

# MASSACHUSETTS SMART GROWTH ALLIANCE

MASSACHUSETTS  
SMART GROWTH  
ALLIANCE

NOTABLE HIGHLIGHTS  
2003 - 2020

Photo provided by the Community Economic Development Center (CEDC), New Bedford



## ACHIEVEMENTS

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After a transition process that culminated in early 2020, the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance decided to continue as a state policy coalition staffed by its member groups, a format that will enable its long-term sustainability. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council will assume the role of coordination.

The Great Neighborhoods program, still led by Anabelle Rondon, has merged with LivableStreets Alliance and will continue to support smart growth activism at the local level. Meanwhile, longtime executive director André Leroux and staff members Larry Field and Dottie Fulginiti have moved on to new opportunities helping communities implement smart growth strategies.

To commemorate a new chapter, we compiled a list of 15 key achievements over the years:

1. Uniting advocates for better communities
2. State consistency with smart growth
3. Brownfields
4. Zoning reform
5. Support for planning
6. Great Neighborhoods phase 1: transformative development
7. Placemaking
8. Mixed-income housing
9. Smart infrastructure investment
10. Smart growth conferences
11. District management
12. Housing Choice
13. Accessory Dwelling Units and healthy aging
14. Racial justice initiatives
15. Great Neighborhoods phase 2: local organizing



# 1. UNITING ADVOCATES FOR BETTER COMMUNITIES

There was a time when affordable housing advocates and environmentalists battled at the State House. Now, they fight on each other's behalf in recognition that a green community provides safe, stable and affordable housing options for its residents—and a community that believes in justice must be environmentally resilient and steward the natural processes that support life. Another key realignment began five years ago when the public health community joined MSGA, acknowledging the important connections between health and development. And more recently, our Great Neighborhoods program has helped coordinate housing, transit, and climate activists at the local level. MSGA has always been powered by the relationships among its member organizations.



# 2. CONSISTENCY WITH SMART GROWTH

Since Governor Romney's term in office, MSGA has helped make state policies, investments and decisions consistent with smart growth principles. We can't build human-centered communities while building around cars. That means breaking down agency silos that work at cross-purposes, and at times saying "no" to policies that induce sprawl. It's easy to forget how radical this idea was in the early 2000s, when suburban growth was at its peak.

MSGA's coalition helped shape the first generation of smart growth policies in Massachusetts, including the Office of Commonwealth Development, Commonwealth Capital, Chapter 40R smart growth zoning districts, and the Sustainable Development Principles. We ensured that smart growth survived the change between administrations and became a firm bipartisan commitment. Today, sustainable and equitable development is a mainstream, shared value and one that is incorporated into almost everything the state does.

# 3. BROWNFIELDS

**\$30M**

**RECAPITALIZED IN 2006**

**\$15M**

**ADDITIONAL FUNDS IN 2014**

Cleaning up polluted sites and redeveloping them became MSGA's first signature issue. Although the program was established in 1998, MSGA championed it when it ran out of money. Working in coalition with industry partners such as NAIOP, the Legislature recapitalized the Brownfields Redevelopment Fund in 2006 with \$30 million, extended the state brownfields tax credit, and made the tax credit transferable to nonprofit entities.

In 2014, we won an additional \$15 million recapitalization and tax credit extension. The Brownfields Redevelopment Fund is now operating with adequate funding through 2021. We also supported program rules providing applicants greater flexibility to clean up complex sites, incorporate affordability, and create community amenities.

A man with glasses and a goatee, wearing a dark jacket, stands behind a wooden podium. He is speaking into a microphone. Behind him are several real estate signs. On the left, a sign says 'for sale WORCESTER HOME 2018 Median Home Price \$250,000'. In the center, a sign says 'Apartment RENT 2018 Median'. On the right, a sign says 'QUINCY APARTMENT FOR RENT \$2,000'. To the far left, there is a sign for 'MASSACHUSETTS GROWTH POLICY' and another for 'clf'. To the far right, there is a sign for 'GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITIES FOR FAMILIES'. An American flag is visible on the left side of the background.

## 4. ZONING REFORM

OUTDATED LOCAL ZONING RULES MAKE IT ILLEGAL NOWADAYS TO BUILD JUST ABOUT ANYTHING THAT PEOPLE LOVE ABOUT HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND, WHETHER IT'S TRIPLE DECKERS, VIBRANT MAIN STREETS, OR COTTAGES.

