



VARIETIES OF REGIONALISM IN GREATER BOSTON

Concerns about sprawl – dispersed metropolitan development, accompanied by traffic congestion, inadequate transit service, high housing prices, and disappearing open spaces – has dominated the recent planning debate in Greater Boston. Some say regional planning is the best hope for countering sprawl. But what does regionalism mean? Experts gathered to discuss the issue.

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What is the best way to understand the regional character of the policy challenges that Greater Boston faces in the early 21st century?

Some of Greater Boston's leading figures on a wide range of issues – housing, the environment, transportation, planning – gathered to explore that question. At a public forum titled "Varieties of Regionalism in Greater Boston," sponsored by the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston, panelists talked about the complexities involved in planning in an age of sprawl. The gathering took place at the Suffolk University School of Law on July 22, 2003.

The event was cosponsored by the Boston GreenSpace Alliance, the Boston Natural Areas Network, the Boston Society of Architects, the CitiStates Group, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the Suffolk Law School, and the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy.

Charles C. Euchner, executive director of the Rappaport Institute, based at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, moderated the gathering. Panelists were:

- Steve Adams, president of the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy, and a former Maine state government official and vice president for the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City.
- Valerie Burns, executive director of the Boston Natural Areas Network and a longtime activist on environmental issues.
- David Dixon, president of the Boston Society of Architects and a principal at Goody, Clancy and Associates.
- Marc Draisen, executive director of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council formerly executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations and a member of the Massachusetts General Court.
- Stephanie Pollack, acting president of the Conservation Law Foundation.
- Jay Wickersham, a Cambridge-based lawyer, lecturer at the Harvard Design School and former director of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office.

An edited transcript of the conversation follows:

Charles Euchner: We are here to talk about “Varieties of Regionalism.” We wanted to get away from the idea that regionalism is an either/or question. In many ways, regionalism is a both/and question, meaning that we need a variety of policies to deal with concerns that we consider to be regional – whether they are environmental or housing or schools or any of the other things that make our communities what they are.

We have identified five different varieties of regionalism. We don’t mean to suggest that these are the only five ways that you can think about it. But we do think that there’s a spectrum. It begins with localism – the idea that regional solutions aren’t so necessary, and that if we simply allow and give the locals the tools that they need, they’ll take care of the problems that are local in nature.

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Further along the spectrum is what we call ad-hoc regionalism, which occurs when different localities decide to fashion joint solutions to problems as they see arise; there is no need for a permanent body, more an ability to kind of react creatively and quickly in cooperation with others. The Urban Ring Compact is a good example of that – a voluntary association of six communities dedicated to creating a circumferential transit system in Boston.

Next along the spectrum is the single-purpose regional entity. We’ve had several examples of those over the years, from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority to Massport to the Metropolitan District Commission.

As you move further along the spectrum, you come to multi-purpose regional entities. Many regions around the country have multi-purpose regional entities with strong powers over land use and planning and coordination of land use for transportation.

At the very end of the spectrum is state government. Many people would argue that in a state as small geographically as Massachusetts that the proper regional entity might very well be state government.

Let’s begin with the question: What issues are most in need of regional solutions or regional attention, and what issues are least in need of regional approaches or solutions, and why?

Marc Draisen: There are three things that maybe we can think about doing regionally. First, growth and development issues need to be dealt with on a regional as well as a local perspective. We are so far past the point when the decisions we make locally do not have major repercussions throughout the region, from both a fiscal and from a quality-of-life perspective. It frankly seems bizarre to me that we have a system where virtually every development decision is just made locally, even when those decisions affect the larger region.

Second, we should look doing more regional provision of municipal services. You might say, “Well, if you use the word municipal, how can they be regional?” And the point is that as we do it. The MAPC brings municipalities together to perform services, to bid for services and products, and to generally share information in such a way that will make their work better.

And the third is kind of a new one, and it's often called "homeland security." We have a system which basically runs from southern New Hampshire and southern Maine down to Rhode Island, and we're part of it. But we don't manage it regionally at all. We manage it somewhat locally and somewhat on a state basis. And if we're going to do it effectively and efficiently and in a way that is reasonable from both a security and a continuance of service perspective, we should find a way to do it on a more regional basis.

CONSIDERING BOTH PEOPLE AND PLACES

Charles Euchner: As a clarification, the issues that you raised, being regional in character, have to do with the built environment, for the most part. Is that correct? What about non-built environment kinds of issues? Anybody want to take that up? Stephanie?

Stephanie Pollack: I think that the strongest argument for regional solutions is not that there's a political need for regionalism, but that there's an ecological or biological need for regionalism. My strongest candidate would actually be water and wastewater infrastructure. If every town along the river has its own system for deciding how much water they're going to pull out of it and how much wastewater they're going to dump into it, the river is never going to function the way it needs to. So there's a natural region for grouping communities to deal with water supply and water quality issues - yet we don't do that on the Ipswich or on the Taunton River, and the rivers are suffering because of it.

Charles Euchner: How about human services? Anybody want to jump in on issues like education or public health or any other issues, or are we going to be ending up talking about the built environment-- which, of course, would be okay?

David Dixon: Education clearly is a critical issue that we have to address regionally. In work a number of us did to develop a Civic Initiative for Livable New England, we found a lack of people who really understood planning and regional development issues and education at the same time. And I think it's a piece of the debate that is very much missing.

I think we have to confront the fact that we've had, for many years, in our post-Gingrich era, a shrinking perception of the public sector's responsibility and the resources available to it. And we either have to come to agreement that we're going to fund the public sector or find an acceptable alternative to funding things like transportation.

