and major employers. Employment is down 10 percent in older communities from 1950 to 1990, according to the Boston Society of Architects, while employment around Route 128 is up 200 percent for the same period.

Issues of image and equity arise in any analysis of urban areas. Seventy-five percent of the state's African-Americans and Hispanics live in cities, which are beset by high poverty rates, high school dropout rates, low test scores, and stiff competition for low-skill jobs. On a map, Brockton looks to be a well-situated urban center to absorb growth south of Boston. But its perceived drawbacks—from a reputation for crime to under-performing schools to a lack of cultural amenities—trump its advantages of location and infrastructure.

Efforts to improve amenities, such as waterfront redevelopment or improvement programs for housing stock, are sometimes criticized for fostering gentrification and displacing low-income population and immigrants. Simply put, residents in middle-level communities such as South Boston, Fall River, and New Bedford do not want the city transformed for new people; they want it improved for them. Local officials constantly walk a fine line between the desire to bring in new development and new residents with a desire to protect the interests of longtime residents.

Spatial relationships in commerce and transportation among the middle-level cities of eastern Massachusetts could help to form a functioning economic network, similar to the inter-relationship of medium-sized cities in the Netherlands, for example. In this way, medium-sized cities can help each other and feed off each other.

High-technology industries were seen until recently as an important engine for these cities. Worcester has staked its future on bio-tech and health-related businesses. Everett, Medford, and Malden have established a major office park called Telecom City to lure new high-technology businesses and incubate new high-tech firms. Tax incentives and brownfields initiatives—the cleanup of vacated industrial land in urban areas for development—have had some isolated successes. But the lack of a statewide program to steer growth to middle-level urban centers has left those cities struggling.

Recent Experiences in Planning Greater Boston

In Greater Boston, “smart growth” usually means strategic efforts by specific cities and towns—usually alone, sometimes in cooperation with immediate neighbors—to enhance their centers and make connections to the rest of the region. By taking advantage of location and existing infrastructure, these communities hope to foster the kind of development that not only brings new economic and social opportunities, but also fosters a more coherent region.

The Boston Renaissance

Boston remains the shining example of compact urban living, as working-class neighborhoods are transformed and massive redevelopment or “infill” projects—on the South Boston Waterfront or the air rights over the three-mile Massachusetts Turnpike corridor through the city—hold the promise of having more people live and work where the infrastructure is. But Boston continues to struggle with its planning process. Established residents express fear about too much growth, with concerns about the shadows cast by tall buildings, traffic congestion, and the evolution of the city into a playground for the rich. The tensions are seen throughout the city, from Allston-Brighton to Roxbury, but in three major areas—the South Boston Waterfront, the Mass Pike air rights corridor and the area around Fenway Park—the drama has played out with particular intensity.

South Boston Waterfront: If the definition of “smart growth” is to build where infrastructure already exists, instead of out in the countryside, then the South Boston Waterfront offers the ultimate location for such infill development. The district’s “thousand acres” of vacant industrial land and parking lots constitutes some of the most prized real estate on the East Coast, because of Boston’s popularity and the area’s proximity to downtown and Logan Airport. Once home to foundries, wool and molasses warehouses, and miles of railroad tracks, the area is now occupied by a dwindling number of maritime and industrial functions. The waterfront’s potential for office, commercial, and residential development became clear in the 1990s. Billions in public investments—the \$4-billion cleanup of Boston Harbor, the \$14.4 billion Central Artery and Tunnel project, the construction of a \$700 million federal court house, and the \$750 million Transitway public-transit system—have transformed the area’s potential. The waterfront district will soon be connected to the airport, the Massachusetts Turnpike, as well as Interstate 93. It will also be connected to the rest of the city with a new transit line. New office buildings and streetscape improvements link the waterfront to Boston’s thriving Financial District.

Yet consensus on what this new neighborhood should become has been difficult to achieve. The Boston Redevelopment Authority hired the New York firm of Cooper, Roberts to create the Seaport Public Realm Plan, which suggested a close-knit street network and publicly accessible parks and sidewalks. But the Ted Williams Tunnel-I-90 connector, and the Congress Street interchange in the heart of the district, ensures a car-oriented feel.

Three projects with roots back to the 1980s have set the tone for development in the area—and the dilemmas inherent in neighborhood building in the age of the automobile. The J. Joseph Moakley Federal Courthouse, which opened in 1998, attracts thousands of lawyers weekly to the area and offers a little-used (and now closed) waterside park hidden behind a fortress-like structure. A \$700-million convention center, set on 60 acres off Summer Street, could bring hundreds of thousands of visitors to Boston annually, but will be accessed largely by taxi and shuttle bus because its front door will be a significant walk from the nearest Transitway station. Fidelity Investments' Seaport Hotel and World Trade Center office buildings, accommodate major public events and conferences but do not offer attractive public spaces or pedestrian areas around their bases.

In its Cooper, Roberts plan, the BRA sought to create a “24-hour” neighborhood that did not shut down at 5 p.m. like the Financial District, but development proposals thus far have included negligible residential components. South Boston leaders led by City Councilor James M. Kelly resisted the idea of hundreds of new residential units in the area, preferring commercial development that would provide jobs and so-called “linkage” funds—money for job training and affordable housing in the nearby residential neighborhood.

The South Boston Waterfront story has played out like a place that refuses to be planned. Competing constituencies and interests have continually clashed. The land is not controlled by one single entity but by several. At the state level, the Massachusetts Port Authority controls the 30-acre area known as Commonwealth Flats, and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority has dictated land-use decisions tied to the Central Artery project. The federal government owns the new courthouse and property deeper in the district used for military staging and storage. Manufacturing, industrial and maritime interests also control significant parcels. The Gillette Company owns the key property in the area and exerts considerable “veto” power when proposals for major facilities arise. The areas also contains shipyards, the Black Falcon cruise ship terminal, and harborside auction sites. The most important players might be the major private property owners. The Pritzker family of Chicago, owners of the Hyatt hotel chain, plans a \$1 billion mixed-use

development on 16 acres on Fan Pier and enjoys the support of Mayor Thomas M. Menino. Frank McCourt, a lifelong Bostonian whose family has been involved in development for two generations, owns 25-acres and has proposed a new Red Sox stadium and extensive commercial development as well. Mall developer Steve Karp has announced plans for office, residential and high-end retail on the narrow slip of Pier 4.

Declining economic conditions have put the reclamation of the South Boston Waterfront on hold. Land is being prepared for the horizontal convention center, but so far the waterfront skyline consists of the new federal courthouse on Fan Pier, the World Trade Center office towers, and a giant ventilation building over the underground I-90 connector. Meanwhile, artists are being driven out of Fort Point district lofts by high rents and competing development plans. The industrial-era Old Northern Avenue bridge awaits demolition. The identity of Boston's new neighborhood remains very much in flux.

Air rights development: The Massachusetts Turnpike extension, like the Central Artery, was conceived and built in the 1950s when highways were seen as the city's salvation—ways to make it easy for suburbanites to breeze into town, park, and shop. Though built beside an existing rail corridor for the length of its three-mile run from Allston-Brighton to Chinatown, the sunken, eight-lane highway cuts a deep gash through the urban fabric of Boston that planners and developers have sought to re-knit for decades. In a city short on space, so-called "air rights" offered a creative strategy to "fill in" dead urban spaces with development.

The first such repair effort was the Prudential-Copley deck, over what is now referred to as the Prudential tunnel, which showed how lucrative development over the highway could be. The Prudential project of the 1960s posed a challenge of financing. Since Boston was not considered an attractive place to build, Mayor John Collins was forced to put together an extensive incentive package to attract the insurance company to the city.

Since then, proposals for air-rights development have been dogged by bad timing and controversy. Air rights proposals started to materialize in earnest during the reign at the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority of James J. Kerasiotes, who sought the revenue from selling and leasing land around and above the road. Kerasiotes saw development on Pike land as a source of much-needed revenue for the Central Artery, where cost overruns have been in the billions. But he has encountered resistance from community groups concerns about building shadows, traffic, and the architectural character of the city's neighborhoods.

During the Kerasiotes regime, the first and most controversial air rights development project emerged: Millennium Partners' proposal for a 57-story tower and residential and commercial complex at Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street. Coming from the west, the tower would form a new edge to the Back Bay skyline, followed closely by the Prudential, 111 Huntington Avenue, and the John Hancock building. Proponents like Northeastern University's George Thrush argued that the site was an appropriate place for density. But Back Bay residents protested. They said the tower would cast shadows on parks and playgrounds and overwhelm an already congested street network at Massachusetts Avenue, Boylston Street, and Newbury Street.

The Millennium proposal galvanized residents in Back Bay, Bay Village and the South End, who questioned why there was no rational plan or framework for air rights projects. The artists at the Fenway Studios, one of the nation's first artist-only cooperative which overlooks the site, won an early battle to alter the design to allow more light into their building. Ultimately, the legal authority to build the structure came into question. While the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority alone controls the air rights and does not have to adhere to Boston zoning, Mayor Menino was quick to remind state officials that the project required use of Boston land on the edges of the site—and hence, city approval. A memorandum of understanding between Menino and Kerasiotes spelled out a process that gave Boston the authority to review all projects—but not veto power.

