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FOSTERING LAND USE DIALOGUE: COMMUNITY PRESERVATION AS A GROWTH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN MASSACHUSETTS

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The Community Preservation Initiative (CPI) was an innovative attempt by the Massachusetts state government to stimulate discussion about land use and growth management at the local level. Based on land use and zoning information, CPI relied on geographic information systems (GIS) to model a potential development scenario for each of the 351 municipalities in the state. The process for generating GIS data and maps purposefully involved officials at local, regional, and state levels. This paper examines the success of the CPI process in evolving land use dialogue within and between communities, and amongst planners at all three levels of government. Town planners in two Massachusetts metropolitan regions, Boston and Springfield, were interviewed about CPI's impact on local land use discussions. This research was supplemented by interviews with other regional planners and CPI staff. The results suggest that while CPI may eventually lead to changes in local land use, in the short term few changes have occurred to the dialogue on growth management in the state. The results of this investigation should aid state and regional decision-makers in determining what future policies and approaches are needed to promote smart growth and regional planning in Massachusetts and other states.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I once asked a Boston regional planner, if you played a game with metropolitan residents where they had to position pieces that represent Boston's projected population growth onto a regional map, would they propose densifying existing suburbs or spreading growth into the rural hinterland? He responded: "they would throw the pieces out the window!"

Studies and experience indicate that suburban residents have an aversion to many of the effects of growth, such as dense development, commercial land mixing with residential areas, the loss of open space, and traffic congestion. One solution that works within a municipality – preserving open space and maintaining low-density residential development – is expensive. It also exacerbates the problems of growth by pushing it further from urban centers, leading to larger overall problems for society. Even more infrastructure needs to be built, more farmland is developed into housing, and people have to travel longer distances. Given that suburban residents do not want development next to them, but pushing growth outward causes larger problems, where do they think growth should go?

The attitudes of suburban Massachusetts residents generally follow the "anywhere but here" philosophy laid out above. This approach is amplified by the fragmentation of that state into 351 distinct municipalities, many with strong local identities that project a semi-rural New England town ideal, and by the rapid population growth of metropolitan Boston over the past twenty years. The "anywhere but here" philosophy has resulted in large-scale, low-density development that has increased commute times, converted treasured landscapes into housing and roads, and paradoxically pushed the cost of living even higher. In response, from 2000 to 2003 the government of Massachusetts embarked on the Community Preservation Initiative (CPI) with customized public presentations in all 351 municipalities of the state that showed local officials

and residents the possible impact of future development on their community. The CPI projections were based on the town's current zoning and showed the potential demographic, resource, and financial impacts of a maximum development scenario. The resulting maps and data – which showed which land could be developed, how it is zoned, the maximum amount of building that could occur there, and the resulting increase in population – were termed “buildouts.”

To explore the potential for smart growth in Massachusetts, this paper examines CPI's ability to influence local dialogue – at least as viewed by municipal and regional land use planners – around the implementation of local growth management policies, regional land use coordination, and the role of the state in local land use planning. The first section of this paper argues that largely uncontrolled growth pressures, such as those faced in Massachusetts, lead to calls for public policies that address the rate and form of development and that success in doing so requires regional coordination. After reviewing the CPI program's goals and process, this investigation's methodology and research question are explained. The findings of the research are then revealed and, based upon these results, the last section recommends policy actions both within Massachusetts and for state policy-makers throughout the country.

II. LINKING GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND REGIONAL PLANNING

Effective management of metropolitan growth requires a broadly-defined approach like “community preservation” that can spur debate about the tradeoffs between lifestyle, equity, and built forms at both the local and regional level. In many ways, regional planning and growth management are complementary. The typical American approach to land development shifts public investment from existing areas of settlement toward constructing new infrastructure at the

urban fringe. This sprawling pattern of growth produces the low-density, single-family suburbs that many Americans desire (Ewing 1997, Talen 2001). However, this population also wants a low-traffic, low-cost lifestyle that runs at odds with this type of development, which in the aggregate inspires more and more housing that requires long car drives and expensive investment in new large-scale infrastructure. Myron Orfield and other regional planning scholars have described how this metropolitan diffusion leads to inter-municipal competition, declining suburbs, and the destruction of open space and commonly enjoyed landscapes.

These problems are persistent in Massachusetts, where fundamental changes to the rural appearance of the suburban fringe have been occurring for at least thirty years. Between 1971 and 1985 alone, metropolitan Boston lost nine percent of its agricultural land and seven percent of its forested land to new development (MAPC 1989). To maximize property tax revenues and slow down the rate of growth, some suburban Boston communities changed their zoning in the 1990s to encourage commercial development and large single-family homes instead of smaller housing units (Buote 2003). This practice of downzoning toward large lot development has increased the price of land by making fewer land parcels available, leading developers to build expensive mansion-like homes in order to turn a profit on such large pieces of property. A recent study by the Massachusetts Audubon Society found that across the state since 1970, the average living space in single-family homes grew 44 percent and the average lot size grew 47 percent (Viser 2003). Meanwhile, because of a state-wide zoning provision known as “approval-not-required” that allows residential building on any lot with road frontage, subdivision development has spread housing along the length of rural roads, often in a cul-de-sac style. This pattern dilutes the community life of village centers and heightens the visibility of new residential development in an otherwise non-urban area. Together, these policies are creating ever-

widening belts of low-density development around Massachusetts cities, which have a short supply of reasonably-priced housing, and are leading to high commute times for residents.