Valerie Burns: You mentioned public health. One of the things that regional thinking and planning and acting leads to is an opportunity to connect issues. Environmental issues and preservation and restoration of natural systems is very much linked to public health. We have to try not to segment issues of public health from other aspects of regional life, particularly the natural systems. So issues like asthma, obesity, diabetes, which are large and growing public health issues, are very much connected to the environmental condition in the regional area.

Jay Wickersham: I'd like to return to Stephanie's point. We need regional solutions for

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things that cross boundaries. Stephanie mentioned water as something that crosses boundaries. Another element of our regional system that crosses boundaries is transportation; cars, airplanes, buses, trucks. That is an inherently regional system. And another inherently regional system is all of us – people – where we choose to live and the ways in which local regulation distorts the market and limits our choices in where and how we live.

REGIONAL PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Charles Euchner: Does that suggest, Jay, that if an issue is regional then it requires a regional solution? You just mentioned barriers to home building at the local level. Might it be that removing the barriers makes more sense, or does there necessarily need to be a kind of proactive regional policy on housing?

Jay Wickersham: I think the question should be whether there needs to be a solution that's above the local level. Let's put on hold whether the solution should come at the regional or the state level. The other question we need to look at is whether there is something inherent in the

local system that is going to lead to counterproductive solutions. With housing, I would say very definitely that the combination of the system of municipal finance and the lack of oversight of local zoning regulation requires a solution that is above the local level of government. Water and transportation require regional solutions for a different reason: they move across local borders. You cannot effectively plan for either water or transportation systems at a local level because their physical natures are inherently regional.

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Steve Adams: Ideas about what we think should be addressed regionally probably ought to be colored by what actually can be done regionally or can work regionally. And there are so many great examples of regional strategies already very effective in Massachusetts that we could build

on. When the solution is going to increase the efficiency or reduce the cost or increase the quality of the people in the grouping, people will go along with the regional solution.

Charles Euchner: Like what?

Steve Adams: There are education collaboratives of school districts to get together to buy services. And up in Lawrence – one of the winners of the Pioneer Institute's Better Government Competition – the school system is buying special education services for their district residents, and they're getting a cost savings, but also a better quality product for their students.

Stephanie Pollack: I question whether we have to address some of the zoning and development approval issues above the local level. I'd like to put on the table the idea that we don't actually need to reinvent regionalism; we need to reinvent localism. And the model to look to for – what I would call heavily guided localism – is education reform in Massachusetts. We didn't take the governance issues away from the local level, but we imposed a top-down

set of rules that local government had to follow in providing local education to students, on the grounds that, hey, the money comes from the state.

And you can do the same thing with zoning and development issues. You can have a different kind of localism instead of a different kind of regionalism. It's going to just be really hard to take zoning and development approval decisions away from municipalities in Massachusetts.

Charles Euchner: So in other words, issues themselves can be broken down. There are a number of different issues in education. One of them is equity of finance, and the state has a compelling desire to equalize the opportunity that kids have to get a chance for education. So the state spends more and imposes more basic standards. But at the delivery end of the story, the actual school building or school district, you loosen the regulations. This is the central principle of the charter school movement. How does that sound to other people here, and can it be applied to other issues?

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Marc Draisen: I think with any issue, the first thing you do is you figure out does it have a regional context? Do the actions of one party influence another party across a municipal boundary? Are there externalities that need to be dealt with? Once you decide, yes, this is an issue that's regional – and to be perfectly frank, it's increasingly hard to find anything that isn't – then you have to say, "All right. Well, how do you deal with it?" And you can always deal with it – almost always – in one of two ways. You can change the governing structure so that a regional set of actors have power over the decision-making process. Or you can say, "We're going to keep it local," but tell local governments what to do.

What's important about education reform – and I was in the legislature at that time – was we developed a powerful political consensus around issue. The business community played a powerful role in helping us to reach that particular consensus. We continue to have the benefits and suffer from the costs of that decision. There's no particular reason why we couldn't have a similar review of the development of the built environment, and decide we're going to deal with that question through some changes in governance, and/or through some changes in incentives and direction.

Charles Euchner: Okay, what would that look like? What one issue?

Marc Draisen: One the most important issues – which is frequently missing from people's lists – is the impact of municipal finance and municipal decision-making. We are blind to the fact that local governments make their decisions largely with their own pocketbooks in mind. We encourage that attitude in this state through Proposition 2½. We encourage our communities to be peculiarly focused on every dollar, intensively focused on every dollar, because they are so limited and constrained in that regard.

As a result, we have development decisions that are largely being made for tax reasons, as opposed to other reasons. And there's no [reform agenda] that we could implement unless we ensure that municipal governments are going to cover their costs and grow at a reasonable pace. If we leave that out, we're just going to have municipalities trying to get around the

other rules we set up, and we're not going to have good results, and everyone's going to be mad at everybody else.

TANGLED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Charles Euchner: Well, and there's the danger there is that you create incentives and you pile incentives on top of restrictions on top of regulations on top of more incentives.

Steve Adams: In housing, people are acting very much in their economic interest, very rationally in their economic interests, when they support an exclusionary approach to development in their community. We need to recognize that when policy touches somebody's pocketbook and they have the control, they're going to be influenced by that.

So I think Marc is 100 percent right. You've got to figure out the incentives. But for some issues like housing and maybe education, and maybe eventually health care – issues that touch individual pocketbooks – you've got to figure out the incentives for individuals to make rational decisions for themselves that also benefit the social policies.

Charles Euchner: Now someone might be listening to this conversation and say: "Hold on a second. State aid to localities has exploded in the last ten years."

Marc Draisen: Yes, state aid has gone up tremendously. But we should remember that that state aid went up after a period in which we basically starved our cities and towns, and has gone up by sort of continually applying the number to a formula, the base and root of which nobody can even remember anymore – utterly unrelated to the desire to get municipalities to do or not do anything.