In response to the calls for a plan, the Boston Redevelopment Authority worked with architect and planner David Lee to develop a consensus for air-rights development. The result was a document called "A Civic Vision for Turnpike Air Rights in Boston," which calls for the development of 23 air-rights parcels along the corridor. The architecture critic Robert Campbell of the *Boston Globe* praised the report as "a model of what such a planning study should be." The report calls for modest density along the 44 acres of air rights parcels through Boston, with no more than one new building taller than 15 stories on the Back Bay parcels near Massachusetts Avenue, taller buildings for housing in Chinatown, and respect for the historic and landmark districts throughout the Back Bay and South End.

The plan lends a sense of order to air rights development, but the neighborhood-by-neighborhood skirmishes over specific projects has continued, as developer Arthur Winn discovered when he pushed ahead with a mixed-use complex at Clarendon Street, which would link Bay Village and the South End.

As with the South Boston waterfront, air rights development has reached a period of inaction. Kerasiotes was fired by then-Governor A. Paul

Cellucci over financial improprieties in his management of the Central Artery project, removing the most aggressive proponent of air-rights development. The fighting over the shape and extent of development over the Massachusetts Turnpike lasted long enough that developers missed the economic cycle. Building over the highway is an engineering and financing challenge, so market and financing conditions have an exaggerated effect. The notion of “stitching back the urban fabric” remains a distant dream.

Fenway Park: When a team of investors headed by John Henry agreed to pay \$700 million to buy the Boston Red Sox in December 2001, Fenway Park, and an 80-percent share of the cable television New England Sports Network, it appeared to be the last chapter of a long and contentious battle over a proposal for a new stadium in Boston. Henry’s group vowed to renovate Fenway Park rather than build a new stadium in the neighborhood or elsewhere in the region. But in Boston politics, to paraphrase the baseball legend Yogi Berra, it ain’t over *when* it’s over. The Henry group provided a caveat to its vow to renovate Fenway Park, saying that it would seek a new stadium if renovation proved infeasible. Meanwhile, rival bidders for the franchise, who indicated they would seek a new stadium, sought to wrest control of the Red Sox from the Henry group in early 2002. Whatever the ultimate conclusion of the controversies surrounding the team’s ownership—and eventual plans for a new or renovated stadium—the history of the 1998 proposal for a new Fenway Park provides a cautionary tale for any new stadium proposal.

Fenway Park, the home of the Boston Red Sox since 1912, is one of the nation’s oldest and cherished sports venues and draws fans from all over New England and the U.S. Mayor Thomas Menino notes that fans from all over make pilgrimages to Fenway Park, but the Red Sox ownership convinced him to support its plans to build a \$600-million replica next door. But despite obtaining upwards of \$300 million in public subsidies for infrastructure and a garage, the team has struggled to finance its part of the deal. Community opposition—and doubts about the legality of the land-takings necessary for the project—undermined the air of inevitability that the proposal had when it was unveiled.

Activists in the Fenway neighborhood opposed the project from the start. Opposition is based on considerations of both heart and head. First, consider concerns of the heart. Neighbors complain that a larger stadium—45,000 seats versus the current 33,000—would overwhelm an area already congested with traffic generated by the Longwood Medical Area, Boston University and Northeastern University, museums, and commuters and visitors. Fenway has

experienced a renaissance as the Back Bay-style neighborhood it was originally designed to be and is anxious to avoid the blowout effect of a new park. At the same time, neighbors contend that the existing park is a historic treasure that should be saved and knit into a new “urban village” plan.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority has committed itself to taking 15 acres of private land under its eminent domain powers. But such powers to take land were originally granted the BRA to clear blight and otherwise revive declining areas of the city. The Fenway is thriving, not struggling, and legal experts like Herbert Gleason say such takings would be illegal. At the same time, opponents worry that an expensive new project would drastically affect real-estate costs all over the area. As Jane Jacobs and other planning critics have maintained for years, new buildings of all kinds increase rents and other local costs because they have to be paid every year; old buildings, which are already paid off, help to dampen the overall price structure of the area.

Neighbors have different ideas about how to improve the area, starting with the idea of turning Boylston Street into a grand boulevard. The new Fenway Park proposal rattled residents because it seemed to diminish neighborhood control.

The design of the stadium itself, by the Kansas City firm HOK and Cambridge-based Chan, Krieger, includes a sunken playing field, a replica of the high left-field wall known as the Green Monster, and improved access for deliveries, services, and crowd circulation. Portions of the current Fenway Park parcel would be sold off to help pay for the new project. The structure itself, similar to Camden Yards in Baltimore or Jacobs Field in Cleveland, will be pricey to build, but it is the cost of real estate that makes it prohibitively expensive. The triangular-shaped site bounded by Yawkey Way, Boylston Street, and Brookline Avenue, which would need to be acquired, is home to businesses that do not want to leave; the tab for the city to clear it could exceed \$200 million.

State-financed infrastructure improvements at the Yawkey Way commuter rail station and a small parking garage could contribute to the vitality of the neighborhood. But the perception has taken hold that a sports team would be getting a handout in this project, while neighborhood businesses and residents get squeezed. Until the new Red Sox ownership establishes itself, a new Fenway Park is not likely. Leaders behind San Francisco’s new Pacific Bell Park have said that the new ownership should count on a period of six years to develop and implement new stadium plans. Even though the siting of a new facility once appeared to be settled, new sites have become more viable. Leaders in South Boston, where a football stadium was rejected during the Weld Administration, have embraced a baseball stadium and one of the

bidders for the Red Sox, Frank McCourt, has said he would use his land there for a new facility. Somerville and Revere are mentioned as other potential sites.

Other projects: Taken together, the controversies over the South Boston Waterfront, Mass Pike air rights, and Fenway Park paint a portrait of semi-paralysis for the city of Boston. Established residents are skeptical and defiant, and the BRA and the mayor have struggled to articulate a vision for the changing face of Boston. In the absence of a citywide consensus on the urban form, the prevailing response is a resistance to more density, in any form.

Despite this, Boston experienced a significant building boom in the period roughly from 1996 to 2001. Individual projects flourished and the skyline expanded. One of the most dramatic additions to that skyline is Millennium Place on lower Washington Street, built by the same New York-based Millennium Partners firm that proposed the tower over the Mass Pike. The gleaming skyscraper rises up where the Combat Zone, Boston's red-light district, once flourished. The building houses luxury condos, a Ritz-Carlton hotel, and the L.A. Sports Club. The area from lower Washington Street to Downtown Crossing even has a new, trendy name: the Ladder District, named for the small streets that run like rungs between Tremont and Washington streets.

After years of fits and starts, One Lincoln is the most recent addition to the core Financial District. Moving west, the office building at 10 St. James, an infill project also financed through New York-based Millennium Partners, is only the beginning of extensive redevelopment plans for the Park Square area. Then there is 111 Huntington Avenue, with its distinctive spiked dome, adding significant office space, hotel and retail to the area on the back side of the Prudential Center. A remarkable "filling in" is occurring on Washington Street in the South End, between East Berkeley Street and Massachusetts Avenue, as loft and luxury housing rises up on either side of the once-desolate street.

Several other major commercial projects, many of which could transform the look of the city, are on hold, such as the Hines proposal for the city's third-tallest building over South Station. The commercial market is somewhat less than robust due to the post-September 11 recession and cut-backs in finance and high-tech. For years, Boston has been trading off with San Francisco for the honor of having the nation's lowest vacancy rate on Class A office space. Now both cities have cooled, and Boston's vacancy rate has begun to rise; there is not yet a glut of space, but industry observers say the building boom is over. Financing for hotels in particular has dried up, industry analysts say.

The residential market, meanwhile, has been so strong in Boston since the 1990s that a slowdown is expected to be inevitable but more subtle. Continued interest in city living, led by aging baby-boomers and young professionals, keeps demand high while the overall supply of housing in Boston remains limited. The overall number of housing units in the city increased by only 500 from 1990 to 2000. Some moderation is expected because of the economic downturn and wariness of cities in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. But home prices of half a million dollars are common in established areas such as the North End, Leather District, Bay Village, South End, Back Bay, Beacon Hill and Charlestown, as well as select parts of South Boston, Dorchester, Roxbury, and Allston-Brighton. Jamaica Plain, the neighborhood of choice for young professionals, is a leading case study in gentrification; homes that once sheltered three families are being renovated to accommodate just one. “If we fill cities like this, it won’t be infill under the smart growth model,” says Stephanie Pollack, attorney for the Conservation Law Foundation. “A housing stock that once served 750,000 people is full at 600,000 people.”