Although zoning reform has justifiably been regarded as one of the most difficult and intractable issues in state politics, MSGA committed itself to the cause, knowing that land-use rules lie at the heart of segregation and sprawl. Over the last fifty years, the prevalence of single-family zoning requiring large house lots has restricted the production of apartments and other small homes, curbed opportunities for wealth creation for young families and people of color, and helped create our current housing crisis.

Notable highlights of our work include:

- Supporting the creation of a Zoning Reform Task Force first at CHAPA, then led by Secretary Greg Bialecki under Gov. Patrick;
- Building a zoning campaign that culminated in the State Senate's passage of comprehensive zoning reform legislation in 2016;
- Working with real estate and housing organizations to fund a research project led by Amy Dain analyzing multifamily zoning, subdivision rules, and accessory dwelling unit (ADU) ordinances for the 100 cities and towns around Boston.

While working to pass statewide legislation, we built on the early efforts of the Zoning Reform Working Group and that state's planning associations to expand the coalition for reform and make the issue a critical one for local and state decision makers. We educated and organized legislators, municipal officials, and business leaders across the state who called for zoning to produce vibrant downtowns, sensible infill development, and housing near jobs and transportation. We built a grassroots campaign of over 2000 local activists.

The growing momentum encouraged Gov. Baker to propose his own zoning reform legislation in 2017, *An Act to Create Housing Choices*, which the House and Senate have included in the economic development package expected to pass later in 2020. When signed, this will represent a landmark accomplishment and a culmination of our collective efforts.

## 5. SUPPORT FOR PLANNING

MSGA was an early proponent of regional planning. In fact, our first executive director Kristina Egan joined the Patrick Administration to lead creation of the South Coast Rail Corridor Plan, which won national awards. That project set a template for a collaborative practice involving state agencies, regional planning agencies, and municipalities to determine Priority Development Areas and Priority Preservation Areas.

Over the years, we advocated for numerous planning grant programs to help cities and towns be more proactive about their development strategies, including the Gateway Action Plus program, Smart Growth Planning Grants, and District Local Technical Assistance.

In 2018, we worked with Senate President Emerita Harriette Chandler to secure supplemental funding for the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) to help formalize their curriculum for local planning and zoning board members and make it available online via a new website.



## 6. GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS PHASE 1: TRANSFORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT



Community Planning in Lawrence

MSGA launched Great Neighborhoods in 2010 to support local partnerships in implementing their transformative visions. Five compelling initiatives were selected to participate based on their readiness: the Fairmount corridor in Boston, Dudley Square in Roxbury, downtown Lawrence, the Green Line extension in Somerville, and Winchester Town Center. Each site presented unique challenges and lessons about transit-oriented development in Greater Boston.

We provided the local initiatives funding from the Barr and Ford Foundations, along with technical assistance and coaching from our staff teams.

In just three years from 2011-2014, the partnerships produced an impressive pipeline of projects:

- Over 1800 housing units

- Nearly 300,000 sq ft of commercial space
- Nearly 8,000 jobs
- 58 acres of new open space
- Over 16 miles of new paths

All told, less than \$5 million dollars of operational funding leveraged more than \$257 million in private and public investment. In 2013, we began working with local partners along the Acushnet Avenue corridor in New Bedford, culminating in the creation of “Love the Ave,” a community-driven initiative that continues to transform the neighborhood to this day. Great Neighborhoods was an important precursor to the Federal Reserve Bank’s Working Cities program, MassDevelopment’s Transformative Development Initiative (TDI), and MAPC’s Sustainable Communities grant.

# 7. PLACEMAKING

MSGA helped launch the placemaking movement in Massachusetts. At our Great Neighborhoods Summit in 2011, we brought Fred Kent from Project for Public Spaces to give a keynote address to a room of 500 community leaders, advocates and practitioners. This was the first time that most people in the room had heard of the concept of placemaking.

Overwhelming interest and positive feedback from the Summit led us to bring back Project for Public Spaces for a “placemaking academy” and a series of local workshops for nonprofits and activists in our Great Neighborhoods communities. Working with LISC-Boston, we made mini-grants available to community groups across the region for catalytic placemaking projects.

We also convened a regular working group of agencies that helped lead to major new placemaking initiatives at MAPC, MassDevelopment, and A Better City. MSGA hosted a Placemaking Leadership Council meeting in 2016 with foundations and implementation partners that built funder interest in these projects.



