



DRAFT

Vision for Sustainable Greater Boston 2050

Land Use

In the year 2050 the Boston metropolitan region has become a leading cultural and economic capital, famous for its environmental leadership. The 2004 analysis by renown journalists Neal Pearce and Curtis Johnson declaring that the Boston region is “one of the best qualified world regions—in brain power, university departments, laboratories, capital—to elevate a renewable, green, future from idealistic hope to on-the-ground reality” has largely been realized. Starting with a range of activities led by architects, planners, environmentalists, and community developers around the turn of the century, mixed-use and transit-oriented development and green building practices have since been institutionalized throughout the region.

Zoning laws have been updated to encourage appropriate density levels and mixed-use, transit-oriented development, as well as smaller housing units. Lifestyle preferences have shifted towards reduced material consumption and as a result, residents prefer smaller, denser housing arrangements. In addition, residential building permit fees are now scaled so that residents with high per capita floor space pay significantly more than those with smaller units, with the excess revenue earmarked to support green affordable housing. This scaling system, combined with increasing recognition of the ecological costs of large houses and preferences for smaller homes, has resulted in a reversal of the trend towards larger housing units experienced during the last half of the 20th century. In 2050, 65% of all housing is multi-family and almost no new construction is for single family homes. Co-housing and other cooperative living developments/buildings are incentivized through streamlined permitting, infrastructure assistance, and no- or low-interest revolving construction loan funds. High efficiency appliances have become standard for new homes and buildings, and have replaced the vast majority of the less efficient older stock. New non-residential buildings and those with major renovations are required to include facilities for bicycle parking, including showers and lockers. Such buildings also routinely give parking preferences to multi-occupant and/or alternative-fuel vehicles.

The vast majority of citizens are living and working near transportation hubs. Brownfields, vacant lots and many parking lots in the Boston region’s inner core and regional centers have been redeveloped with mixed-use infill projects; development restrictions and/or fees are placed on undeveloped areas within the region; and mixed-use zoning is adopted throughout the region to encourage a mix of residences, offices and commercial activities within walkable/bikable distances from each other and from transit stations.

Open space has been maintained throughout the region and people enjoy a mix of neighborhood parks, recreational space and pedestrian malls. Moreover, the links between development in the inner core and regional centers and preservation of open space in the outer suburban regions has

been widely recognized, and strong incentives are now in place to motivate the construction and renovation of buildings in already developed areas, especially along transit lines, and discourage greenfield development.

The Boston area is an attractive region for its citizens and for visitors as it combines urban features such as shops, cultural attractions, restaurants, schools, and museums, with green features including parks, rivers, and the coast. Moreover, land use and transportation policies have created a region without the nuisance, disruption, and impacts of heavy reliance on private vehicles and large parking lots. Because of its public transportation infrastructure and mix of incentives, the Boston area offers a wide variety of services with high accessibility within short distances.

Note: We greatly appreciate all comments and feedback you have regarding this document. If you would like to suggest changes directly in the document, please email afleder@tellus.org and we will email you a copy of the document in Microsoft Word format.