The Challenge of Assembly Square

For years, developers and planners have proposed projects for the 145-acre area between the Mystic River and Interstate 93 in Somerville, site of the former Ford automobile assembly plant. The area is currently home to big-box retailers like Home Depot, Circuit City, and K-Mart and a cinema complex. A proposal for an Ikea home furnishing store helped spark a community push to build a mixed-use, urban village-style project that incorporates parks and a link to mass transit. The Orange Line runs right by the property although there is no station directly at the site. Somerville Mayor Dorothy Kelly Gay has been caught in the middle, in dire need of the commercial tax revenue that the big-box stores generate but mindful that Assembly Square has great potential as a more dynamic site because of its proximity to downtown Boston.

A possible compromise is in the works. The city recently issued requests for proposals for the parcel of city-owned land known as Yard 21, adjacent to the Orange Line tracks. This land is seen as a prime spot for “urban village” style development, which would co-exist with the big box retail. Two companies—Cathartes Investments and Gravestart-Taurus, the developers for the Ikea proposal—submitted proposals. In November 2001, Gravestart-Taurus won a provisional designation for the job. The plans call for a major new transit station, which could be privately built—a first for the Commonwealth—as well as a mix of office space and high-density residential

units. If developed in this way, Assembly Square would have a split personality of sorts—dense, urban development near mass transit at one end, big-box and parking lots at the other. Activists and planners have worked to develop strategies to reduce auto impacts; one proposal would require that Ikea make deliveries of all its sales so that customers do not need to use their car to pick up purchases. The Mystic Valley Task Force, a well-organized citizens group, vows to keep the pressure on in what many Somerville residents regard as their own version of the South Boston Waterfront. But amid economic uncertainty, political and business leaders feel they have a bird in the hand with the proposed commercial development. The area already has the feel of suburban shopping-mall development; the city has thrown its support behind a proposed Super Stop and Shop on the other side of I-93 from Assembly Square, which residents have also opposed. The question is whether more mixed style of development can gain a foothold and become, over a period of years, the dominant style. For the moment, the economic downturn could thwart both the proposed office space in the “urban village” section and the Ikea outlet in the “big box” section.

Experiments in small-scale regionalism

Cities and towns in several parts of the Commonwealth have begun to band together to encourage and manage growth—not so much to specifically combat sprawl, but because impacts of development spill over municipal borders and often it makes economic sense to coordinate projects.

Medford, Malden and Everett each contributed land to create Telecom City, a \$590-million high-technology office park. These towns have always competed against each other, on the high school football field and in business development. But in 1996 they formed an alliance and secured state and federal funding to develop the vacated industrial land. Significantly, the plan includes an innovative revenue-sharing system, so the three cities share equally in tax dollars regardless of where the development is actually sited. A regional, coordinated transportation plan is also integral to the project, which has the advantage of close proximity to both Logan Airport and downtown Boston. The cities are working together to create bike paths, pedestrian walkways, and park land on both sides of the Malden River. The project was the victim of unfortunate timing, given the slowdown in the high-tech sector, however, and there are no tenants currently lined up for the first phase of five office buildings, set to break ground in 2002.

Other communities have banded together in Southeastern Massachusetts to manage large development projects. A.D. Makepeace has proposed a 6,000-acre plan for 3,500 or 6,000 units of housing (depending

on whether the project would get zoning variances) and 3 million square feet of office, retail, hotel, and golf course development. That plan, which straddles the towns of Wareham, Plymouth and Carver, would be the largest single development project in New England history. The state encouraged the three towns to work together on the approval process and provided funding for a tri-town task force. Each town had different concerns, such as the impact on school systems, water, sewer, and traffic. Makepeace sought zoning changes to build more densely by clustering buildings and preserving 70 percent of the site as open space (including the golf courses). Environmentalists entered the fray, saying the land was ecologically sensitive and should not be developed at all. In the final analysis, the three towns did unite—but to oppose the project outright. Makepeace withdrew its proposed new zoning bylaw before a town meeting vote in the three communities.

Six communities—Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Brookline, Everett, and Revere—have banded together to form the so-called Urban Ring Compact. The Compact is analyzing economic development and transportation needs for a corridor that might be the location of a new circumferential transit line. The Urban Ring would create a new “rim” that connects the spokes of Boston’s hub-oriented transit system. Such a rim could offer a valuable new transit option for riders of the Red and Green lines and many bus lines as well. Although many transit activists are calling for a light rail system, others say a bus system would be more practical given the costs and need to reconfigure streets and buildings. A dedicated right of way—separating car traffic from the bus line—would make the trip quicker than current bus service.

The I-495 Initiative promises to set the framework for regional cooperation all along the highway corridor, or at least large stretches of it. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council has convened communities along the high-growth corridor to consider the wide range of traffic and infrastructure issues that accompany development. One of the central issues in early discussions was the supply of water for growing communities.

Regional planning remains an uphill battle all over the Commonwealth, as staunchly independent New England towns cling to their independence. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council and the Massachusetts Technology Cooperative sought to portray “liveability” as an economic imperative; attracting employees is difficult if they face high home prices and daily traffic jams on the commute to work. But many major businesses and developers remain unwilling to substantially change the way office parks are developed.

The expected surge of development interest in Southeastern Massachusetts prompted the creation of the Southeastern Massachusetts

Vision 2020 Initiative, an attempt to get a handle on growth in some of the last undeveloped rural areas in the state. The idea grew out of a 1996 studio led by Robert Yaro at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. To keep tabs on development and analyze regional impacts of large projects, the studio proposed creating the so-called Mayflower Compact. The Compact is a voluntary organization of 50 towns to respond to development proposals town by town. The Compact enjoys none of the project review powers of the Cape Cod Commission, but poses a bold challenge to towns. The decision to join the Compact passed by narrow margins in most town meeting votes, and four towns have still not signed on.

The Cape Cod Commission, the commonwealth's model for regional planning, has also encountered resistance. Political and business leaders in Bourne have threatened to seek legislative action to secede if the Canalside Commons, an expansive mixed-use development on vacant land at the foot of the Bourne Bridge and off the Bourne rotary, is denied. The Bourne leaders' logic is that Bourne, the gateway to the Cape, does not share the same development issues of communities in the middle and outer reaches of Cape Cod. Bourne does not consider itself a part of the region, at least not enough for its development to be restricted by an outside political body. The stand-off underscores the difficulty of coordinating development when centuries-old political boundaries require them to look out for themselves first.

Most planners say that the toughest challenge is to convince large cities and suburbs to understand their common destinies and to formulate policies to grow together. But the New Mayflower Compact, Makepeace, and Cape Cod Commission experiences indicate that even like-minded, comparatively homogeneous communities have a tough time working together—unless the agreed-upon policy is fighting growth entirely.

Experiments in Financing

At a time when cities and towns receive less money for infrastructure and development from federal and state programs, and as the cost of such investments has skyrocketed, local governments have worked to forge alliances with the private sector. Well-established public-private partnerships include business improvement districts and tax-increment financing schemes. A BID allows retailers to pool resources to provide security and maintenance for a specific geographic area. TIF allows private developers to borrow against increased revenues expected from development to finance capital projects like sidewalk repairs, building plazas, and the like.

Public-private development is common in other parts of the country. In California, the Disney Company and the city of Glendale have teamed up to

transform an aging industrial park into the Grand Central Creative Campus. In New York City, public-private agreements resulted in the redevelopment of Times Square and the revitalization of Bryant Park. In Boston, however, such partnerships are viewed with suspicion. Boston's primary model for public-private collaboration is Post Office Square, where in the 1980s civic leaders led by developer Norman Leventhal tore down an old parking garage, put the structure underground, and built a park on top with parking revenues. The space has become a case study for park revitalization nationwide, winning 20 planning and development awards. The garage generates approximately \$8 million a year; that money pays the debt service, taxes, and the park's maintenance costs.

Since then, other attempts to retool the urban landscape by harnessing private-sector funds have been met with concerns about the privatization of public space and "giveaways" to private developers. The city does not budget enough money to pay for extensive new parks and public spaces, but many residents resist handing over that responsibility to private entities. Activists viewed skeptically a proposal to create a TIF district in the Fenway. Harvard University's financing of master planning for Allston-Brighton has brought charges of a conflict of interest. Elsewhere, the travails of public-private development in Boston can be vividly seen in four major areas: the South Boston Waterfront, City Hall Plaza, Downtown Crossing, and the surface restoration of the suppressed Central Artery.

The South Boston Waterfront: When the Chicago-based Pritzker family proposed a \$1-billion complex of hotels and residences on 16 acres at Fan Pier, critics immediately attacked. The Conservation Law Foundation, generally supportive of such dense development near transit stations, demanded that the size of the project be reduced and parks be expanded. The call was seconded by the editorial pages of the *Boston Globe* and by nearby landowner Frank McCourt, who threatened to build higher buildings if the Pritzkers were allowed to build to just under 300 feet in their tallest tower. The amenities offered by the Pritzkers and local partners Spaulding and Slye—a fishing pier, a tidal-pool park, a kayak marina, a skating rink—were dismissed as the first offer at a bargaining table. But the urban design scheme had a rationale. The developers rejected a large waterfront park because they thought it would be windswept and uncomfortable, especially in the winter months. They proposed parking on the streets to encourage a sense of street life and vitality, but were forced to eliminate the streets entirely, in favor of mall-like plazas. Activists like Vivien Li of the Boston Harbor Association remarked that the public's suspicions were fueled by experience. Three examples support her

argument: locked gates block many parts of the city's Harborwalk, the Long Wharf Marriott barred access to restrooms in violation of the original development agreement, and the new federal courthouse is completely cut off to pedestrians.