POW WOW Mural in Worcester funded with the Placemaking mini grants in 2013



# 8. MIXED-INCOME HOUSING

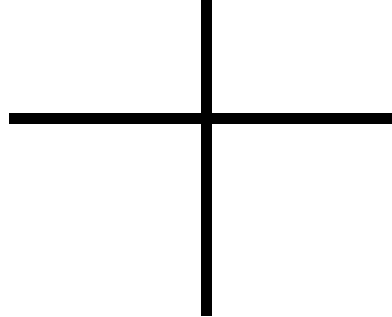
The Alliance became a strong voice for mixed-income housing in smart growth locations. Collectively, we advocated for transit-oriented development (TOD) programs, the disposition of surplus state property for mixed-income housing, and funding for the Community Preservation Act. We encouraged the Legislature to replenish the Smart Growth Trust Fund, which pays cities and towns state incentive payments for Chapter 40R zoning districts and Chapter 40S school cost reimbursements.

Our behind the scene efforts helped connect the DC-based Governor's Institute on Community Design to the Patrick Administration, whose efforts resulted in the state's first multi-family housing goal. MSGA supported the Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) to create mixed-income housing in Gateway Cities, and changes to the Commercial Area Transit Node Housing Program (CATNHP) to make it easier for to fund the commercial space in mixed-use housing projects.

We supported the prioritization of multifamily housing projects in MassWorks applications. More recently, we have been supporting measures in the Governor's proposed economic development package that include: affordable housing near transit nodes, climate resilient affordable housing, and neighborhood stabilization.



Haverhill boardwalk developed with MassWorks funding within a Smart Growth District



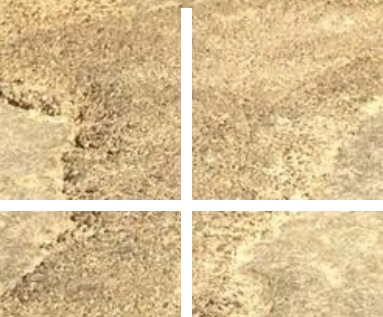
## 9. SMART INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

In the early 2000s, public infrastructure expanded rapidly, incentivizing sprawl and creating a massive public maintenance liability. MSGA supported Gov. Romney’s “fix-it-first” mantra and pushed to implement it, even when politically difficult.

When the Great Recession hit in 2008 and 2009, MSGA partnered with Smart Growth America to influence the federal Recovery Act (ARRA) and guide our state’s use of transportation stimulus dollars. Massachusetts had one of the top track records of any state, spending 90% of its road funds on repair, and 23.3% of all its transportation stimulus on public transportation, walking, and biking projects.

Realizing that our state’s crumbling transportation system needed more than part-time advocacy, we helped launch our sister coalition Transportation for Massachusetts in 2010. Around the same time, we presented the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) with recommendations for applying a smart growth lens to its infrastructure planning and take into account land-use and potential for induced sprawl.

One of the most impactful smart growth programs has been MassWorks, which the Patrick Administration developed into the state’s one-stop shop for economic development infrastructure, with nearly \$700 million deployed since 2011. The portfolio of projects strives to achieve key smart growth targets: at least 66% of projects will be transit-oriented; at least 80% will be redevelopment; and at least 50% in Gateway Cities. MSGA provided feedback on the program’s design, helped secure the statutory changes needed in legislation, and has offered comments on grant applications each year.



# 10. Smart Growth Conferences



When the Commonwealth stopped hosting its annual smart growth conference in 2008, MSGA stepped in with a series of events in following years, including:

- Great Neighborhoods Summits from 2010-2012
- Massachusetts Smart Growth Conference in 2013 at ABX Boston
- Massachusetts Smart Growth Conference in 2016 & 2017 in Worcester
- Pioneer Valley Smart Growth Summit in June 2019
- Merrimack Valley Smart Growth Summit in October 2019

In addition, we brought activists and local leaders to state and national conferences, including New Partners for Smart Growth, PolicyLink's National Equity Summit, and YIMBYtown.





## 11. DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

Vibrant, walkable areas like downtowns, town centers, and villages require dedicated management and resources to support small businesses and maintain busy public spaces. However, there were still only five Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the state by 2015.

MSGA surveyed district management legislation from other states and proposed a new tool called Community Benefit Districts to make it easier for more communities to adopt. Although the Legislature passed the bill more than once, it was not signed into law—and later, when the Baker Administration supported it, the Legislature did not pass it. Despite that setback, our campaign educated many local and state leaders about the value of district management and generated new enthusiasm for BIDs. Over the last few years, the number of BIDs in the state nearly doubled, with new districts in Boston, Worcester, Cambridge, and Hudson. In addition, with MAPC’s leadership, an important new district management tool became law in 2016—parking benefit districts, which enable communities to direct parking revenues into local improvements.