In response to decentralization issues, over the past 20 years some academics have proposed a new urban design paradigm that promotes compact and land-efficient development; greater equity between different racial and socioeconomic groups; a finer mix of land uses and residents; financial and environmental sustainability; and a coherent and cohesive use of space that strengthens the public realm (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987, Kelbaugh 1997). This concept has become popularly known as “smart growth,” a catch-all phrase sometimes used interchangeably with “sustainable development.” Smart growth encourages changes in current development patterns. Though often touted for saving public money by requiring more efficient infrastructure investment, its true focus is on altering the suburban development monoculture in order to support different lifestyle options and avoid market failures that destroy open space and historic communities. Recognized as a smart growth program by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), CPI concurrently supports open space protection, affordable housing provision, and historic preservation, thereby challenging the status quo pattern of development by pushing for long-run community-wide gains over short-term individual profits.

Smart growth efforts “inevitably raise questions of regional planning, since in the absence of regional coordination, initiatives by local jurisdictions could easily be undercut by neighboring communities” (Wheeler 2002, 269). Case studies have indeed suggested that a high degree of municipal fragmentation leads to the avoidance of regional issues and subsequent inter-town economic conflict (Savitch and Vogel 1996). Additionally, the sources of many land use issues span municipal borders. One community acting alone cannot resolve clean air concerns or rush-hour traffic jams, and economic growth in a metropolitan region may lead to

high housing costs in seemingly secluded nearby towns. In the 1990s, American elected officials and the general public developed a renewed interest in regional planning, driven by the shift of cities from a monocentric model – oriented on a single business district in downtown – to a polycentric model, which places destinations all around the metropolitan region (MacBurnie 1995). The catalysts for this “new regionalism” are lifestyle concerns such as sprawl, traffic, city-suburban inequities, environmental degradation, and the blandness of modern built form (Wheeler 2002). While these themes can behave at odds with one another, they also serve to bring in new political support for regional planning (Henig 2002).

Nonetheless, resistance to regional land use coordination may occur for a variety of political, social, and economic reasons spanning both rational and emotional responses. Localities respond to calls for regionalism with justifications for home rule powers, invoking the differences in demographics and culture across the state and asserting that local governments are more responsive and perceptive of local needs (Alexander 2000). They fear that regional planning will restrain their freedom of choice and action (Porter 1992). The key power in local control is zoning because it affects land use, which in turn shapes tax revenue, public services, community character, and local schools (Danielson 1976). Regionalists assert that many communities have abused this power by unfairly excluding racial minorities and making self-centered decisions that feed sprawl and housing prices. Logically and politically, localities do face little incentive to take proactive steps that address regional problems. One issue that can serve as an example is affordable housing, which operates as a regional benefit by alleviating homelessness and providing shelter for the economy’s entry-level service workers, but which is considered undesirable at a local level. As a result, if one town provides affordable housing it

benefits low-income families throughout the entire area and no other community is compelled to help share the social and financial burden (Jackson 2000).

In Massachusetts, opposition to regional cooperation is often extreme. Home rule powers and long-established parochial town cultures have led local residents to view the people in neighboring towns as being “different than us” even if they are only four miles away (Barron et al. 2004). These communities jealously protect their powers and are very reluctant to cooperate with one another because collaboration is viewed as disempowering and a loss of control. This gets to the point that regional coordination becomes politically difficult if one town benefits more than others, even if they all gain from the arrangement (Barron et al. 2004). Across the country, there is a “...very real possibility that there may be a trade-off between the values associated with equity (in particular, the reduction of unequal opportunity) and values that have undergirded the traditional American system of local government, such as efficiency, choice, and local autonomy.” Certainly such a trade-off is perceived by many of the opponents of various proposals for metropolitan reform (Committee 1999, 105). As a consequence, a crucial component of regional planning is taking away at least some – and maybe all – local land use power from municipalities. Policymakers have to make a decision between supporting local control and promoting the benefits of regional planning - greater equity, economic benefits, and improved livability. In Massachusetts, CPI attempted to succeed on both fronts by encouraging dialogue and decision-making among local residents and officials that would accept the need for regional planning in order to preserve key elements of their own community and lifestyle.

III. THE CPI APPROACH

CPI was a truly original program. No other state agency has ever produced such a comprehensive product for all the communities in Massachusetts. Its innovations included state officials visiting every municipality and encouraging local-level support for changes in land use policy and practice. CPI also introduced an integrated process whereby state, regional, and local officials worked together to gather, analyze, and present the buildout results. For these efforts, CPI received the 2002 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement from the EPA.