Charles Euchner: So what you're saying is that one of the first jobs we have to do is to untangle the incredibly complex system of state aid to localities so that we can understand what the impact is in the first place, and then make sure that that impact isn't distorted. Is that fair?

Marc Draisen: I certainly agree with the fundamental points being made, but I think that there was also something missing. We don't have a mechanism for relating financial resources to issues that require regional solutions that cross municipal boundaries. We have some pieces of it. But for example, we have no real way to fund transportation improvements, at this point. We have no real way to counteract the fiscal competition for jobs that are pulling jobs and therefore people out of poor communities into suburbs – which aggravates problems like congestion. We have no way to develop regional solutions to our housing crisis that don't tend to aggravate social fragmentation. And I truly think that in addition to looking at the broad balance of localism and regionalism, we need, at a regional level, to understand how are we going to get these resources. Otherwise it's competition for a shrinking fund.

Steve Adams: It's not always about getting more resources. It may be about how we get people to allocate them, but it's not always about getting more. We're spending \$800 million a year on transportation, so we have the money. We just may not be spending it as much as

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people want or in the places people want.

Charles Euchner: Glenn Tepke and Charlie Chieppo coauthored report on MBTA finances. The force of the argument is that the T is already way overburdened and can't even handle its own maintenance issues, and the T has been put on a diet by the state legislature – the T gets one penny out of every five cents of sales tax that's collected across the state and the T has to live within those means. That means that the T has to make smarter decisions about what

projects are actually worth investing in. So it seems to me this is the thrust of your comments, is that rather than deciding we want to pursue any project that comes down the pike – pardon the expression – we need to be very, very careful and deliberate about where that money goes, and then we can be much more smart regionally. Is that fair?

David Dixon: Everything in life is a continuum. There's too much and too little. I truly don't think we risk spending too much on public transit or affordable housing, given the problems we have. But we need to recognize we can't create the tens of thousands of jobs we need because we don't have the transportation infrastructure in the places where jobs might go.

The Longwood Medical Area is a great example where this threat is very real; there are parts of eastern Cambridge where this threat is very real. It's because we don't have the transit that we need to create the capacity to accommodate those jobs. And we're going to lose them to other regions if we don't find a way to solve that.

Stephanie Pollack: How we connect funding streams to infrastructure investments points out one of the problems of the regionalism spectrum. There isn't a mechanism for moving money around, for saying, "Oops, it turns out that more funding didn't create enough of a revenue stream to support any capital expansion of the T. Let's take money from here and move it there." The same is true for water and sewer. The MWRA, for a variety of reasons, has a reasonable set of tools at its disposal for financing needed infrastructure improvements. Communities outside the MRWA by and large don't have those same mechanisms for water and sewer. So what do they do? They come banging at the door of the MRWA and saying, you know, "Mother, may I become part of the Authority so that I can also have access to some tools for addressing water and sewer problems?"

Right now the financing schemes are so irrationally related to the infrastructure needs that even if there is enough money in the system, we don't have the ability to move it around in the way that we need to.

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PLANNING AND/OR MONEY?

Charles Euchner: Let us talk about one project in particular, the Urban Ring, which offers a way to connect the outer pieces of the spokes on our hub-and-spoke transit system. It would go through six communities, connecting major employment centers. Now the question arises: In order to make the Urban Ring happen, is it so necessary to have a lot of money, or is it more

necessary for localities to make sure that they clear rights of ways for transit vehicles to move through? Which is the more critical piece: local action that clears the way and prevents major development from blocking the path, or money?

Marc Draisen: Of course, both are important. No, I can't say which one is more important, although I would think you need to clear the ways before you get a lot of money. But the greatest impediment right now is that nobody actually knows for sure if it will happen because of uncertainty about money. Nobody knows for sure if Greenbush will happen; nobody knows for sure if the Urban Ring will happen; nobody knows for sure if Fall River/New Bedford Commuter line will happen. We at MADC have called for a statewide commission to make some of the critical transportation priority decisions for the next 20 and 30 years, like we did before. Like we did before, by the way, at a time when we were very poor and when the state was in a miserable decision.

Until we set some certainty, until we say, like we said with the Central Artery, "This is a big thing. We don't have all the dough right now, but we need it. We're going to do it. We're going to be committed to it," then you can't expect the individual municipalities or anybody else to put life on hold for something that might not happen.

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David Dixon: The rights of way are easy and are largely done; it is the money. And the reason that this is an artificial project to many people is because there is no visible way to pay for it. There are a number of places in this region where zoning at a local level could be tied to implementation of this project, and in turn, enable development projects that could help pay for this, but none of these municipalities will even begin to down this road for a project that appears so artificial at this point. The Urban Ring is a classic example of something where there is a general accord that we need it very badly - but we literally have no way to take the first step forward or the next step forward.

Steve Adams: I don't think it's universally accepted that it's a great idea and should happen. But putting that aside, what we're doing all the time with these massive infrastructure projects is we're trying to paper over in very expensive and inefficient ways - and usually it's ways that are late - these larger regional issues like land use, development, and the movement of employers and people to places that are not where our current infrastructure is.

We need to figure out where are people going, where are employers going, what's driving those decisions about where people move in Massachusetts, and try to get companies, individuals, create the economic incentives for companies and individuals to make vocational decisions that make more sense. We keep building these infrastructure projects, but when the Urban Ring ever gets done, the population will be beyond Worcester. The economic base, which is now between Route 128 and Interstate 495, will not be within the Urban Ring.

Jay Wickersham: I completely disagree with that perspective. There is this myth that somehow market forces and land development are utterly divorced from public investment in infrastructure. I would say that if the most rapid growth is going out beyond Worcester, it's because we invested many hundreds of millions of dollars in I-495 twenty-five years ago. It is

the access to markets created by those infrastructure systems which are going to ultimately influence the locational decisions of businesses and residents. Any major transportation investment we make is going to exert a gravitational pull on future actions.