## 12. HOUSING CHOICE

An important element of our zoning reform efforts over the years has been to create an incentive program for cities and towns to improve their zoning. In 2017, the Baker administration launched its Housing Choice program to encourage municipalities to build new housing, especially in smart growth locations. Cities and towns that meet the threshold are certified by the state and become eligible for dedicated capital grants, preferential funding for other key state programs, and access to coordinated technical assistance.

To date, 79 communities have achieved a two-year designation. As mentioned in the zoning reform bullet, the administration also filed complementary legislation called An Act to Promote Housing Choices, which would make it easier for municipalities to adopt best practices. A broad coalition including MSGA, the Mass Municipal Association, and real estate trade groups support it and are advocating for its passage this year.

## 13. ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS AND HEALTHY AGING

In order for residents to stay in their community as they age, they need flexible, affordable housing while their family evolves. One way of accomplishing this is to allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs), meaning that homeowners can create a small “in-law” apartment in their home. In 2018, MSGA and the Pioneer Institute issued Amy Dain’s report on local ADU ordinances in Greater Boston that showed that most cities and towns lack effective policies and indicated how they could be improved. Our staff made presentations to elder service organizations around the region to educate them about the benefits of ADUs for aging in place.



We also worked with the AARP and the Healthy Aging Collaborative to help communities obtain “age-friendly” certification by passing a resolution and creating an implementation plan. MSGA proposed senior property tax relief that would also advance affordable housing.

As interest in ADUs has risen—including numerous Boston Globe articles extolling their virtues—there has been an uptick in communities pursuing local adoption. Examples of the new, more effective crop of ADU ordinances include those passed by the City of Newton, the Town of Lexington, and numerous towns on the Cape with support from the Cape Cod Commission.



## 14. RACIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES

MSGA has long challenged the zoning and housing systems that are closely linked to segregation, one of our founding members being the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston. From 2011-2014, we passed through \$1.5 million to our Great Neighborhoods partners, nearly all of whom were based in communities of color. This work supported community organizing for equitable policies and plans, affordable housing development, access to open space, and transportation justice projects.

We worked with the State Senate in 2016 to pass a package of reforms which included making exclusionary zoning practices illegal, as well as requiring all communities to allow multi-family zoning. We briefed senior staff in the Attorney General's office about the relationship between the housing crisis and restrictive zoning. We also fostered grassroots housing activism in suburban communities where affordable housing is scarce and difficult to build.

In recent years, we accelerated our commitment to racial justice by supporting a "Race Talks" book club and discussion series in collaboration with the Mel King Institute at MACDC to promote diversity and inclusion in the community development field. We also launched a Planners of Color network with members around the state who seek to amplify diverse voices in development decisions.

MSGA's ongoing "health equity and housing" project led by the Mass Public Health Association and Conservation Law Foundation supports grassroots housing justice campaigns while engaging health care institutions in state housing policy.

In the face of the pandemic, our priority has become preventing the displacement of thousands of families who have lost income and we supported the successful eviction and foreclosure moratorium led by social justice organizations. In addition, we're advocating for CHAPA's \$50 million expansion of the state's RAFT program to prevent homelessness, as well as court record sealing, and a proposed Right to Counsel pilot program to make legal representation available to those facing evictions as a result of COVID-19.

# 15. GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS PHASE II: LOCAL ORGANIZING



Since 2015, Great Neighborhoods has evolved into a platform for residents to learn about development issues and connect to other local activists. Our staff developed the [www.great-neighborhoods.org](http://www.great-neighborhoods.org) website and identified personal stories of people whose lives are limited by restrictive zoning and housing laws. We created “learning journeys,” messaging for non-planners, and “myth-busting” information to help communicate the costs and benefits of different kinds of development.

We worked with residents in 17 different cities and towns to host networking events called “Transit-Oriented Drinks” (TODrinks) that foster relationships among people interested in promoting smart growth in their communities. In some cases, we helped local activists who wanted to keep working together form a grassroots organization.



Finally, we believe that local housing, transportation, and climate victories will only be won if those activists collaborate, which is why we bring organizing networks like Massachusetts Climate Action Network, CHAPA, LivableStreets Alliance, and others together to share information and strategies.



## Steering Committee



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# THANK YOU!

The MSGA team in 2020: Larry Field, Andre Leroux, Anabelle Rondon, and Dottie Fulginiti