CPI was run by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) and the state mapping agency, MassGIS, in partnership with all of the regional planning agencies in Massachusetts and with participation from officials in every city and town. EOEA saw CPI as an opportunity to quantify and illustrate the degree to which Massachusetts is zoned for urban sprawl. Furthermore, the architect and main proponent of CPI, Secretary of Environmental Affairs Bob Durand, believed GIS was an important and powerful tool that should be made available to all communities. Therefore, the core of the public CPI presentations was the buildout maps that could be recreated and adjusted by local planning officials using publicly available GIS data.

One of CPI's initial goals was to develop political support for legislation known as the Community Preservation Act (CPA), which would allow individual communities that passed the legislation to add a surcharge on local property taxes with matching funds coming from the state. The revenues would be designated for open space preservation, affordable housing, or historic preservation. Enhancing these three areas became collectively termed "community preservation" by the state government. Secretary Durand felt that by showing communities the development allowed in their town and asking if they like how they are growing, then a discussion of land use possibilities would begin. He thought most places would be unhappy with the status quo and

would therefore advocate local passage of the CPA as a way to preserve open space. The state's broader goal for CPI, however, was not as simple as enabling funding for a scattered set of community preservation projects. Individual communities can only control those growth pressures that originate within their borders. To truly support community preservation on a statewide level, regional issues like business development, housing prices, and transportation have to be addressed through cross-border cooperation. Consequently, CPI hoped to inspire residents to think of the long-term land use picture for their own town and adjacent communities. The aspiration was for municipalities to initiate open space preservation and land use cooperation across municipal borders and throughout their region.

Many states on the frontlines of smart growth policy behave like regional planners, working to coordinate land use across jurisdictions in order to produce public and private development that works for the state as a whole without unduly benefiting one location or population at the expense of others. This approach involves legal changes that restrict local control over land use or give an ultimate veto to the state. In contrast, Massachusetts avoided using legal means and instead attempted to produce a public atmosphere that supported smart growth and, by extension, regional planning. The state's strategy was twofold: to educate the public on policy costs and options so that growth issues would become more understandable, and to engage people at the local level to make the lessons of CPI less abstract and more personalized.

CPI used regional planning agencies (RPAs) to collect zoning and land use information on each municipality in the state, involving local planning offices if possible. Although the buildout maps could have been created with minimal town involvement, CPI attempted to engage local officials in the mapping and analysis process because they wanted to get their

corroboration on the accuracy of the buildout data. For each town, this data was used to create maps showing absolute development constraints, developable land and partial constraints, a composite of development opportunities, aerial photographs of land plots, and existing zoning. These graphics were accompanied by a statistical buildout analysis, for which undeveloped and underdeveloped land was identified and a “realistic” amount of new development for those sites – in other words a normal pattern for that size and type of property – was projected based on the current applicable zoning. This calculation was done on an “infinity” basis that demonstrated the town’s ultimate possible buildout, which obviated the need for determining the chronology of development and also served as something of a scare tactic to get the audience’s attention.

Subsequently, CPI and the appropriate RPA made a joint public presentation to each municipality in the state, inviting elected officials, local leaders, representatives from key state agencies, and residents. The presenters explained the buildout maps and analyses, provided information on the Community Preservation Act, introduced a financial incentive toward creating a local comprehensive plan, and promised future technical support through the EOE’s Community Preservation Institute. To ensure easy access to the buildout information, CPI made all of the buildout data available for download from their website.¹ The hope was that local officials familiar with GIS could use the data to create their own buildout analysis and develop their own growth scenarios.

IV. CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

To learn about the effects of CPI on local land use dialogue, twenty-four interviews were held with town and regional planners across Massachusetts. I conducted a before-and-after (pre-post) test, inquiring about planning conditions prior to and after the CPI process, to determine

¹ <http://commpres.env.state.ma.us>

whether and when local and regional attitudes changed regarding the role of the state in growth management, interest in regional planning, and the credibility of buildout maps as a long-range land use planning tool. The objective was to evoke a clear picture of the governmental interactions and reactions during and after the CPI process.

This test was carried out through two case studies, each covering a different Massachusetts metropolitan area. The Boston region was immediately chosen because its regional planning area (the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, or MAPC) includes almost one-third of the towns in the state, contains the state's capitol and largest city, and has been experiencing tremendous growth for much of the past decade, especially in the suburban fringes near Interstate-495. In comparison, Springfield (and its region, covered by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, or PVPC) is also completely surrounded by residential and commercially-developed suburbs. Both areas are experiencing the bulk of their growth at the suburban fringe, yet Springfield is a fairly distinct entity. It is about one-fifth the size of metro Boston (600,000 versus three million people) and, although just a two hour drive apart, residents of metro Springfield are drawn to nearby Hartford, Connecticut, for shopping, cultural events, and even jobs.