Charles Euchner: Sometimes these issues are framed as: “If you build it, they will come.” If you build the Greenbush line, people will cluster along the line and at the nodes. If you build the Urban Ring, then businesses and residential development will flourish there. A lot of the research suggests that that doesn’t always happen. And so the question is: Which are the cases where if you build it, they really, really *will* come, versus which are the cases that if you build them, you just sort of hope they’ll come?

POLICY ‘AT WAR WITH ITSELF’

Stephanie Pollack: Well, I think one thing you do is you stop having state infrastructure investment that’s at war with itself. I mean, it’s not just that we built 495. It’s that when the towns started to grow, we paid 80 percent of the cost of building new schools for them out there, too. We say we want concentrated growth, but our entire school construction program subsidized the very sprawl that we claim we’re trying to counteract by building the Greenbush line. We have totally schizophrenic policies that pull in opposite directions.

Charles Euchner: Would you think it would make sense to put a moratorium on some of the projects until we figure out what other policies and projects and incentives will make them work?

Stephanie Pollack: We do need to figure out comprehensively what we want our transportation system to look like 30 years from now. And I would disagree with Steve that the goal should be to attempt to build transportation and infrastructure where the population is moving, because it’s not true that transportation either follows or leads. It’s more complicated. But there’s clearly a relationship between where we put transportation infrastructure, where the population goes, and where we have to put transportation infrastructure to catch up. It is long past time for this state to take a deep breath and say, “What should the whole system look like in the year 2050?” But we need to go beyond transportation and look at what we do about school construction and water and sewer infrastructure and all the other things that influence locational decisions for both businesses and residents.

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Charles Euchner: Does anybody think that we know the answers to these questions very well? I mean, what’s the relative importance, say, of school building versus transit construction versus highway building versus various incentives for industrial buildings, office parks, and so forth? Does anybody have a sense that we really know what causes what? What grade would you give us for how much we know? We don’t get an A.

David Dixon: Well, I think we could get a B if we went to school. But right now we don’t even try. We just let all the decisions get made, either sectorally or municipally. The cost of delay in tackling these relationships is far more expensive than applying our limited

knowledge and understanding to the tasks. We not only have to figure out what we as a society will do regionally, but we have to figure out how the Commonwealth is going to make regional decisions. Even if we don't change the system of governance at all, we need to get the state to think regionally and to make decisions regionally. The Romney administration is making some real strides in this direction, but it takes a lot more work.

Charles Euchner: What you're saying is what we need to do is have a great conversation, where the people involved with schools have to be there with the transportation people, state building boards, environmental protection folks, and so forth. Now it's interesting. The last time Massachusetts had a constitutional convention was during World War I. The last time we seriously rethought state and local government, or at least what kind of authority locals should have, was in the late 1940s, the Curley era. Is it time for a kind of spacious conversation about these things again? And what would it look like?

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Steve Adams: I don't think that a big staged process is going to help us find a way. We know a ton about big infrastructure. And one of the things we know is from the great work done by David Luberoff at the Kennedy School is that most of these big infrastructure projects cost two or three times what we tell the citizens they're going to cost at the front end.

If we trust democracy a little bit better and give people some honest ideas about the trade-offs, we'll get people to make better decisions. They're not going to be ideal, because democracy's messy; we're always going to make inefficient decisions. But we need to start with the great role of the state, which is to give good, honest information, and then let people decide.

Valerie Burns: The MWRA's a great model, because it came into existence when a federal court judge held the legislature hostage.

Stephanie Pollack: That does show what the threshold is for sort of serious governance reform. I mean, everyone knew that the MDC was totally dysfunctional with respect to how it maintained the water and sewer system. What people forget is how new the wastewater treatment infrastructure was. The MDC trashed it in a matter of years by simply ignoring maintenance entirely. So there are thresholds in this state for sort of getting to the point government is forced to take action. In the case of the MDC's water and sewer system, it took a lawsuit, and it took a lawsuit in which the judge was willing to push the state legislature to create an alternative governing structure, not just tell the existing agency, "Well, you have to do something different."

THE NEED FOR OPEN PARTICIPATION

Charles Euchner: To me, Valerie, you are kind of living proof of the "act locally, think regionally" mindset. You're involved with all of these environmental systems which thread their way through a number of different jurisdictions, and yet the thrust of your work is to

organize at the local level – acquire this parcel of land, make that kind of connection. But at the same time, you’re working with state and regional authorities.

Valerie Burns: This discussion really brings to mind the importance of who gets to have real role in decisions. That is one of the reasons the MWRA model is so interesting – because it is absolutely essential that the people that are most affected by the decisions have real impact in making those decisions. On a very local level, I work with a street-level association to a neighborhood to a community to a municipality, and up to state government. But if you don’t have buy-in and a sense that the people that are most affected are going to have some impact in the decisions that affect them, I don’t think that the idea that the state can, in fact, make decisions for a community or region is really going to be successful.

Charles Euchner: So you’re saying that intense localism, in many ways, is essential to workable regionalism?

Valerie Burns: It is, absolutely, in terms of involvement and input. But it isn’t only policy, it’s also revenue. And that’s such a key: there’s got to be real resources for the local entities to work both in a municipality and among municipalities. And that’s really not the way state agencies make their policies and allocate resources.

Charles Euchner: I think most people who follow the MDC in its final years would say that money has been a big part of the problem. What are the other things about the MDC that made your job easier and harder?

