

Fact Sheet: Regional Planning Agencies

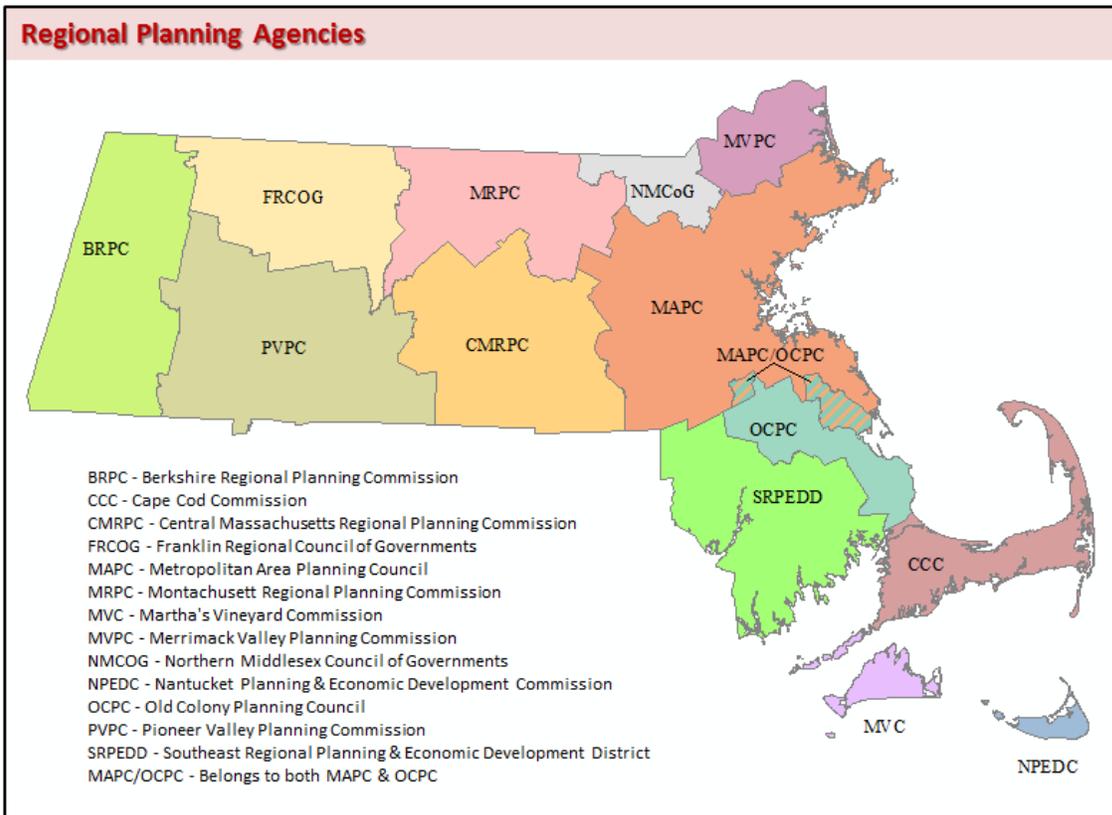
Serving Municipalities Throughout Massachusetts

What is a Regional Planning Agency?

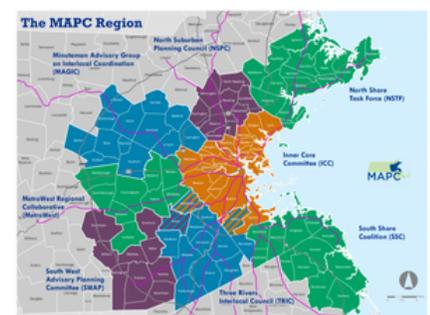
Regional Planning Agencies, or RPAs, provide and coordinate municipal planning efforts in regions across the state. These projects and initiatives include transportation, housing and land use, economic development, public health, environmental efforts, public engagement, and municipal services. RPAs also support municipalities by delivering technical assistance, promoting municipal collaboration, managing state and federal grants, and encouraging public policy conversations at the federal, state, and local levels. RPAs are governed by municipal leaders from their regions.

RPAs in Massachusetts

RPAs are organized geographically and vary in size, capacity, and priorities. Massachusetts has 13 RPAs:



The largest Regional Planning Agency in Massachusetts is the **Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)**, which serves 101 cities and towns in Metropolitan Boston.



The Role of Regional Planning Agencies

RPAs may be tasked by municipalities to develop Master Plans, and specialized plans for Open Space and Recreation, Transportation, Housing Production, Economic Development, and more. RPA staff are frequently involved in all stages of the planning process, from visioning to implementation.

Why are RPAs Important?

The 351 municipalities in Massachusetts operate under "Home Rule", which gives certain powers to cities and towns. At the same time, the state retains significant control, while counties have limited authority in Massachusetts. In this context, RPAs help promote regional cooperation, effectiveness, and efficiency.

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Regional Collaboration to Address Municipal Challenges

Another role of RPAs is to facilitate planning efforts broadly across their regions. Each RPA is governed by a regional council or commission made up of local representatives and state appointees. The councils broadly guide the work of the RPAs.

Generally, RPAs receive funding through per-capita assessments from member municipalities. In Massachusetts, RPAs receive additional funding from the Commonwealth to provide technical assistance to municipalities.



RPAs and MPOs

A Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a federally-mandated agency charged with transportation policy-making and implementation of projects that receive federal funding. In some states, RPAs and MPOs are one and the same. In Massachusetts, however, RPAs and MPOs have different, if overlapping, roles and responsibilities. Massachusetts RPAs serve as members of their MPOs, and help the MPO decide how best to program limited federal transportation funds.

RPAs use public dollars for surveys, studies, and plans. Therefore, public involvement and feedback is important so RPAs can make decisions that reflect the values of the community. To have input in decision-making, members of the community must be "at the table" to advocate for critical issues, like walkable/bikeable streets, affordable housing, and environmental policy. RPA plans and studies also influence how larger sums of state and federal dollars are spent on these and other important areas.

How to get involved with your Regional Planning Agency:

- Identify the RPA responsible for your city or town.
- Navigate your RPA's website to find community events, public meetings, and meeting agendas.
- Each Massachusetts RPA calendars can also be found through the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies.



For More Information:

MARPA

American Planning Association- MA Chapter