City Hall Plaza: The redesign of the windswept, six-acre brick plaza—barren in the winter and baked in the summer—has had a long and tortured history. In the mid-1990s Mayor Thomas Menino established the quasi-public Trust for City Hall Plaza to raise money for the redesign and redevelopment of the plaza. The Trust proposed a standard public-private scheme: a boutique hotel to be sited between City Hall Plaza and the John F. Kennedy Federal Building's low-rise section and an underground parking garage. Both would generate the revenue for improvements on the rest of the plaza, including a winter garden and new MBTA station. The plan was greeted with howls of protest. Activists charged that Menino was trying to privatize public land and give the developer a sweetheart deal. The hotel-and-garage plan was abandoned, and a more modest redesign is underway, using city, state and federal funds. A new colonnade along Cambridge Street, part of the \$2.7 million city-led first phase, was widely criticized for being too expensive and not making a difference in the look and feel of the plaza. The federal government has yet to follow through with promises to redesign its corner of the plaza, and the MBTA is proceeding slowly with plans for station reconstruction.

Downtown Crossing: The retail area along Washington Street from City Hall Plaza to the Opera House has for years had a tattered appearance. In the early 1990s major storeowners sought to do something about that: a proposed Business Improvement District, which would give private entities expansive responsibilities for security and maintenance. The City Council passed the proposal in 1998. But again, critics said the Downtown Crossing BID was an abdication of responsibilities by the city, and that handing over so much power to storeowners was tantamount to privatizing public space. There was a racial component to the debate because Downtown Crossing attracts a particularly diverse population, much more so than the Newbury Street retail zone. Other cities are grappling with issues of democracy and public space; as in Bryant Park and Battery Park City in Manhattan, the concern is whether private security guards can shoo away a homeless person or anyone deemed to be undesirable. Proponents of the BID for Downtown Crossing say the strategy is the only way to spruce up the retail center, in the absence of a major intervention funded solely by the city. The proposal was stopped in its tracks, by inaction at the state Legislature, which has to sign off on the plan even though it is entirely a Boston matter.

Surface restoration of the Central Artery: With the completion of the \$14.4 billion Central Artery project, 10 lanes of highway will be moved underground and Boston will gain the use of about 30 acres of land that has lain in the shadow of the highway since 1951. Deciding how to develop this land has been an even more tortured process than the redesign of City Hall Plaza. The project, known as “surface restoration” and more recently as the proposed Rose Kennedy Greenway, is likely to become another public-private development debate.

Cost overruns at the Big Dig have ruined any chance for major public investment in surface restoration. Neither the state nor the city has committed the money necessary to create a new public space along this corridor; the two entities have continually warred over control of the project. Privately funded proposals for modest development on the surface parcels will inevitably be greeted with wariness. The Artery Business Committee has played a major role, led by the careful diplomacy of Richard Dimino, and the redesign of the Dewey Square piece of the surface artery is seen as a good model for public-private cooperation. But the longterm role of the private sector in revitalizing the area remains undetermined.

Funding strategies are inevitably connected to design questions. Under an agreement signed by then-state environmental secretary John DeVillars, the corridor must be 75 percent open space. But the definition of “open space” remains fuzzy—some say it means only that the space be open for public use, others say it must be park land—and a three-to-one ratio of parks to development is considered flawed from an urban design standpoint. The Boston 2000 plan devised by Stephen Coyle, BRA director under Mayor Raymond L. Flynn, has been criticized as a long green snake that mimics the highway corridor—potentially every bit a psychological barrier to pedestrians as the highway. Without a doubt, the design will reflect the difficult dilemmas of financing.

The Importance of Community Process

In the years after urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 1960s—when one-third of the city’s land was targeted for demolition and redevelopment—Boston’s citizens created one of the most vibrant traditions of grassroots activism in the nation. Officials now recognize the importance of community input into a wide range of planning issues. But through the 1980s and 1990s, the community process has been as controversial as any of the proposed development projects themselves.

A climate of distrust persists between planners on one side and residents on the other. Many activists feel that despite an established format for public hearings, their views are rarely incorporated into long-range planning

strategies. Shirley Kressell, founder of the Alliance of Boston Neighborhoods, calls it “yelling it your television.” City officials, meanwhile, believe that citizens exert a powerful influence over development proposals and needlessly hold up many projects while haggling over plans that are submitted and re-submitted. A line often heard at the BRA offices in the late 1990s was: “Our biggest product is process.”

Kressell and other critics say the city needs a comprehensive, longterm planning process, but that the goals of planning are undermined by the BRA’s responsibility for both planning and development. But when it comes to individual projects, neighborhood groups often have a narrow agenda that does not consider citywide needs. The response to new projects falls along familiar “not in my backyard” patterns. Even the Leather District—as urban a neighborhood as can be found, populated by architects and others knowledgeable in the virtues of density and urbanism—has taken a hard line against tall buildings. Activists there demanded that a new building by Rose Associates drop from an offending 15 stories to 12. The NIMBY syndrome can be especially problematic in neighborhoods where proposals to build new housing are thwarted in the name of open space.

Outside of Boston, community involvement can have unintended consequences. In Cambridge, for example, the Northpoint proposal has provoked bitter fights over the appropriate scale of development. The Northpoint site, located between the Green Line and the Orange Line on an obsolete railyard in Cambridge, is by any objective measure a perfect place for density. It is located close to public transit, a major highway, and downtown Boston. But East Cambridge residents do not want any more traffic near their streets. And Cambridge’s participatory rezoning process has led to a significant down-zoning of this and other areas even on the Red Line. The Northpoint developers—Guilford and Spaulding and Slye—can now build only a fraction of the housing that would make sense from an urban-planning standpoint for this parcel so close to the urban core.

In the Telecom City project, the participation of residents close to the 200-acre site set severe limitations on the project that may prove fatal. Office buildings surrounded by parkland was the only acceptable outcome for abutters. Many residents, opposed to an “influx of yuppies” in the mostly working-class districts of Medford, Malden, and Everett, eliminated housing as an option. Business owners near the site opposed new restaurants or stores in the development, eliminating mixed-use development as an option. Planners were forced to put all their eggs in the basket of office space for the high-tech sector, which of course has suffered a major downturn. If the project included housing or retail, the area might have a better prospect of success.

Community participation often ends up creating exclusionary policies, as well. At the South Weymouth Naval Air Station redevelopment site, the neighboring towns of Weymouth, Abington, and Rockland were steadfast in their opposition to a large residential component in the complex. In the end, the towns consented to a modest number of housing units—but limited to seniors, so there would be no school-age children to burden local school systems. That made sense for Weymouth, Abington and Rockland, but does nothing to improve the jobs-housing imbalance in the region.

The Actors

The institutions shaping planning and development in Massachusetts come from the state's complex political history since World War II. Governors have followed different paths and philosophies, from highwayman-turned-highway-slayer Francis Sargent in the 1960s and 1970s, to state planner Michael S. Dukakis in the 1970s, highway and airport advocate Edward King in the 1980s, a pro-business Dukakis again in the mid-1980s, and then the laissez-faire William F. Weld and Paul Cellucci in the 1990s. Though Massachusetts is considered progressive and innovative on public policy, the state's reputation as "Taxachusetts" still stings, and businesses guard against any broad new public programs or regulations. Massachusetts may face the same growth-management challenges that prompted Maryland to adopt a comprehensive planning strategy, but the Massachusetts political climate fosters caution.

Many growth-management advocates hoped that Governor Jane M. Swift would adopt the cause, perhaps even re-establishing an office of state planning. Former Governor A. Paul Cellucci gave the subject of "open space" some attention before leaving to be Ambassador to Canada, and the opportunity was there for Swift to be engaged on a subject that is central to constituencies along I-495 and in Southeastern Massachusetts. Swift has made moves that have pleased environmentalists, on the Greylock Glen project and on factory emissions. The Community Preservation Initiative and Executive Order 418 have moved ahead under Swift, but the Secretary of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Robert Durand, said in a recent interview that a "top-down" growth-management policy would never work in Massachusetts.

Somewhat more behind the scenes but an important player is Jay Wickersham, who runs the office for the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Wickersham not only has the power through MEPA to approve or reject major development projects, but he is also instrumental in enforcing existing public policies that might encourage "smart growth." The EOEPA, however, faces severe limits on what it can do.