Valerie Burns: On the positive side, the MDC was our state’s oldest regional system. The system did, in fact, coordinate natural resources that crossed municipalities. So regardless of which communities lie along the banks of the Neponset River or the Charles River, there was at least a consistent entity that made those acquisitions over the last 100 years that allowed resources to be used in a more equitable way, rather than having each and every community make its own decisions about the system of a river or very large woodland or reservation. We should think about what the metro region would like if there hadn’t been a metropolitan park system over the last hundred years. What would the Charles River and its banks look like? What would Milton and Canton and Stoughton and Dedham and Boston look like if the Blue Hills weren’t, in fact, preserved over the last hundred years?

So the fact that there was an entity that took that action and preserved those resources has been incredibly significant. For 50 years, the MDC was a national model. For the last 50 years it was nuts. Well, that’s not such a bad track record, but it’s time for a change now. But the real benefits of acting regionally are, particularly taking a long view, taking the 100-year view.

Marc Draisen: There’s another lesson that we can take from the MDC. If you go back and you read the statements that people made at the time the MDC was created, you’ll see that it was not only a preservationist movement. It was a social equity movement as well. There were powerful reasons to open up lands and preserve lands for inner-city and immigrant children. And, you know, it was sort of a noblesse oblige perspective, and it both worked and didn’t

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work; it had its flaws. But that was the driving force.

We can't confront issues of inequality if we act entirely locally. It remains impossible to confront most of those issues if we permit every individual city and town to act locally in making most of its decisions about resource allocations.

Stephanie Pollack: In 20 and 50 years we're going to be a very different place than we are today. And it's not just that we're going to be different in terms of the built environment.

We're going to be different in terms of who is living in Massachusetts, whose kids are in school, who's entering the work force. We could get an A-plus in knowing that, because there's actually good data on that. We're just not dealing with the realities, which is that this is the state whose only population growth come from immigration.

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One of the hardest things is structuring an inclusive conversation to wrestle with these issues of race and class. The truth is, in the past even when we got it right, like creating the metropolitan park system, we did it in a very paternalistic, noblesse oblige kind of way. The decisions were made by elites. For better or worse, we now live in an era where the decisions aren't going to be accepted if they are only made by elites.

THE 'TOOLKIT' APPROACH

Charles Euchner: My last question has to do with the Cellucci and Swift administration's approach, under Robert Durand and others. It was a toolkit approach. The idea was for the state to provide localities with expertise and options, so that localities could do the right thing, not only for themselves, but for the region and for the Commonwealth.

Last night I had the pleasure of being down in Mattapan, a guest of the Mattapan Community Development Corporation. They wanted to bat around ideas about enhancing not only Mattapan Square, but also the whole Blue Hill Avenue corridor. What they've come up is what they call "vertical design." But it's the old idea that town centers should have density and a variety of people in them. And they're not looking for a master plan, they're not looking for money so much as expert assistance and the green light to go ahead with a much more dense form of development. Now what can be done to make that happen? What kinds of toolkits can the state provide to make happen right now?

Marc Draisen: If they weren't asking for money, then something's wrong. They always need to be asking for money and they should be, and they should be getting it. We should be able to have much more liberal use of tax income and financing in this state than we have. We have fixed the brownfield laws, in large part. We still do not have a state system for the assembly of land that and for giving the municipality adequate control over that disposition process - or at least giving one entity somewhere some control over that disposition process.

You can have all the tools in the world, and if you don't have the money to hire the contractor, then the tools won't be used. And I think that is one of the issues in communities

like Mattapan. A lot of the things that they want to do require funding. And we've largely pulled away from a lot of those activities. You know, we have a \$30-million brownfield fund; now after five or six years we're finally thinking about adding \$8 million more. There was a time in the state that we spent \$220 million a year just in bond revenue on the production of housing, and that fell to \$60 million; it's now up to \$101 million. And it does, at some point, come down to a question of resources. This is not an impoverished state. If we set priorities, we should put our money where our mouth is.

Jay Wickersham: There is an absolutely invaluable role for the sharing of information about better ways to do simple things. Every time we rebuild a local street, we should think about how wide the sidewalk is, and how tight or how broad the radius of the street corner is. These are the decisions that are going to have an enormous influence on whether or not a car's going to go down that street at 50 miles an hour, and that will determine whether or not you feel safe crossing the street, particularly if you're pushing a baby carriage or a walker. You need good information if you're going to make those very small, fine-grained decisions in a way that will reproduce, or preserve, the old urbanism that you're talking about.

Those decisions can and should be made at a local level. That's the intense localism that Stephanie was talking about. The Conservation Law Foundation published a wonderful book called *Community Rules* with precisely that goal in mind. We should be producing information that can be disseminated at a regional or a state level, so that citizens can make a fuss locally every time those small, incremental, quality-of-life decisions are made.

Charles Euchner: What a wonderful transition, Jay, to CitiStat. The City of Baltimore has developed a database system for tracking everything that goes on in municipal government, and you can get it mapped, you can get it up in pictures. I had a professor in college, Harry Howe Ransom, who studied the CIA. And he said, "Knowledge is power. Secret knowledge is secret power." And I would just add one thing to Professor Ransom's little slogan, which is that open information is democratic power. And I think what we're seeing in Baltimore is just how dramatically vast amounts of information that are gathered and formatted in a decent way and that are made available can start to transform a community.

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Valerie Burns: Knowledge is important. In my work on the Neponset River, we have seen a very important role for the regional parks commission. As cities and towns like Milton and Canton have opportunities that relate to open space preservation, they have turned to the MDC for help with both planning, acquiring, and managing it. What kind of capacity lies in the towns? And what kind of capacity could lie in the towns to really participate in a different way in that planning and acquisition of open space?

Marc Draisen: It varies from town to town. In the larger towns the capability is pretty good; in the smaller towns it tends there tends to be relatively little professional support. It is not clear to me whether the MDC services of this kind will be preserved under the new rubric. There are people in the room who maybe can answer that question.