For each case, interviews were held with the appropriate regional planning agency and with planning staff in targeted municipalities. Initially, the planning officials of 33 towns around Boston and 12 towns around Springfield were sought for interviews, all in communities at the suburban fringe which, in contrast to urban centers and fully developed suburbs, will probably experience greater development in the next 10 to 20 years and a larger shift from their current, semi-rural way of life. Interviews were also held with current and former state officials that helped create and implement CPI.

V. RESEARCH: QUESTION AND RESULTS

Based on my interviews, state officials believe that CPI has created several important benefits for both the state and the individual towns including: passage of the Community Preservation Act, an enhanced constituency on land use and other regional planning issues, better informed communities, and a greater number and broader range of people involved in the public planning process. These benefits may all be true – this paper does not dispute any of them nor does it determine CPI’s effectiveness at predicting land use or development patterns. Rather, it investigates whether CPI accomplished its aim of fostering land use dialogue both within communities and between planners at the state, regional, and local level.

As discussed above, many of the problems caused by unmanaged growth pressures can be mitigated with “smart growth” policies, an approach that requires a paradigm shift in both local attitudes and public policies toward accepting long-term goals, adjustments in lifestyle, and regional cooperation. Responding to the fundamental and accelerating transformation of the Massachusetts landscape explained briefly in Section II, the “community preservation” concept advocated by the state is an attempt to create bottom-up support for smart growth policies. CPI was particularly important because the state of Massachusetts does not have a permanent land use planning office or any effective regional governments – its interests in growth management and regional development issues exist at the discretion of the current governor – while, as a home rule state, municipalities have a large degree of control over local land use. In addition, policy experience in recent decades suggests that state governments that wish to encourage smart growth need to establish grassroots support for land use reform. Establishing this low-level but enduring interest in effective growth management is necessary to accomplish longer-term policy

goals. By providing somewhat value-neutral information about local development possibilities and ensuring local and regional participation in the process, CPI should have at least sparked public discussion about growth management within communities, across municipal borders, and upwards to encompass regional and state officials.

My hypothesis is that the CPI program influenced local dialogue around the implementation of local growth management policies, regional land use coordination, and the role of the state in local land use planning. In other words, I claim that CPI should have inspired better public discussion and decisions about growth pressures and enhanced key governmental relationships. To test the hypothesis, interviews were conducted with state and regional officials and with municipal planners in suburban fringe communities. These areas were targeted because, as explained earlier, they should possess the strongest interest in land use policy reform. Still, these research results cannot be generalized to all types of communities.

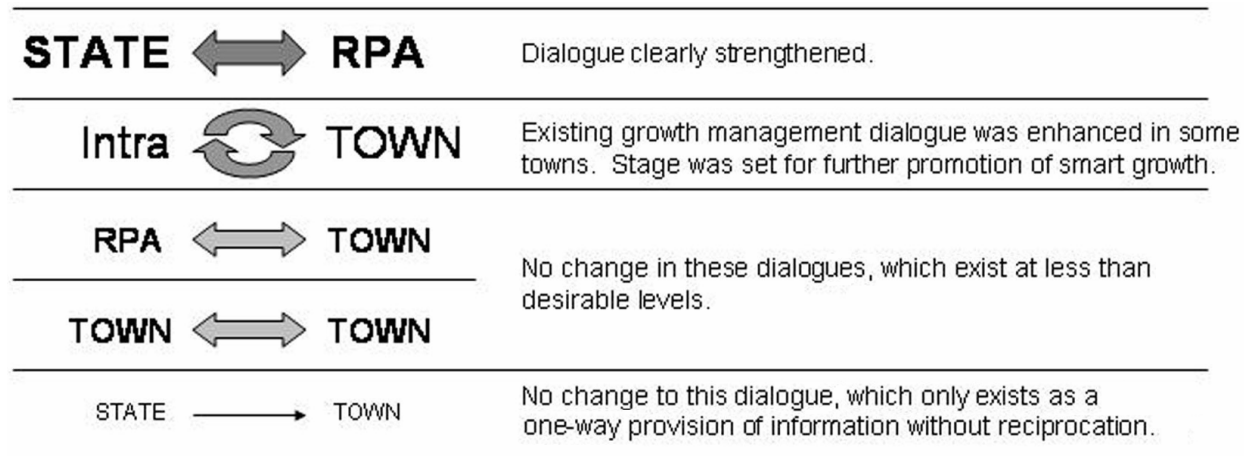
Support for the hypothesis could come through qualitative indications of an altered before-and-after working relationship or attitude between town, regional, and state land use officials. It could also come from direct local actions – such as changes in zoning or local funding priorities or renewed involvement in regional initiatives – that would indicate a post-CPI discussion that resulted in a new land use policy.