Wickersham has encouraged the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, led by Secretary Kevin Sullivan, to consider land-use issues in transportation policy. The Massachusetts Highway Department is by many accounts still steeped in the expansive, pro-car culture fostered by James J. Kerasiotes, who reversed the public-transit bent of his predecessor, Fred Salvucci. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority has many opportunities to influence development patterns—by encouraging dense, mixed-use development near transit stations, for example. But on that topic, MBTA planners say they wait for localities to suggest TOD to them, and do not play an active role.

Two other state agencies have extensive influence on development and are exempt from local zoning: The Massachusetts Port Authority and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. Massport, led by Virginia Buckingham, was hired to push for construction of a new airport runway to better manage air traffic at Logan Airport. The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority manages the Central Artery project and the related challenges of surface restoration and air-rights development.

The Mass Pike Authority has experienced great turmoil in recent years. It was chaired by James Kerasiotes for four years (1996–2000) and then Andrew Natsios for one year (2000–2001). After Natsios left for a job in the Bush Administration, the authority's strong-chairman model was replaced by the position of chief executive. Former U.S. Army Corps official J. Richard Capka was named to run the Masspike in 2001. The authority's most urgent job is paying for the Big Dig, which includes revenue from air-rights development on the Central Artery corridor and the Mass Pike proper. The composition of the turnpike board could be changed to give the Legislature and the City of Boston a presence in deliberations.

Taken together, four state agencies—the MBTA, the turnpike authority, Massport and the Massachusetts Highway Department—control some of the largest and most influential development projects in the state.

The Massachusetts Water Resource Authority influences land-use policy by providing communities with water and sewer service and infrastructure. The authority provides a strong example of the power of cooperation and could produce smart growth by directing commercial and residential development away from communities with the necessary infrastructure. But some communities consider the MWRA both a blessing and a curse. Joining the MWRA system means increased capacity—not only for specific projects that need it, but for new proposals that communities might not want. In the meantime, the idea of “keeping water local” has become more popular—recharging local underground water supplies or aquifers, instead of shipping

all storm and sewer discharge out to sea via the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority.

Sources of capital for innovative development projects are limited in Massachusetts, but a major player is clearly Michael Hogan, head of the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency, which operates like a public-investment bank and was instrumental in the banding-together of towns for the Fort Devens redevelopment.

Legislative figures who have expressed interest in sprawl and smart growth include Senate President Thomas F. Birmingham of Chelsea, a likely candidate for governor in 2002, and state Senator Marc Pacheco of Taunton. Birmingham recently proposed putting 15 percent of any budget surplus towards the purchase of conservation land, and Pacheco filed a bill that would create a \$35-million fund for municipalities to do better planning. Other active lawmakers include state senators Mark Montigny of New Bedford) and Pamela Resor of Acton, who both supported Birmingham's measure, and David Magnani, who has shown interest in revenue-sharing systems for towns and regional planning along the I-495 corridor.

Local leaders, from big-city mayors to selectmen, town managers and planning boards in smaller towns, face mounting pressure to coordinate better planning and development. In Boston, Mayor Thomas Menino has struggled to balance development interests with the social concerns of the neighborhoods. The Boston Redevelopment Authority, headed by Mark Maloney, is undergoing a steady but gradual overhaul. The addition of Rebecca Barnes as chief planner has given new energy to the authority. Other major policymakers in Boston include mayoral aide Peter Welsh; former chief of staff David Passafaro, who continues to be a personal advisor to Menino; Department of Neighborhood Development chief Charlotte Golar-Richie; and planners in the Mayor's Main Streets 19 programs. Active city councilors on development issues include James Kelly of South Boston, Paul Scapicchio of the North End, Michael Ross of Back Bay, and Michael Flaherty of South Boston.

In cities and towns outside of Boston, leaders are taking greater interest in development issues. Marlborough Mayor William Mauro has been active on land-use and transportation issues including the challenges of the reverse commute. Fall River Mayor Edward M. Lambert has capitalized on marketing that city, where homebuyers are snapping up homes close to the city center in anticipation of the extension of commuter rail. Weymouth Mayor David Madden has demonstrated a quick grasp of planning issues and was the first politician to come out in opposition to the Mills Corporation plan for a mega-mall at the South Weymouth Naval Air Station.

Somerville Mayor Dorothy Kelly Gay has similarly plunged into urban planning; the Assembly Square project and surrounding area has been one of the top issues facing her administration. Beyond the chief executive, there is an increasing sophistication among town planners in Massachusetts as well, demonstrated by the likes of Joseph Walsh in Salem. Burlington town planner Anthony Fields played a prominent role in the regional initiative linking Burlington, Reading, North Reading and Wilmington to study water issues.

Development and real estate leaders are increasingly aware that they are being closely watched. Thus they work tirelessly to promote community relations, to demonstrate they embrace the growing consensus for classical urbanist approaches. Len Cubellis in Bourne and John Drew of A.D. Makepeace promote their projects as master-planned communities based on the clustered, urban-village model. The terms “smart growth” and “New Urbanism” are brandished to show sensitivity to concerns about sprawl. In Boston, Millennium Partners, Beacon Properties, the Pritzkers, and local partners Spaulding and Slye and McCourt have all invested heavily in community relations.

The major real estate players are Meredith & Grew/Oncor International; Insignia/ESG; CB Richard Ellis/Whittier Partners; Cushman and Wakefield. Edward Shanahan, chief executive officer of the Greater Boston Real Estate Board, has been a strong voice for regulatory reform and market-based approaches to housing and community development. David Begelfer, co-chair of the I-495 Initiative, is chief executive of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties.

Community Development Corporations—also known as CDCs—play the critical role of directing neighborhood development. Key players include Marc Draisen, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, and Michael Gondek, who runs the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation (CEDAC), which makes grants and provides technical assistance to CDCs all over the state. CDCs face the difficult challenge of balancing the needs of neighborhoods with the financial realities of development. One creative approach to such a balancing act is the Davenport Commons complex, where the Madison Park Development Corporation created housing for Northeastern University students and low-income families from Lower Roxbury on a stretch of Columbus Avenue.

Universities have long been major real estate players in the city and in suburbs. The newly installed president of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, is focused on campus expansion plans in Allston-Brighton. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, under president Charles Vest, has

built an array of on-campus buildings and research facilities in Kendall Square. Boston University, Boston College, Suffolk University, and Emerson College all have land-use plans that affect the city and the region. The same is true of the area's medical institutions, including Massachusetts General Hospital, Beth Israel Deaconess, the New England Medical Center, Boston Medical Center, and Brigham and Women's Hospital, in the booming Longwood medical-center area.

Universities, colleges, and medical institutions have long been attracted to Greater Boston and have grown up with some towns from their founding. Cities on Boston's periphery see great value in those institutions, as part of a balanced economic development strategy; colleges and universities tend to be recession-proof. Because they need as much land as they do, as well as spin-off amenities such as cafes and bookstores, they are significant players in land-use decisions and development trends (locating downtown or on the edge of town, for example). The tax-exempt status of these nonprofit institutions has fostered great controversy, however. Harvard's acquisition of a major parcel in Watertown—where millions in public money were required for site cleanup—has reduced the town's tax revenue potential.

Religious institutions also play an important role in development and land use. The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act gives churches wide latitude in their capacity to build and develop in any manner they choose. A recent controversy in Belmont, concerning the construction of a major Mormon church and towering steeple, is expected to be repeated across the commonwealth as religious organizations test the limits under this law. In a modest way, the landscape will be affected wherever religious organizations are involved in real estate and development. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston has played a major role in development of affordable housing, but is also criticized for not making excess properties available for public purposes. In some communities, churches have been the savior of decayed old districts. Parishioners come from all over the region to attend predominantly black churches in Boston's neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan.

Major employers like Cisco, EMC, Lucent Technologies, 3Com, and Sun Microsystems have a significant impact on the region's landscape. Fast-growing companies prefer large office parks on undeveloped land because they seek large amounts of contiguous space, close to a major highway. Rural communities along I-495 are eager for the tax revenues that these companies generate; by responding to enticements and incentives offered by towns such as Boxborough, these companies end up intensifying the spread-out characteristics of the region.

Community and citizens groups are increasingly savvy, and have become adroit in making their case with the media. In Boston, the Alliance of Boston Neighborhoods has been a tireless critic of major development projects. The Boston Harbor Association, led by Vivien Li, keeps the pressure on developers to provide public access at waterfront locations and to respect industrial and maritime interests. And perhaps no voice on planning and development has been stronger than those of environmental groups, who have taken up the battle against sprawl as a leading cause. The leading organization for environmental issues is the Conservation Law Foundation, led by Douglas Foy, Stephanie Pollack, Seth Kaplan, and Bennet Heart. The CLF is developing a for-profit arm to generate revenues and demonstrate the viability of green building and production. The Massachusetts Audubon Society has not only fought for preservation of open space statewide but also created the new Boston Nature Center in the heart of the city. Other important organizations include the Environmental League of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group, the Nature Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land.