Betsy Shure Gross: I think it's fair to say that the mission and ethics of the Metropolitan

Park System is intact. There may be a consolidation of the agencies, but the commitment to the resources of the Metropolitan Park System and the people they serve, and making sure that not only the resources that are currently owned, but the opportunities for increasing and enhancing that system, the plan is certainly to honor that commitment.

Marc Draisen: The MAPC also provides services to individual cities and towns regarding conservation planning, and in fact, would love to do so more. We review our government services work, we would like make sure we serve regional needs, and be perhaps a little bit less in the arena of providing services to individual cities and towns.

INFORMING THE DEBATE

Charles Euchner: Neil Pierce and Curtis Johnson are from the CitiStates Group, and they have been scouring this region for the past six months or more to do a major report on regional issues in Greater Boston.

Neil Pierce: Seems to me what we're hearing is that every issue in eastern Massachusetts is intensely regional. No matter how you cut it, there are major regional elements, and nothing really is going to be decided and effectively dealt with unless you look at regionalism. But we're also in this era of democratization. If you make top-down decisions and don't ask and confer with people, you're going to have either huge amounts of discord or even more likely just stalemate, and nothing can move forward - which is one of the frustrations that regionalism gets into. You can't avoid regionalism, but how do you reach those decisions?

How do you find middle ground between large governmental decision-making bodies that seem authoritarian and local folks with multiple opinions? You have to find ways for information to be more comprehensible to people: what their alternatives are, what the consequences of action and inaction are going to be. Unless they

know that and can be part of it, you're going to hit the stalemate again. You also have a state with more brainpower than anyone. We've done these in over 20 regions around the country, and we nowhere have run into the amount of sheer intellectual power that we do here, which is one thing that Massachusetts specializes in. How does one use that incredible bank of gray matter to create the conditions so that rational decisions can be made? Is there a way to tap it better than you're doing?

Steve Adams: It's interesting. Stephanie made the point earlier on about the courts - some of our biggest decisions were forced on us. We were forced to do some very interesting intellectual exercise by some outside powers in federal courts saying, "You shall do something smart." And it would be interesting to hear if there were some big, interesting decision that we made that wasn't forced on us by lawsuits.

Charles Euchner: Does it have to come to a crisis?

Stephanie Pollack: One of the ways we're going to have to reconcile the very genuine

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desire for democratic participation with the imperatives of regionalism is to bring more people into the decision-making practice. I would like to make the counterintuitive claim that you need lots and lots of people to achieve consensus, and that a lot of the processes that result in stalemate actually involved a very small number of extremely vocal people, without even bringing in the larger number of people in a given community or people of interest around an issue. Anthony Flint wrote a piece in the *Globe* about how a community had rejected transit-oriented development as a key-- and this was a community of 15,000 people, and the vote at the town meeting was like 86 to 61.

That doesn't tell me that the people of that community have rejected transit-oriented development. It tells me that not enough people of that community became part of the conversation, and so a very vocal minority of people in that community were able to use the zoning and planning system to block something they didn't want. So I would actually say the way that we can harness the democratic tendencies that we have to achieve consensus is we need to bring more people. In Boston, white homeowners overwhelmingly show up for meetings that are part of the zoning and planning process. You see far fewer renters, you see far fewer people of color. You see more people who have been in the city for a long time, fewer people in the city who have only been around for 10 or 15 years. And so I think we have to open things up before we're ever going to get to consensus.

Marc Draisen: I want to draw attention to the regional vision and growth strategy under way at MAPC now - which is an attempt to harness a lot of our knowledge in the region - not only those folks who tend to be known internationally for being intellectually powerful, but also to get as many different voices at the table. If we can't move the legislature and if we can't move other power centers to deal with regional issues, then we will convene a very large group of other people who will try and build a constituency behind these ideas, and move those power centers afterwards.

We want to avoid having to wait for a crisis or a court order to make a decision. But we are unlikely to make that decision unless hundreds, and in fact, thousands of people are calling for it. And I hope that many of those people who are involved will not be the typical people who are involved in decision-making, I hope those people will also be at the table, but other voices need to be at that table too.

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THE NEED FOR LONG-TERM PLANNING

Curtis Johnson: Listening to your discussions here is a little reminiscent of being in Atlanta in the late 1990s. I remember being at a Smart Growth Conference with everybody from Ted Turner to the Builder's Association to the Georgia Conservators. And I remember a particular guest speaker rose to the platform. He was a builder from Oregon, very experienced in their wars over growth and development. And he waited until the audience was quiet and then he

just simply said, “You’re doomed,” and sat down.

In the absence of a court order or some other kind of crisis, can any of you imagine what business people would call in this situation a break-out strategy? Is there one thing you could pull the trigger on that if you could do that, other things would begin to tumble into place and get easier to do?

David Dixon: Those of you who are as old as I am can remember something called the Boston Transportation Planning Review, which was an effort under duress to create a regional transportation strategy. We finished it in the early 1970s and we have followed it for 30 years, and it’s served us well. And I think that clearly, around the mismatch of funding and the inability even to set any priorities, we have this crisis around transportation – that is an issue we can come around. It naturally lends itself to regional solutions, and it naturally relates to land use and housing and education and the environment and all the issues that we’ve talked about.

The single most important actor, I believe, if we are to pursue a breakout strategy around these issues, is the business community. Enough of the actors in the business community have to decide this is an issue they’d be interested in working on. And frankly, many of the people in this room have the responsibility to get them interested. We shouldn’t presume that they simply will come to it naturally in the course of the day’s work. Then that could move things substantially, in my opinion. And I think many of these arguments that we’re making are powerful arguments to a person with a business interest in mind.