The research found that, at least in fast-growing suburban fringe communities, CPI had little effect on changing local attitudes or policies about land use. Specifically, CPI did not result in more dialogue amongst towns or between local and regional planners. Nor did it improve relations between the state government and town planners, who were also largely disinterested in the land use and development data provided by CPI. One reason may be that the fringe communities appear to have been well aware of growth issues already. Another reason is that

the CPI process did not draw in local officials and give them a sense of ownership in the resulting maps and data analyses; it still felt like a top-down process imposed by the state. Meanwhile, respondents suggested that local residents in exurban towns are hampered by their own ambiguous feelings about development. Rather than using first-hand knowledge about growth pressures to advocate for effective long-term solutions, they have generally retreated into contradictory positions that do not resolve problems associated with growth.

VI. FINDINGS

Massachusetts state officials expected that public education on land use and development would lead citizens and towns away from a development pattern focused on short-term gains and toward smart growth. The objective was that CPI would initiate zoning reforms as well as local debates over how to handle increasing housing costs, loss of local character, and traffic congestion. The ultimate plan was for an ongoing dialogue to begin between towns and regional planning agencies, and a sense of partnership to develop between towns, RPAs, and the state. To promote these aims, CPI relied on a vertically integrated process to induce state, regional, and local planners to work together and participate as a team. The research findings, summarized in Figure 1, show that, barring some exceptions, these efforts have thus far been largely unsuccessful.

FIGURE 1: Effect of CPI on Land Use Dialogues

A. CPI did not spur smart growth actions in suburban fringe communities

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) was approved in many of the municipalities interviewed, but the respondents generally attribute its passage to their own efforts rather than to CPI (although we are limited in our ability to determine the extent to which the local officials may have exaggerated their own roles). Beyond that, there have been almost no new actions to enact smart growth policies at the local level. At least in the towns studied, many residents were already aware of the growth in their communities due to local planning initiatives or simple observation, making the CPI buildouts less revelatory than expected. Around Boston, the current growth management dialogues were largely in place prior to CPI, and they appear to have been altered little by the initiative. This lack of progress appears to be frustrating to the local planners. One respondent was at a loss to explain the absence of growth trade-off discussions, and another fretted that her town had squandered a unique opportunity. In fact, even major problems caused by growth are not spurring dialogue. One fast-growing town has had to impose a temporary moratorium on new water main connections because their water system is at capacity. Instead of inspiring a discussion about the impacts of growth, this town's planner felt

that, “until the water and sewer issue is resolved, there is no point in discussing smart growth in the town.” One official did note that residents in her town are now generally more willing to accept cluster developments, trading off density for open space, partially attributing this change to the attention being given to smart growth by the state. Around Springfield, CPI appeared to expand existing growth discussions in more exurban areas but did not spur any particular actions, due in part to the lack of consensus on the problems and the solutions of growth among the local electorate.

B. Fringe residents possess conflicting feelings about growth

When combined with an ongoing public process – like master planning – CPI enhanced in-town dialogue, but this has occurred in the greater Springfield area and not in metropolitan Boston. The dialogue on growth that contains fundamental schisms based upon length of local residence and homeowners versus homebuyers. For example, most homeowners want new development to be concentrated in the center of town in order to preserve open space, while those looking to buy a new home simply want what the owners already have: a single family house in a residential subdivision. These conflicting desires can make a community’s public position on growth appear to be ambiguous. As one local planner described the situation,

At the time of CPI, the local view on growth was, and remains, contradictory. People wanted smart growth, a diverse economy and housing, and preservation of open farmland. They want those results, but when asked to have the consequences next door, they have a powerful NIMBY² response... They want a paradox...they want the land near them to remain (or become) pastoral, yet want to be able to walk to high quality urban services.

As a result, though residents may ideologically support growth management, they are likely to resist when it imposes costs on them. That said, the discussions that are underway seem to be

² NIMBY stands for ‘Not In My BackYard.’ It is a term commonly used by land use planners to describe local resistance to any and all new development, regardless of its type and appearance.

about accepting growth as inevitable and managing it, not trying to stop it or push it further out. It should also be noted that the form of growth – particularly monster homes and the buildup of rural roads – was often mentioned as a bigger concern than the rate of growth.

C. CPI did not enhance inter-town dialogue

CPI appears to have had no effect on informal inter-town dialogue. Even in the face of great inconveniences posed by externally generated traffic, few planners or residents look beyond their town borders or actively cooperate with neighbors on land use. The message from towns is consistent: they do not want any interference in their affairs, nor do they plan to get involved in their neighbors' issues. It is quite telling that only a few planners mentioned that CPI gave them the ability to compare their town's buildout scenario with any other town in the state. This oversight does not appear to be limited to the interviewed towns; there has been little to no downloading of the regional buildout files available online.