One professional organization—Boston Society of Architects (BSA)—stands out as a regional leader on smart growth and a variety of other issues. The BSA coordinated a one-year community-based effort to spark debate and policy making in eastern Massachusetts. The Civic Initiative for a Livable New England, steered by Rebecca Barnes before she left for the BRA, was coordinated by David Dixon, Wig Zamore, and others. The BSA is the largest professional organization for architects in the U.S. and sets the tone for public debate in Greater Boston through its networking, events, and magazine.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council, led by David Soule, is in the process of reinventing itself and collecting community input for a new regional policy framework. Steve Smith, head of the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District, is quietly leading efforts for to build regional cohesion in that fast-growing part of the state. The Cape Cod Commission, led by executive director Margo Fenn, continues to be a model for a regional planning organization with teeth. John Schneider, executive director of the Metro West Growth Management Committee, is a leading policymaker with expertise in the area between 128 and 495 on both sides of the Mass Pike.

Policy Options for Planning Greater Boston

Since 1970, 16 states, dozens of regions and thousands of municipalities have adopted broad plans to control the rate, location and appearance of urban and suburban development. Maryland, Oregon, Washington, and New

Jersey are well-established growth-management regimes; other states instituting statewide “smart growth” policies include Tennessee, Minnesota, Utah, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. High-growth states such as Georgia, Florida, Texas, Arizona, and California have not been yet been able to coalesce around a growth-management strategy, but in New England, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire are all considering major growth-management initiatives to guide development for the future.

The spectrum of growth-management techniques starts with Portland, Oregon’s regional governance structure and urban growth boundary, where no building is allowed beyond an established municipal border, so development must “fill in” at the more urbanized core. At the middle range of the spectrum are the consolidated city-county governments, regional councils, and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), all of which establish a regional approach to planning and development. And at the other end of the spectrum are the public-private initiatives such as those being tried in Utah, and civic initiatives or grassroots campaigns that operate with no official authority.

It remains to be seen where Massachusetts ends up on that spectrum—if it is on the spectrum at all. Still, public officials, civic leaders, planners, architects, and academics have all begun to explore different policy choices for planning on a regional basis in Massachusetts. Those choices fall under five rough headings: comprehensive policy, strategic action, toolkits, and removing barriers to development that would strengthen the region’s vital centers.

Comprehensive Policy

Growth management regimes throughout the country have a basic similarity. Development in existing urban areas is encouraged, with incentives, rewards, reduced fees and a smooth permitting process. Development where there is no infrastructure gets nothing and indeed is charged more. It’s a classic carrot-and-stick method. That is the kind of state intervention that the most aggressive smart growth advocates are calling for in Massachusetts.

A recent report on development, fiscal capacity, housing, and race in Greater Boston boldly declares that the only viable policy response to the problems of the region lie in creating a new system of regional governance. *The Boston Metropatterns* report by the Metropolitan Area Research Corporation states: “Without a governance structure that provides the power to shape regional land use and public investment patterns, the ability to effectively address regional problems is greatly reduced.” The report acknowledges the difficulty in overcoming political and cultural barriers to regionalism. But in response to that concern, the report states simply: If other regions can do it, so too can Greater Boston.

Advocates of regionalism disagree about the proper instrument for bringing about coordinated land-use planning and development on a metropolitan scale. Former Governor Michael S. Dukakis, noting the small geographic scale of the Commonwealth, argues that state offices and policies can provide the leadership and administrative coordination necessary for fulfillment of a regional vision. David Soule, the executive director of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, argues that the MAPC or some new regional body needs to gain the authority to coordinate important land-use policies and capital investments. Such a regional body would have substantial control over development, transportation, housing, and the environment.

At the state level: A statewide smart growth program, modeled after the Maryland plan, would have to include an oversight office. Maryland's Office of Strategic Planning, led by a cabinet-level secretary, provides comprehensive broad research, policy-making, oversight, and implementation functions. The notion of a state planning office has become moribund since the first Dukakis Administration in the 1970s. But some argue that the tools to promote smart growth are already at the state's disposal—from MHFA to MDFA, from Massport to the MWRA—and need only be mobilized. The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs has been active in promoting the Community Preservation Act and encouraging state transportation agencies to consider the land-use implications of road projects. In one scenario, the EOEA could become the state planning office.

Executive Order 385, a little-known measure signed by Governor William F. Weld, instructs state agencies to consider local growth-management plans, adhere to smart growth principles, and promote rehabilitation and re-use of infrastructure in development projects. Jay Wickersham of MEPA referred to this executive order when he encouraged the state Office of Transportation and Construction to form its Land Use Task Force, which is designed to consider development patterns and not just the swift flow of traffic or people, in rail or highway extensions or improvement projects.

Under one scenario, E.O. 385 could serve as the foundation stone for a new regional policy directed by state agencies. If a governor decided to use E.O. 385 as the basis for a comprehensive smart-growth policy, she or he could designate key state officials to coordinate the development activities of a wide range of agencies such as Administration and Finance, Housing and Community Development, Transportation, and Environmental Affairs. Just as President George W. Bush's director of homeland security coordinates the policies of a wide range of entities concerned with terrorism, so too could a growth czar coordinate a wide range of state officials.

Even without a growth czar, the state can provide better vehicles for coordinating development—for making sure that the right hand knows what the left hand is doing. A better link between state housing policy and a big-picture view of land use would help change the landscape, smart growth advocates say. Putting affordable housing on state surplus land such as the Belchertown state hospital might sound like a good idea on paper, but left unconsidered is where the jobs for those residents will be—and how much they will contribute to traffic congestion. Thus the state Department of Housing and Community Development could coordinate with the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction to locate major new affordable-housing projects near transit nodes, in the urban-village model. Similarly, the Executive Office of Economic Development could coordinate more with the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, steering companies toward existing urban centers rather than to undeveloped land along major highways.

At the regional level: Noting the unpopularity of the State Office of Planning in the 1970s—and the different needs and capacities of different regions within Massachusetts—smart-growth advocates like the MAPC’s David Soule have called for creation of a regional planning authority with muscle. Building on the models of the Cape Cod Commission and the Mayflower Compact, these advocates say that Boston will only address its fragmented character with an entity that coordinates land-use policies for all of Eastern Massachusetts.

The exact makeup and powers of the regional authority are open to debate. Assuming that MAPC would be the body given the powers to manage regional planning and development, the first step would be to get the MAPC designated as Greater Boston’s metropolitan planning organization, which carries out federally funded transportation projects and programs. Those programs—as part of a larger comprehensive transportation plan—could provide a framework for land-use planning in the region. A second step would be to give the MAPC some authority to control certain aspects of land-use planning, for example, requiring localities to create mixed-use communities near their business districts and transit nodes and requiring the designation of land for multi-family housing. A third and grander step would be for the MAPC to develop a comprehensive plan for the region, with coordinated strategies for building a more integrated transportation network, encouraging housing development, protecting vital natural spaces, and managing inter-community relations on everything from freight traffic to waste disposal.

Getting cities and towns to cede their local powers to such a regional body is an unlikely scenario. For the foreseeable future, MAPC will likely exist side by side with Greater Boston’s existing MPO. While the MPO coordinates

transportation policy, the MAPC will continue to convene state and local officials to address common challenges, develop sophisticated information systems, and develop special projects around strategic issues and spaces.

Compacts: Already, coordinated planning has taken hold on the sub-regional level. A number of groups have developed plans and working groups that recognize Greater Boston's "poly-nodal" character. Under this understanding, cities and towns recognize that the region should no longer be considered as an urban solar system, with suburban planets revolving around an urban center. Instead, newly developed areas relate to each other on a more equal basis, like stars in a constellation.

The Boston Society of Architects "Civic Initiative," after a series of workshops held in 2001, suggests that a more realistic first step—short of a statewide "smart growth" agenda—is to identify encourage cities and towns within Greater Boston's sub-regions to work together. At its regional charrette and "future search" events, the BSA identified smart-growth principles to guide development along Interstate 495; the Alewife area that includes Cambridge, Belmont, and Arlington; the Assembly Square land in Somerville, which abuts Medford, Everett, and Boston; the Chelsea Creek, which connects Chelsea, Revere, and Boston; the Urban Ring corridor, which includes six cities and towns; and Telecom City, a 200-acre development involving Everett, Malden, and Medford. All of those efforts were already under way before the BSA process, but the BSA hopes to bring greater visibility and resources to these efforts—and to identify them as a coherent poly-nodal strategy of regionalism.

Over time, these separate collaborations might come together as a more unified regional strategy. The operating assumption behind such efforts is that, before a comprehensive strategy can be developed, the state needs to mobilize communities that have a common cultural or geographical identity—and common problems that require joint action. The sub-regional approach would have the politically attractive attribute of being sensitive to each sub-region's special needs and strengths.

Strategic Action

Rather than trying to micromanage all aspects of policy, some smart growth advocates say that planners should seek critical "leverage points" where strategic intervention can yield good results and spur others to pursue sensible development. Advocates of this approach—inspired by Malcolm Gladwell's work *The Tipping Point*—say that strategic interventions can change the dynamic of much larger areas. The key is to find the leverage points that affect a wide range of policies and actions.