Michael Turner: Michael Turner, Massachusetts Climate Action Network. We all share the air and the energy system, and we’re facing climate change on a regional basis, which will affect our environment greatly. And I’m wondering about how regional approaches can supplement the synergies, and what synergies there are that will work to address this problem over the next 25 years.

Stephanie Pollack: Well, we need to do a regional mapping strategy and identify this place called Somewhere Else, which is where we’re going to site all of the region’s noxious activities. It’s very similar to housing and everything else. There’s this place called Somewhere Else. Affordable housing will be there; there will be clean, renewable power there; there will be great public transit there.

Jennifer Hill: Jennifer Hill from Somerville. I’d nominate Somerville as that location. None of the towns north of the Charles River have been mentioned today at all, and I would just like to point that out.

Erin Flynn: My name’s Erin Flynn with an organization called Future Works. We’re organizing a national network of business civic organizations that are organizing business leadership in metropolitan regions around the country on the regional sustainable development agenda. We’re finding that business civic organizations that represent business interests can be a very key institution in organizing business leadership around this agenda, and that it’s actually sort of unlikely that individual business leaders will engage in this agenda themselves. But working through these institutions there’s the possibility of a collective employer voice that does actually represent the collective employer interest in these issues.

CARROTS AND STICKS

Barry Bluestone: Barry Bluestone, Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University. You've touched on it, but I'd like to hear more explicitly from any one of you: Carrots versus sticks to get local communities working in a regional process around housing, around transportation, around the environment. What's proper balance? How should we be doing this? Does the legislature have a role to play in rethinking the idea of how much carrot, how much stick?

Marc Draisen: Well, I think the legislature in the last ten years has had so much money that it was just, you know, all carrots. They spread a lot of money around. I'm not sure they often used it in an incentive-oriented way. But we're sort of at a point where we disdain sticks entirely; it's just not in the vocabulary of politics these days. But I firmly believe you need about 50/50 split. You know, people will respond to good things, but you will in an average year not possibly be able to afford buying everybody off. It's not sustainable. So you also have to enact some discipline.

Steve Adams: If you can have tools that can sort of go either way, depending on the choice of the individual - and housing comes to mind, because you and I have been talking about it so long. But individual property tax payers, you could create a system where if the community is engaging in exclusive behavior, that could cost them more money. And if they decide that they're going to be more inclusive, it could cost them less money in terms of state aid or some way you allocate your formula. So the individual can decide if they're going to take the pain and pay the price or, you know, go for the carrot and sort of broaden the social good.

Stephanie Pollack: I would just add I think we're at a point where either piling more carrots or more sticks on top of the mess we already have may be counterproductive, and what we actually need to do is kind of clear away some underbrush. Because the system really does work at cross-purposes, and so I'm not sure that adding one more carrot or stick to the pile is actually going to change the equation enough to change behavior. We actually probably have to change some of the existing carrots and sticks we have, and that may be a more productive way of actually effecting systems change than piling new stuff on.

James Stockard: Jim Stockard, from the Loeb Fellowship Program at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. I live in Cambridge, and my city councilors and my state representatives and my senators all ask me to think as a Cambridge citizen. Maybe sometimes the Governor asks me to think of myself as a Massachusetts citizen. No one ever gets me to think about my role as a citizen of the metropolitan area of Boston. I don't have to vote for anybody because they tell me they have a better way to do this than somebody else has got a way to do this. Portland has an elected regional government with some power and some success; Louisville has just started it. I shudder to ask this question in view of our

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county government history: Do we need some kind of electoral process at the regional level so that someone will talk to us as citizens about what we should do as part of a region?

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All would agree that New England is a great place to live and work because of the diversity and the character and scale of our environments, of our little towns and our neighborhoods. Can any of you come up with a circumstance in which a public agency has actually fomented that kind of scale?
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Marc Draisen: One of the things I hope we will have a conversation about in the course of the Regional Vision and Growth Strategy is the question of regional governance. You know, we have regional authorities, we have regional planning agencies, we have a variety of things like that, but God forbid we should actually let people vote on a regional basis. I hope we'll have that conversation. We have no consensus either within my organization or statewide on that issue now. But I would remind people the day before they had a regional government in Oregon, they didn't have a regional government in Oregon. And my expectation and my guess is that a lot of people were saying it could never happen. We got a lot of opportunities to have regional governance. Lots of communities in Massachusetts take advantage of current laws to band together for as simple as mutual-aid agreements, whether it's regional school districts that we have one or two of around Massachusetts, or it's those collaboratives I talked about. And there's a lot of ways around specific issues, and I think that's part of the challenge of this regionalism discussion, is that it's great to talk at this very

high level, but when you get down to specifics, there are vehicles for towns to elect to work together to address some of this stuff.

CAN THE URBAN VILLAGE BE PLANNED?

Buzz Constable: The business community has been involved. It took about 10 years to get them actively engaged in the education debate. It's taken them about four or five years to be actively engaged in the affordable housing debate. We're sort of on the cusp on getting them involved in the transportation debate. To engage business and other groups on the question of regional sprawl and smart growth, I think we need a sharper description. A business leader, even a chamber of commerce or a group of business leaders, doesn't want to take on smart growth. They want to take on a specific problem. We need to make that problem clear.

The bigger question for me is: I think we all would agree that New England is a great place to live and work and has attracted all this gray matter because of the neighborhood nature of what we have, the diversity and the character and scale of our environments, of our little towns and our neighborhoods and cities. Can any of you come up with a circumstance in which a state or even a large regional agency has actually fomented that kind of scale? I mean, I'm a firm believer in home rule with both assistance to have home rule work well and the carrots and sticks.

Charles Euchner: So is there anything state or regional or any other body can do to foster the kind of organic ecological communities that we all love so much?

David Dixon: And the quick answer is Portland and Seattle.