Around Boston, despite good working relationships amongst local planners, there are no explicit conversations about regional growth trends. Towns hold casual discussions with neighboring communities on coordinating transportation, open space, and drinking water issues, but the respondents did not feel CPI changed those conversations. Meanwhile, cross-jurisdictional action on non-traffic issues tends to be reactive in nature, such as addressing the construction of a large low-income housing development along a mutual town border. Similarly, while the interviewed planners very much like MAPC's system of subregional groups, they believe that it tends to restrict broader regional engagement. Most towns do not interact with any communities outside of their subgroup, even if they are immediate neighbors. For example, to the west of Boston, the City of Waltham is the source of much of the traffic in neighboring

Weston, but there is no dialogue about the issue between these municipalities because they are in different subgroups. Meanwhile, around Springfield, the interviewed towns plainly refuse to interact with their neighbors, even if enduring debilitating cross-border traffic congestion.

D. CPI did not enhance dialogue between towns and their RPA

CPI also appears to have had no effect on the dialogue between towns and their regional planning agencies, with major disconnections between local and regional planners. The responses to CPI at the town level are at odds with the perceptions of regional planners and state officials, who felt that there was a lot of curiosity at the local level about regional growth. While the RPAs think that the next policy step is for communities to understand what to do with the buildout information, many towns have a disinterest in even viewing neighboring communities' buildout projections on the CPI website. This disconnect is aggravated by the one-dimensional nature of the current relationship between town and regional planners. The RPAs perceive a much higher level of municipal interest in regional planning than truly exists. As one town planner in the Boston area explained,

MAPC wants understanding to flow the opposite direction than it needs to...rather than ask town officials to inform them, they need to take the time to read the local newspapers to understand the political dynamics and demographics in the communities.

Ultimately, there is tension over regional planning because towns want their RPA to be a support organization, not a supervisor. While CPI did not worsen the situation, it was not enough to overcome these philosophical and organizational barriers.

E. CPI-generated data was welcomed by RPAs but not by towns

It was noted earlier that the CPI strategy was to educate the public with personalized information, delivered via GIS. The research findings suggest that the delivery mechanism was inadequate in meeting CPI's objectives on fostering dialogue. One goal of CPI was to generate GIS files that would be available to local and regional planners. They could subsequently recreate the buildouts on their own, making adjustments that better reflect their town's circumstances or test out different development scenarios. At the local level, this tool seems almost entirely unused. Some Boston area towns already had their own GIS departments and preferred internal work over what the state gave them, in part because of local access to more accurate parcel-level data.

In contrast, regional planners were excited about the information gathered through CPI. For MAPC, this data allows them to build a more accurate growth model for the entire region. The agency is already using the buildout information to help communities make and implement zoning changes. In addition, the RPAs can now create alternative futures models – that is, possible patterns and trajectories of land use related issues like population growth and traffic generation – from a realistic base (instead of just extrapolating demographic data) and show how adjustments in local land use policy could modify the impacts of regional growth.

F. Local officials did not feel vested in the CPI process

Besides the way the CPI reports were delivered, the process through which information was collected and composed was an important component of the project. In general, the process of information gathering and distribution may be more important than participation in shaping the perceptions, choices, and the ultimate outcome of land use planning efforts (Hanna 2000). Yet in the CPI endeavor, the process of having state, regional, and local representatives work

together did not lead to a sense of partnership. To the credit of CPI and its RPA partners, the process of engaging municipalities was seemingly identical in all the towns interviewed. The buildouts could have been created without any local involvement, but state officials felt local participation was a critical component of the project. Yet, it appears that local officials were not fully engaged in the CPI process. They provided land use information to their RPA and commented on preliminary maps, but never engaged in a true two-way dialogue with state and regional planners. In fact, it appears that many of the local planners just “went through the motions” during the CPI process. A key indicator of this problem is that while respondents said they felt involved in the process, only one requested a redevelopment analysis. This was an option that CPI offered instead of the regular maps; it may have been more useful for some of the towns that were already fully developed. Furthermore, the disinterest that many interviewees demonstrated toward additional uses of the CPI maps suggests that local planners did not feel vested in the community preservation campaign.

G. CPI did not improve state relations with towns

Due in part to this shallow investment, at least in the short term CPI did not positively change local planners’ attitude regarding the role of the state in land use planning. The subjects responded that CPI gave them no new interest in dealing with the state on land use. This attitude was sometimes a result of a town having adequate planning resources on their own, such as their own GIS department. More often, merely asking about the state’s policies brought forth frustrations from town planners.

However, despite their dislike of the status quo, towns did not have many suggestions on what the state could do better. In some communities, there is a simple disappointment that the

state does not just give them money without conditions and remain removed from local development planning. Indeed, town officials are generally very reluctant to allow the state any local land use power. Some planners expressed, “we don’t want the state to get too involved in local land use planning” and across all the interviewed towns there was a strong “we can do it better at the local level” attitude. In this view, RPAs and the state should simply support local-level efforts without question.

H. State relations with RPAs were improved

CPI appears to have strengthened the relationship between the state and the regional planning agencies. The state officials interviewed stressed how valuable the RPAs are as allies, and the feeling appears to be mutual. The RPAs understand that the state put forward a lot of goodwill in terms of town relations and yet made sure that RPAs were well positioned to reap any positive publicity or enhance their local reputation amongst local officials and citizens.

