THE COMMONWEALTH’S RURAL TOWNS

A report to the Rural Policy Advisory Commission developed by the Demographics and Economic Development Committees with support from the Franklin Regional Council of Governments.

June 28, 2017
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

This presentation contains:

- An overview of demographic and socio-economic trends in Rural Towns, including:
  - Comparisons of the aggregate of Rural Towns to the State
  - Comparisons of regional differences among Rural Towns

- Sub-regions with shared characteristics, which may influence how strategies are implemented.

- Potential approaches for economic development in different types of Rural Towns.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

- The definition of “rural” is a municipality with a population density of less than 500 people per sq. mile.

- Nearly half of all municipalities are Rural Towns.

- Population of Rural Towns is 830,000 (13% of state).
  
  *Equivalent to the population of Boston + Worcester + Lexington*

- 59% of the State’s total land area.

  **170 Rural Towns**

  Of these 170 Rural Towns, 84 are in four western counties, and 86 are in nine eastern counties.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

In aggregate, demographic and socio-economic trends in Rural Towns are comparable to the State with some exceptions.

Often, the greatest differences are between east and west Rural Towns.

Categories

- Recent population change
- Population by age cohort
  - Under 18 years
  - 65 years and older
- Median household income
- Average Home Value
- Highest educational attainment
  - High School Diploma or less
  - Some college or more
- Employment by selected industry
- Self-employed workers
- Workers in private, for-profit sector

Rural Towns in Massachusetts

2000-2010% Population Change:
- 3% growth Statewide
- 5% growth in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns with population decline in west, than in east.
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Population Under 18 Years:
- 21% Statewide
- 21% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns with high percentage in east, than in west.

Legend:
- Less than 15% of total population
- 15%-25% of total population
- 25% and over of total population
- Not a Rural Town
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Population 65 Years and Over:
- 15% Statewide
- 17% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns with a high population in west, than in east.

Legend:
- Less than 10% of total population
- 10%-20% of total population
- 20% and over of total population
- Not a Rural Town
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Population Foreign-Born:
- 15% Statewide
- 5% in Rural Towns only
- International migration reported as a major contributor to recent and anticipated population growth in Massachusetts.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Median Household Income (MHI):
- $68,653 for Massachusetts
- Data not available for aggregate of Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns above statewide MHI in east, than in west.
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Average Single Family Home Value:
- Statewide average not available
- Median of the municipalities’ average is about $306,000
- More Rural Towns above municipalities’ median in east, than in west.

Note: Data not available for all municipalities.
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Equalized Valuation (EQV) 2010-2016 Change:
- -1% Statewide
- -11% Rural Towns only
- EQV has been used by MA Department of Revenue to distribute State aid to municipalities.

Note: Comparison of 2010 EQV to 2016 EQV done in 2016 equivalent dollars.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Highest Educational Attainment: High School Diploma or Less

- 36% Statewide
- 33% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns with higher percentages in west, than in east.

Note: Highest educational attainment for population 25 years and older. Multiple categories are collapsed.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

**Highest Educational Attainment: Some College or Higher**
- 64% Statewide
- 67% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns with high percentage in the east, than in west.

Note: Highest educational attainment for population 25 years and older. Multiple categories are collapsed.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Employment by Industry:

Percent Employed in Manufacturing

- 9% Statewide
- 11% in Rural Towns only
- About the same number of Rural Towns in east and west with a high percentage.
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Employment by Industry:
Employed in Professional, Scientific, & Management Services
- 13% Statewide
- 11% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns in east with a high percentage, than in west.

Statewide

Rural Towns only

Less than 11% of total employed
11%-15% of total employed
15% and over of total employed
Not a Rural Town
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Self-Employed Workers:
- 9% Statewide
- 12% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns in west with high percentage, than in east.

Note: Includes all industries, such as construction, agriculture, professional services, arts/entertainment, and etc..
For-Profit Workers:
- 69% Statewide
- 66% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns in east with high percentage, than in west.

Note: Includes all industries, such as construction, professional services, education, and etc.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

What are the conditions needed to access jobs and to create jobs?

To Access Jobs -

- Workers require access to career services, skills training and higher education opportunities.
  
  Such as provided by:
  - Community Colleges and Public Higher Education
  - Career Centers

- Workers require the ability to connect to jobs in person or online.
  
  Such as provided by:
  - Transit services
  - Broadband access
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**Access Jobs**

- Rural Towns (green)
- Public Transit Service in Rural Towns (blue)
- Unserved by Broadband (yellow hatch)
- Career Centers (yellow stars)
- Public Higher Education (red dots)

Rural Towns in green with yellow hatch do not have last mile broadband access, nor public transit service.

*Note: The public transit service available varies, for example there is no weekend service for FRTA and BRTA.*
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

What are the conditions needed to access jobs and to create jobs?

To Create Jobs -

- Suitable locations with infrastructure to support business development.
  Such as having:
  - Water and Sewer systems

- Technical assistance to help entrepreneurs to develop a business.
  Such as services provided by:
  - Community Development Corporations (CDCs)
  - Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network (MSBDCN)

- Leverage opportunities in the community to develop businesses that attract customers (as well as prospective employees and other entrepreneurs).
  Such as:
  - Natural assets – scenic landscapes and villages, outdoor recreation, farm & food system, etc.
  - Housing affordability
  - Quality of life – culture, environment
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Create Jobs

- Rural Towns (green)
- Rural Towns with Water and Sewer (orange)
- Rural Towns Commercial / Industrial Land Use (yellow areas)
- Business development: CDCs (purple squares) and MSBDCN sites (yellow diamonds)

Rural Towns in green either may have either Water or Sewer, or has neither service. Rural Towns in orange have both Water and Sewer located within its borders.

Note: Some CDCs primarily work on housing, and do not provide access to business development services. Some MSBDCN sites are locations with only periodic office hours.
Rural Towns in Massachusetts

Sub-regions of Shared Characteristics.

While each town and region is different, when looking at the data shared characteristics at the sub-regional level emerge that are beyond “east” and “west”.

Each of these characterizations have their own challenges and opportunities for economic development, which may provide a useful lens for developing and implementing strategies.

- Economic Distress
- Suburbs/Bedroom Communities
- Concentrations of Second Homes
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Areas with Shared Characteristics

- Suburbs/Bedroom Communities (red)
- Areas of Economic Distress (yellow)
- Concentrations of Second Homes (dark blue)

Note: These are generalized areas with shared characteristics, which may or may not be applicable to all individual Rural Towns.
Approaches for Economic Development

What is the best approach for supporting residents in Rural Towns in accessing and creating economic opportunities?

- Not all approaches may be suitable for all Rural Towns.

  - Where are there gaps of needed services?
  - What communities can or could support new business growth?
  - How can rural residents access opportunities?

- Propose three approaches to categorize Rural Towns and then apply economic development strategies.
Approaches for Economic Development

**Anchor Communities**
- Identify lead Rural Towns that serve as an employment or population centers to smaller Rural Towns, in traditionally underserved or gap areas.
- Target support to extend services and resources to these communities.

**Targeted Town Centers**
- Identify Rural Towns with defined town centers that could support commercial development.
- Assess infrastructure and support needed to enhance economic activity in the town center.

**Low Density Rural**
- Identify Rural Towns without defined town centers.
- Implement projects to support home-based opportunities (such as through broadband access).
Which Rural Towns could serve as…..

- Anchor Communities?
- Targeted Town Centers?
- Low Density Rural?

If these approaches were to be pursued, an analysis would need to be conducted to identify which Rural Towns would be most applicable to these categories.