We have wonderful commercial centers, squares and neighborhood centers because we grew up in an urban world that supported those – without other choices like “big box” retailing and Internet sales. We live in a different world now. It is at a regional level or a statewide level that we’re going to be able to protect the ability to have these neighborhoods and revive the neighborhood commercial districts.

Without investments at a regional level and things like public transportation, without a statewide incentive to look at local zoning to create the possibility to develop transit-oriented development, we’re not going to get the kind of wonderful places that we created in the past. In fact, the present system right now is much more geared towards creating the kind of anonymous suburban developments, and that’s very much a locally guided phenomenon.

Stephanie Pollack: We have to be careful about this romanticized vision of the places. The wonderful neighborhood that I live in in Newton is totally non-conforming to modern zoning standards and could not be recreated in the City of Newton, let alone anywhere else in Massachusetts right now. I’m not even sure we have a model anymore where local government is continuing to nurture and create new places like that. We’ve really got a very dysfunctional system.

George Thrush: I’m George Thrush from the Department of Architecture at Northeastern. Almost our entire region is non-conforming to existing zoning, and therefore, every project that gets proposed requires this Herculean communication that was described earlier, and it seems too high a hurdle to expect us to clear on every site. And so it seems to me even before we get to a regional strategy, even just our cities and towns individually can start to try to address what their actual vision for realistic build-out in their areas is so that you don’t have to go to war every time a development is proposed?

The other point I’d like to make is that I’m a little concerned about these references to the MDC, because for me it has both very positive and very negative connotations. The very positive one, obviously, is the fabulous regional network of open space that we have. The negative one for me is a persistent correlation between the public good and green things. The fact is we are a growing region. If we want the kind of density that people are advocating here, my hope is that we can achieve some kind of regional vision that isn’t grounded only in the idea that nature is preferable to human occupation.

Valerie Burns: The metropolitan parks system is as much about public health as it is about the environmental character of our region or recreational opportunities or even

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property values. So I think it's very important to understand that something like a metropolitan parks system really crosses many sectors, and adds value to a quality of life in a way that goes well beyond sort of plants versus people.

Speaking of political dialogue, while it appears that we don't have a formal way of conversation and decision making on a regional basis, there's a growing grassroots effort to involve citizens in discussing regional issues. Watershed associations very quickly turn to issues that are not about fish or plants, but very basic economic issues and public health issues in cities and towns.

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The metropolitan parks system is as much about public health as it is about the environmental character of our region or recreational opportunities or even property values. A metropolitan parks system really crosses many sectors.
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Susanne Rasmussen: Suzanne Rasmussen, city of Cambridge. Several of you have noted that we need more people involved. And it's my experience from working in Cambridge for close to a decade now that it doesn't matter how much we advertise our processes and how brilliant our meetings are. It doesn't bring those other people to the meetings. So I would issue a challenge to all of you to help me and many others in this room figure out how we should go about a public process that would bring around different kinds of participation.

MATERIAL INTERESTS AND REGIONALISM

Valerie Burns: If we talk about pocketbooks, we're going to talk about how it's going to affect or cost or benefit individuals, people will come. And almost everything that we've talked about ultimately comes back to pocketbook in one way or another, and that absolutely crosses cultural groups and economic groups. I think that if you want to talk about money, people will come. And we've got to put a lot of this in financial terms, and that's what everyone understands.

Steve Adams: A point someone made earlier was people need to understand the consequences of choices they're making. And we all very seldom get into these conversations about the consequences or the costs. We talk about the benefits in other ways, but we never talk about the real cost and benefits. If we talked more about the dollars, I agree, you'd keep people at the table.

Stephanie Pollack: We have to turn the whole process on its head. We need to go to where people are. One of the wonderful things that New England has in addition to these great little neighborhoods is we actually do have an unbelievably rich infrastructure of small local civic organizations. On any night in Boston, Cambridge, how many meetings are going on? So if you're one more meeting on top of the existing 27 to choose from, then you're one more meeting. But if you see all of those civic meetings that are already taking place as the launch pad from where these conversations can be added to the agenda, you can reach people more efficiently.

Marc Draisen: This is a little bit of an exaggeration, but I'm going to say it nonetheless: I

think that the weeknight meeting that start at 7 or 7:30 is an exclusionary institution. It exists to allow certain people to come out and participate and to prevent other people from coming out and participating. We've got to figure out other ways to go to people. We do have to knock on doors, we do have to go to dumps in the towns, we do have to go to PTA meetings, we do have to figure out more creative ways to use the Internet and to use surveys and to use phones and to do a variety of other things that will get opinions into the loop. If you are looking to bring people into the process who are, you know, single heads of households with three kids, you're not going to do it at 7:30 at night on Wednesday, no matter how many times you try, no matter how sincerely you'd like to do it. It doesn't work.

Jay Wickersham: We have done a good job at identifying problems that go beyond the local solution. But we haven't done as good a job with the challenge that you've posed us: how do you make decisions at a regional level? All of us have tended to jump very quickly to, "Oh, the state needs to do this," or "We need to go to the legislature." Valerie talked about the ad hoc regionalism of different communities getting together. Stephanie talked about intense localism. Marc talked about the role of MAPC. We've hit upon the challenge of regionalism in various ways, but we haven't come up with very many solutions.

Since we've got a wealth of different ways in which we already make decisions, maybe the greatest challenge is to take those governance structures that we've already got and to figure out ways in which we can get those processes to be more inclusive. We could also make sure that the decision-makers have good information on the scope of our regional problems: what is the scope of the regional challenge that is in front of the MDC, or that is posed by this transportation investment or that question about school funding? We're just at the beginning, it seems to me, of wrestling with that question: How do we do a better job of using the decision-making processes that we already have?