I. CPI provided a foundation of credibility to state land use efforts

This research was undertaken only two years after the outreach program ended and lessons from other states show building effective smart growth and regional planning to be a long-term process. CPI was perhaps a necessary step to change the vocabulary around which regional planning occurs. Local officials acknowledged that it was a credible program, due to its consistent approach and statewide execution, contrasting well with the state’s other fragmented land use programs. Additionally, it gave the state’s interest in smart growth and local land use a higher profile – every town planner knew what CPI’s topic and methods were.

Despite the absence of changed dialogue between communities and RPAs, this relationship did not worsen, and CPI succeeded in improving state-RPA relations. Meanwhile, CPI provided better coordination between state agencies, setting the stage for the Office for Commonwealth Development (OCD) – a powerful new committee that oversees and coordinates the state’s housing, energy, and transportation policy.

VII. FINDINGS SUMMARY

The research findings do not support the hypothesis that CPI influenced local dialogue on growth management policies and regional land use coordination. In short, CPI did not result in a push toward smart growth and regional planning in those Massachusetts towns most affected by rapid development. Nor did CPI improve the relations of the state government with municipal planning officials.

The response to CPI could have been stunted by inadequate engagement of local planners and residents during the CPI process. This seems most apparent when considering CPI’s noticeable impact on strengthening dialogue between the state and RPAs, which was expected because CPI was a land use program that helped enhance the profile and skill set of the RPAs, which are themselves primarily concerned with land use. Yet state and local planners also share many similar goals and made no short-term progress in their relationship. Rather, the sense of partnership and mutual appreciation between the state and the regional planners was driven by in-depth interaction and two-way exchanges of information during CPI.

Another explanation is that the extensive planning, visioning, and buildout efforts occurring in many exurban Boston towns in the 1990s may have lowered CPI’s profile. Perhaps, as one planner said, “before CPI, people were already well aware of the growth happening in the

region,” thereby limiting its capability for change. The problem could also lie with the research approach’s focus on fast-growing exurban areas. The findings may be highly dependent on the kinds of communities interviewed. It may be that rural towns in particular would have found the CPI buildouts to be more of a surprise. Still, even accounting for flaws in the research methodology, there are clear policy actions that can be taken to address the shortcomings in the outcome of this and similar smart growth programs.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Policy Recommendations for Massachusetts

Local planners greatly resisted state involvement in local land use issues, and their opposition bordered on hostility. Local officials also complained about being required to work with adjacent communities. While some chafing against state mandates is likely justified, local planners at times appeared to lack reflection on the reasons for state policies, such as the requirement for a minimal level of affordable housing in every municipality. Many of the respondents’ specific complaints actually appeared to be misunderstandings of the state’s intentions. For instance, one town planner complained – incorrectly – that the state required them to expand commercial development. If anything, this tendency underlines the lack of perspective at the local level of Massachusetts government, and presents a compelling case on its own for regional planning.

Responding to local pressure, state policies could be modified from unpopular “one size fits all” mandates by moving away from policy positions and instead emphasizing common interests. For instance, a number of communities have resisted any redesign or improvement of state highways in their town because state policy called for applying a standard width to the

redeveloped road, regardless of local desires and the aesthetic impact. The state's new Footprint Roads Initiative, however, allows roads to be enhanced without being widened. Perhaps there are other "initiatives" like this that can be undertaken.

The state also needs to send a more consistent message on land use, and not overwhelm towns with several options. For instance, it cannot support infill development – which is the densification of already-developed areas by increasing heights and building on vacant lots – while simultaneously funding new schools built on undeveloped land at the urban fringe. The state could also offer fewer programs and package them in a clearer format. In the recent past, there have been multiple and frequently changing initiatives on road building, open space preservation, affordable housing, and economic development all handled by separate state agencies without any coordination. Local officials cannot keep track of all these programs, which have not supported a consistent policy theme.

Meanwhile, local governments and RPAs should have a conversation about their relations. Each side has a very different understanding of the other's role and responsibilities, and they do not seem to be communicating these expectations well. RPAs should seek to better understand local issues and provide more customized assistance to communities. Town leaders need to educate their electorate on the benefits of and even obligation toward regional coordination. As long as the regional-local dialogue is enhanced, state-local interaction can remain in its current condition. Local resistance to involvement by the state government is deep-seated and involves many issues besides land use planning. Rather than expend valuable resources in an attempt to enhance its image, state officials should continue to use RPAs as their ambassadors for land use. The state also needs to make legislative changes that will make regionalism easier. Many local planners emphasized that Massachusetts legislation actively

discourages regional cooperation. Metrics for affordable housing and school financing discourage effective regional land use planning, while a new state law would be required to enable many cross-jurisdictional initiatives, such as revenue sharing.