One leverage point that has won great favor among planners is known as transit-oriented development. Building on Greater Boston's development as a series of "streetcar suburbs," TOD enthusiasts say that the smartest kind of development occurs at key nodes where transit stations, housing, retail outlets, offices, and public facilities all come together. The post-World War II style of development separated these land uses, necessitating car ownership and causing development to spread out. But Greater Boston possesses the infrastructure for a revival of these "urban villages."

And, as the Conservation Law Foundation points out, TOD developers can help design, build and pay for stations, creating a win-win situation for a state transit agency chronically short on cash.

The state has no comprehensive policy on transit-oriented development. Dennis DiZoglio, the director of planning for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, says that the MBTA will work with localities that wish to concentrate development on transit nodes—but that the T will not take a proactive approach to the issue. DiZoglio argues that land-use decisions should be left with localities—that if towns wish to build large-scale parking near transit stations, rather than a mix of uses, those wishes should be respected. But DiZoglio has promised that the MBTA would work with communities that wish to concentrate development at their transit nodes.

A more aggressive state policy on transit-oriented development could be a beacon for private developers, at high-profile sites such as the South Weymouth Naval Air Station and all along commuter rail expansion such as the Greenbush line. As state policy, "transit villages" around stations, such as those under construction in Salem, could make park-and-ride, highway-oriented stations the exception instead of the rule.

The City of Boston is pursuing an urban village strategy as a result of the Boston 400 planning process. After developing assessments of more than 50 "activity centers" around the city, the Boston Redevelopment Authority is developing detailed plans to transform Upham's Corner in Dorchester into a classic urban village. Such an urban village would include new transit service, better roadway design and management, and more aggressive development of housing, commercial, office, and cultural and social-service spaces in the area that is now anchored by the historic Strand Theater.

Attack the 'invisible' regional policies: Many experts argue that regional sprawl results not just from land-use and infrastructure policies, but also from other more general fiscal and tax policies. One such policy is local dependence on property taxes for funding public education. Some 73 percent of the locally raised revenues come from property taxes; in the U.S. as a whole, 47 percent of local revenues come from property taxes. This dependence on property

levies intensifies the search for kinds of development that yield high revenues without making claims on local budgets; in other words, it favors office parks and retail centers over housing and community facilities. Development patterns will not change, according to this school of thought, until the need for “tax farming” for commercial development is removed by reducing the role of property taxes for schools and other local services.

Housing policy is another “invisible” regional policy. If Massachusetts residents are given a broader array of affordable housing choices, many of the root causes of sprawl will be addressed and development patterns will gradually begin to change. If new housing were easier to build all over the region—rather than being practically zoned out of most cities and towns altogether—the strain on communities like Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville might ease. If housing were developed more intensely in communities like Lexington, Bedford, Burlington, and Westwood, it might increase the economic potential of neighboring communities as well. Even if new housing did not have such a spillover effect, it would remove some of the strain on communities now carrying the burden of new housing development.

Other kinds of “invisible” regional policy may include tax breaks to major corporations to locate or stay in the Commonwealth, which often spur new office-park development; the consolidation of schools, which has the effect of making education less local and more dependent on busing; the use of standardized tests like MCAS, which cause more mobile or affluent households to seek out districts with higher overall test scores; the clustering of social services in cities like Boston, which strengthen the “migration chains” of immigrants to a handful of communities; volunteer and parttime systems of local government, which direct the attention of local residents to the most local concerns; and the failure to develop collective systems of purchasing and service delivery, which has the effect of separating neighboring cities and towns from each other.

Land acquisitions: Even if the state does not adopt policies that coordinate land use, it can still take critical steps to direct development away from the state’s remaining farmland and other open spaces. Senate President Thomas Birmingham in 2001 proposed to dedicate 15 percent of any budget surplus towards the purchase of conservation land. Birmingham argues that the state should take a more aggressive role in land conservation deals. The current mechanism for buying conservation, through capital spending channels, is limited; if Birmingham’s measure had been in place over the last five years, it would have generated \$172.5 million to protect 40,000 acres of open space. “We’re a densely populated, geographically compact state, and when we lose open space it’s like the extinction of a species. It’s gone forever,” he said. The

bill was supported by the Environmental League of Massachusetts, the Trust for Public Land, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Toolkits for Cities and Towns

One popular approach to foster smart development patterns in a region that resists regional coordination is to use the carrot rather than the stick. The state could develop a wide range of new resources in exchange for the willingness of cities and towns to adopt favored development and land-use policies.

One of the most innovative new tools is the authority to raise new revenues for projects that encourage smart growth. Cities and towns struggle to raise new revenues because of restrictions on increases in local property taxes under Proposition 2½. But in 2001, after the state legislature approved the Community Preservation Act (CPA), cities and towns had the opportunity to impose a surcharge of up to 3 percent on local property taxes to fund housing, open space acquisition, and historic preservation projects. Since its enactment in September 2000, 67 cities and towns have voted on proposals to use this new taxing power; 35 have passed new local levies, mostly for open-space acquisition. Proponents of the CPA says that it gives localities all the tools they need for a balanced local development strategy, while critics say that the new funds can actually undermine smart-growth goals like density by designating developable land for open space.

The state has been providing critical planning information to localities through a “build-out analysis” conducted by the regional planning organizations. In Greater Boston, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council has conducted these analyses, which provide projections of growth potential for every city and town under current zoning and other local conditions.

Executive Order 418, in conjunction with the EOEAs build-out analysis, provides \$30,000 for technical assistance. Towns may use the money—either alone or by pooling their money with nearby communities—to write a long-range plan. The money must be spent equally for housing, transportation, and environmental analyses. The centerpiece of the work is an analysis of expected development patterns over the next 25 years, given the amount of undeveloped land in any given community.

A bill filed by state Senator Mark Pacheco would create a \$35-million pool for municipalities to hire consultants and to create long-range plans. This proposal is similar to the CPA and Executive Order 418, but increases the money available for cities and towns to devote to first-rate planning. It was also supported by the Conservation Law Foundation, the Environmental League of Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Another tool that the state could offer localities is known as “transferable development rights.” TDRs allow developers to “trade” the right to

develop land with other land owners. An owner of ecologically sensitive land, for example, could agree to keep the parcel as open space in return for the right to co-develop another parcel of land more intensively. A TDR system can be an invaluable tool for communities to steer development to desired locations, but towns in particular need legal support and technical assistance to make it work.

Information: Planning and development is a field where even insiders have a hard time keeping up. The many moving parts—housing, transportation, governance, equity, land-use law, the environment, public-private development—can be dizzying for even those who closely follow the issues. That is why information—data, analysis, maps, projections of current trends—is so crucial for the planning process. And the more of it that is accessible by the general public, the better, many policymakers believe.

The EOEAs build-out analysis program for all 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts provides a basic foundation for planning decisions moving forward—the miles of road that will be needed to support the maximum amount of development that current zoning allows, projected increases in population, how many more kids the local school system will have to absorb, the millions of gallons of water that will be consumed and the millions of tons of trash that will need to be disposed of.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council's MetroPlan 2000 offers another important source of information, tracking trends in economic development (e.g., the loss of manufacturing jobs); land use (the loss of 261,089 acres of open space since 1950); transportation (traffic is growing at 2.5 percent per year, and 80 percent of the region's expressways are congested during rush hours); air quality (the region, already in violation of the Clean Air Act, expects pollution to rise by 2010); water quality (12 communities facing local water-supply shortages, documentation of groundwater contamination), and housing (the region's ratio of housing cost to income is among the highest in the nation).

Other efforts to assemble information are underway that focus on the environment. With funding from EOEAs, the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program has developed a program called the BioMap, to identify areas in the state most in need of protection. The focus is on state-listed rare species, their habitats, and "exemplary natural communities." A more regionally focused effort is underway at Plymouth's Manomet Center for Conservation Science, which is identifying natural areas of importance in a 60-community area in Southeastern Massachusetts. The assembly of scientific data includes computer-based maps that show how buildings and natural areas relate to each other. If ecologically sensitive areas can be identified

in an objective, verifiable fashion, policymakers can use this information as a basic starting point.

Finally, Myron Orfield, a state legislator in Minnesota who has spurred a nationwide debate about regional equity with his book *Metropolitics*, recently authored the report, *Boston Metropatterns*, sponsored by the MAPC, the Citizens Housing and Planning Association, and Harvard University. The report shows how inefficient development patterns have driven the housing crisis. The report details the starkly uneven characteristics of income distribution in the metropolitan area—how sprawl relegates low-income populations to live in Brockton, Boston, Lynn or Lawrence, creating pervasive social separation.

The methods for compiling and analyzing such data can be contested, of course. The use of a “sprawl index” to rank metropolitan areas has been heavily criticized because of confusing standards involving density per acre. *National Geographic* recently came under fire for alleged exaggerations of large urban and built-up areas, based in part on satellite images of nighttime lights.