B. Policy Recommendations for All States

Many of the broader lessons learned from CPI regard the process of educating and engaging the public on land use issues. While knowledge of development patterns may be important, it appears that local planning efforts are key to residents' attitudes toward smart growth. Even towns with growth management dialogues are struggling to enact effective land use policies. This challenge appears to stem from a fractured sense within communities on how the town should develop. The best solution is not state action, which may prompt a negative reaction to smart growth. Rather, the local land use planner needs to mediate a community discussion to determine what residents truly want. Undirected local conversations on growth are leading to contradictory positions; a planner needs to step in and mediate these discussions away from wishful thinking and toward problem-solving. Otherwise, the inability to actively choose a growth management style may eventually push the town toward extreme measures in an attempt to at least hold on to the status quo.

The research findings suggest that information on its own is not sufficient for generating public dialogue on land use issues. Local residents need to be deeply engaged for these discussions to be effective. To turn land use information into shared intellectual capital, state and regional officials may need to hold several conversations with town planners and residents in which both sides exchange information in order to assign value and establish meanings around the issue at hand.

Finally, even if an effective growth management discussion is ongoing, it appears that communities are unlikely to naturally develop an interest in their neighbors' land use or growth potential. One way of increasing local attention on regional planning may be to market the issue differently. Traffic congestion and road usage were consistently mentioned as the most powerful regional issues at the local level. State governments and RPAs can therefore provide a higher profile for their efforts on smart growth and regional planning by making traffic and transportation the primary issue of their land use reform efforts, reframing them as effective methods of improving traffic flow.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

The creators of CPI devised a program that had clear aims and novel methods. Through its regional summits, a vertically-organized process, and an educational focus, CPI worked to build local movements that can support smart growth and regional planning, bring together local power brokers to find common ground on growth issues, strengthen regional planning agencies, and demonstrate to citizens and local governments the interdependency of growth problems. Nonetheless, the outcome of the research suggests that despite its thoughtful approach, CPI failed to meet some of its core goals. The public did not appear to synthesize the information in a way that has led to new local dialogue or action on land use. The research suggests that exurbanites are largely aware of growth issues, and may be open to small changes in development styles. However, at least in Massachusetts, they are also opposed to the loss of local control, which limits the capability of state government to impose a more sustainable land use pattern.

CPI could have better engaged local planners and leaders in a two-way dialogue on land use. That said, it is impressive that the state of Massachusetts created a process that could potentially affect hundreds of millions of dollars in fringe development with far less investment costs. CPI may in fact be the first step in the long process of changing local land use policies. Boston and Springfield area residents still may not know where to put new development, but as a result of the Community Preservation Initiative, the issue was at least put on the table.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews with the following individuals provided the information for the description and analysis of the research questions, as well as comments used directly in the text of the thesis.

All interviews conducted by Christopher Hodges.

Name	Affiliation	Position	Type	Date
Albertson, Douglas	Town of Belchertown	Town Planner	Telephone	25 February 2004
Bartl, Roland	Town of Acton	Town Planner	Telephone	8 March 2004
Bergeron, Arthur	EOEA	Former Special Asst. Secretary	Telephone	4 March 2004
Carlucci, Gino	Town of Norfolk	Planning Consultant	Telephone	3 March 2004
Carlucci, Gino	Town of Sherborn	Town Planner	Telephone	24 February 2004
Dachos, Deborah	City of Agawam	Director of Planning and Community Development	Telephone	9 March 2004
Gaertner, Kurt	CPI	Director of Growth Planning	In Person	8 March 2004
Geigis, Priscilla	CPI	Director	In Person	2 March 2004
Haber, Susan	Town of Weston	Town Planner	Telephone	2 March 2004
Harbottle, Laura	Town of Scituate	Town Planner	E-mail	3 March 2004
Jacqz, Christian	MassGIS	Director	In Person	3 March 2004
Jennings, Angus	Town of Marshfield	Town Planner	Telephone	7 March 2004
Kolias, Vera	Town of Southborough	Town Planner	Telephone	26 February 2004
Lacy, Katy	Town of Hingham	Town Planner	Telephone	24 February 2004
Laydon, Joe	Town of Wayland	Town Planner	Telephone	24 February 2004
Lazarus, Elaine	Town of Hopkinton	Town Planner	Telephone	1 March 2004
Pearsall, John	Town of Wilbraham	Town Planner	Telephone	20 February 2004
Racicot, Mark	MAPC	Regional Planner and Manager, Government Services	Telephone	9 March 2004
Salzer, Paul	Town of Southwick	Planning Board	Telephone	25 February 2004
Stickney, Christine	Town of Duxbury	Town Planner	Telephone	3 March 2004
Superczynski, Denis	PVPC	Senior Regional Planner	Telephone	16 March 2004
Sutton, Richard	Applied Geographics, Inc	Director of Spatial Analysis	Telephone	11 March 2004
Szklut, Jay	Town of Hull	Town Planner	Telephone	10 March 2004
Tucker, Jonathan	Town of Amherst	Senior Planner	Telephone	11 March 2004

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