Smart design incentives: The so-called “green building” or “green design” movement in Massachusetts follows a basic theme: that the development that does take place in the state, including office parks and shopping centers, can at least be designed to have a minimal impact on the environment. The principles of green building call for using recycled materials, consuming fewer natural resources in construction, and using less fuel for heating and cooling. In Bellingham, a series of perforated underground tanks collects rainwater that runs off from rooftops and parking lots, recharging the underground water supply. So-called “graywater,” or water from sinks (versus toilets), can be cleaned cheaply and used for irrigation and other purposes. Advanced building materials maximize energy efficiency, and the use of solar panels can augment or replace conventional power sources.

The frequent complaint about sprawl is that people do not like the way the landscape looks—the cookie-cutter retail outlets and their garish signs, the multi-lane arterials, the look-alike houses in subdivisions, the personality-free architecture of office parks. Thus solutions to sprawl can pack more punch when they include attractive, well-designed features. Homebuyers who have a fixed idea of a single-family subdivision and a one-acre yard can be lured by attractive designs for a more compact living arrangement. Attention to design is also critical in affordable homes, for both buyers and the surrounding neighborhood. Encouraging people to consider an array of housing choices—places without big yards or garages, or homes near

transit—can be helped immeasurably by a built environment that has been thoughtfully designed.

Reform of local authorities: The tension between planning and economic development arises most publicly at the Boston Redevelopment Authority, but every municipality struggles with the same dilemma. Many say the BRA is a relic of a bygone era of urban renewal. After the departure of BRA Director Thomas N. O'Brien in 1999, Mayor Menino promised an overhaul, but the basic framework of the agency remains. Development projects, perceived to be the domain of the mayor, are handled on a case-by-case basis. The preferred approach to large projects is still the “planned development area,” or PDA, where building heights are negotiated with individual developers. The administration has resisted the idea of a firm master plan for neighborhoods of the city or for the city as a whole, despite critics who argue that there should be a clear set of rules for all developers to follow.

Absent more thorough reform of an agency where many jobs are safely held by those with political connections, the BRA moved recently to become, in effect, more user-friendly. Proclaiming that citizen participation was critical to planning and development decisions, the agency recently published a *Citizens' Guide to Article 80*, which spells out the review process for all development projects in the city.

The reform of planning practices in suburban and rural communities is more difficult. Both Executive Order 418 and the Community Preservation Act provide funding for towns to increase their planning capacity, as do locally initiated efforts like the I-495 Initiative. In the case of the I-495 Initiative, however, planners who receive training on permitting or responsible environmental practices do not consider broader issues that bring into question basic assumptions—that it is desirable to have office parks near highways, for example. In other communities, planning reform is really about increasing the stature and resources of local planning officials. But the position can become political. In Wareham, town planner Charles Gricus fiercely opposed the Makepeace proposal, reflecting the complaints of vocal constituents.

Getting Out of the Way

Charles Tiebout's classic model of metropolitan choice suggests that local government is most responsive when citizens enjoy the greatest opportunity to “vote with their feet.” A region with many different cities and towns is more likely to be responsive than a unified system of governance, since people can pick and choose which community offers the right mix of infrastructure, services, amenities, and taxes.

The upshot of Tiebout's thesis is that the full range of public goods—housing, parks, transit, social services—will be provided more thoroughly and efficiently if the local governments are left to create the mixes of services that are most appropriate to their needs and capacity. In a region of many local governments, there are likely to be several communities with the appropriate mix of taxes, services, and amenities for everyone. Not all communities will provide the complete mix of services, but every household will be able to find the rung of the ladder that is appropriate to their needs and circumstances.

Greater Boston is full of stories of local regeneration through local action. The town of Ipswich has, on its own, taken several steps to promote more compact development and preserve open space. Its plan steers housing into developed areas, emphasizes development near commuter rail, and requires that new developments be pedestrian-friendly. In addition, the town has set aside \$10 million through a bond issue for land conservation purchases. Meanwhile, nearby towns like Salem and Gloucester have taken their own steps to improve their attractiveness.

A market-based strategy favored by the Small Property Owners Association and the Massachusetts Homebuilders Association identifies too much regulation as the principal barrier to balanced development in the region. Developers say they would be glad to develop housing, live-work space, or retail space on vacant lots or old warehouses, but they face unwarranted obstacles in the permitting process. The redevelopment and adaptive re-use of buildings is indeed a bureaucracy-laden process in many municipalities, from strict fire and building codes to historic concerns. Many Massachusetts officials have been exploring the possibility of adapting New Jersey's award-winning strategy to loosen regulations on building rehab.

The Massachusetts Homebuilders Association opposes smart growth if it means an extra layer of bureaucracy on top of existing local systems. The group fears that approvals will someday be needed not only from the local planning board, but from a regional entity as well. The backlash against smart growth is waiting to happen in Massachusetts, as it has already been unleashed in Oregon (property owners there can be compensated for land values diminished by land-use regulations) and in Maryland (Carroll County has passed a zoning law encouraging residential development on farmland, in direct conflict with state policy).

Toward a New Regime of Planning?

The policy options for better growth management are abundant and varied. Sprawl is one of those issues that affects some individuals on a day-to-day basis, but solutions may require long-term thinking that is harder to grasp

and rally around as a political cause. It is a “big picture” issue like health care, but voters are more likely to spring to action when faced with immediate threats like a largescale housing project or highway routing. Former Vice President Albert Gore could not capitalize on sprawl as an issue in his 2000 presidential campaign. Former Governor A. Paul Cellucci did not see much mileage in regional planning; still, he and his advisors did pick up on the fact that many affluent and well-educated voters care deeply about the preservation of open space.

Voters also do care deeply about quality of life and the New England-style, small-town character of rural and suburban communities. But that preservation impulse does not translate to managing growth. It translates to stopping growth entirely.

The I-495 corridor offers a fascinating case study of the future of growth management in Massachusetts. Most of the state’s growth in the 1990s took place there, according to the U.S. Census. Residents are sure to become an important political force, and they could become increasingly frustrated with traffic jams, office parks, commercial strips, and the loss of open space.

The rest of eastern Massachusetts poses a vexatious “in-between” scenario—not quite dire enough to warrant widespread outrage, as it did in Atlanta or in Maryland, but enough to prompt anti-growth campaigns, as has occurred in towns such as Bolton. Timing is at issue here: residents who moved to towns along I-495 did so wanting a particular quality of life; once they are established there, they fight against the things that degrade that quality of life. That means simply saying “no” to more development—the “pull up the drawbridge” response. These residents are unlikely to call for better planning on a statewide basis; they care primarily about their own town.

In this scenario, there is no real window of opportunity to capture popular support for smart growth, and the slower and steadier the pace of growth, the more difficult constituency-building is likely to be. When conditions worsen sufficiently, towns will impose no-growth policies when they can. But conditions are never severe enough to reach the “tipping point” necessary to prompt more than a handful of communities to band together to reassess planning policy on a broader level. The only place where the “Atlanta effect” might occur is in Southeastern Massachusetts, but thus far the most publicized response by residents has been to say “no” to development altogether, as seen in the fight against the Makepeace proposal.

The state’s political culture also undermines the “smart growth” movement. The tradition of home rule in Massachusetts means that 351 individual communities design their own land-use policy. The rebelliousness that led

to the Proposition 2½ tax cap resists broad new government initiatives and anything that smacks of “Taxachusetts.” The Commonwealth elected Republican governors in the last three elections and voted itself a major income tax cut in 2000. Property rights—the notion that the government cannot reduce the value of land or block a particular use of land because that is unconstitutional—may be most associated with the “Sagebrush Rebellion” of western states, but New England has its own culture of the inviolability of property. While rebellious counties in Maryland fight the statewide growth management plan and Oregon property-owners savor their November ballot victory requiring government compensation for losses in property values, the seeds for similar revolts are in the ground here. Nurtured by a culture of Yankee independence, economic self-interest remains of primary importance.

The most immediate impediment to a smart-growth movement is the economic downturn and the fallout from the September 11 terrorist attacks. Smart growth is predicated on more people living in cities, and because cities remain the likeliest targets of terrorism, fewer people than ever may want to live in them. Workers may be especially reluctant to work in tall buildings. Some businesses in lower Manhattan have already moved out to suburban locations.

But the terrorist attacks have a broader impact. In states across the country, security has become the primary concern of public policy. As budget surpluses turn to budget deficits, public officials are reluctant to restrict revenue-generating development of any kind. The recession also removes the urgency needed to arouse a movement. Slower economic activity means less building of office parks, shopping malls, and ultimately single-family subdivisions. After September 11, growth management seems a quaint or even naïve issue. The new focus is on jobs and economic development, not controlling growth or scaring developers or companies away.

Despite widespread frustration with traffic jams and the placelessness of sprawling settings, a statewide outcry about sprawl has failed to materialize. And in the absence of an organized, passionate constituency focused on planning and development, Massachusetts politicians seem likely to continue to focus on other issues.