THE COMMONWEALTH’S RURAL TOWNS

A demographic analysis and summary of rural community issues based on survey response.

Conducted for the Rural Policy Advisory Commission by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments

October, 2017
This presentation contains:

- Overview of the Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RAPC)
- An overview of demographic and socio-economic trends in Massachusetts’ Rural Towns, including:
  - Comparisons of the aggregate of Rural Towns to the State
  - Comparisons of regional differences among Rural Towns
- Highlighted results of a survey sent to Massachusetts “rural” municipalities in the summer of 2017

View of Sunderland’s village center from Mt. Sugarloaf.
Rural Policy Advisory Commission

- Created by the Legislature in 2015; began meeting in late 2016
- The mission of the RAPC “shall be to enhance the economic vitality of rural communities”
- Commission Membership:
  - A representative from the House and a representative from the Senate
  - Secretary of EOHED
  - 12 gubernatorial appointments including from RPAs serving Rural Towns – Berkshire, Cape Cod, Central MA, Franklin County, Martha’s Vineyard, Montachusetts, Nantucket, and Pioneer Valley
  - Pioneer Valley Planning Commission’s appointment is Judy Terry
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.
Population is declining in the most rural areas.

2000-2010% Population Change:
- 3% growth Statewide
- 5% growth in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns with population decline in west, than in east.
In general, the population is older in these rural areas as well.

**Population 65 Years and Over:**
- 15% Statewide
- 17% in Rural Towns only
- More Rural Towns with a high population in west, than in east.
State growth is driven by foreign-born residents, who are not moving to rural areas.

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.
Median income is higher in metro eastern MA.

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.
With exceptions, houses are cheaper in rural MA.

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.
Manufacturing is located outside I-95/Route 128.

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.

Legend:
- Yellow: Less than 7% of total employed
- Orange: 7%-10% of total employed
- Dark Brown: 10% and over of total employed
- Grey: Not a Rural Town
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.
Self-employed is more predominant in rural areas.

**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..
Potential reductions to federal funding for non-profits and government will impact rural areas more.

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.
Workforce support services less available in rural areas.

**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 availability varies, for example there is no weekend service for FRTA and BRTA.*
Rural Towns have less capacity to pay for municipal services.

Equalized Valuation (EQV) Change from 2010 to 2016 (in 2016 dollars):

- -1% Statewide
- -11% Rural Towns only
- EQV has been used by MA Department of Revenue to distribute State aid to municipalities.

Note: EQV is the estimate of the full and fair cash value of all property as of a certain taxable date.
Rural Town Survey

- This year, the RAPC is focused on the following areas:
  - Sewer/Water and Title 5
  - Rural Service Delivery
  - Small Business Support and Job Creation

- A survey was distributed to gain a better understanding of how these focus areas impact the quality of life and economic vitality in rural Massachusetts.

170 Rural Towns

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

- The survey was released on July 17, 2017 and forwarded to Rural Towns by Regional Planning Agencies.
- By August 30, 2017, data was submitted for 101 Rural Towns.
- Survey response rate of 59%.

Title of Survey Respondents:

- 53% Town Manager/Town Administrator/Town Coordinator
- 16% Administrative Assistant/Executive Assistant
- 8% Board of Selectmen
- 7% Other (such as Planning Board, Board of Health, Planner)
- 16% No response

Map showing survey response across Massachusetts.
Availability of public sewer service in Rural Towns.

**Question**
Does your town have public sewer in all or part of the town? (select one)

**Responses**
- 2% = Yes, available in all of town
- 42% = Yes, available in part of town
- 56% = No, not available

* Of the 101 responses submitted
Availability of public water service in Rural Towns.

Question
Does your town have public water in all or part of the town?
(select one)

Responses*
5% = Yes, available in all of town
62% = Yes, available in part of town
33% = No, not available

* Of the 100 responses submitted
Potential impact of public sewer/water expansion.

Responses*

- Yes: 54%
- No: 20%
- Don't Know: 26%

Question

Would expansion or creation of public sewer and water systems aid in economic development and housing production?

What is the limiting factor?

- 34% too expensive either to expand septic or add small treatment facility
- 9% DEP regulation constraints
- 7% would require transitioning from private well to public water system
- (33% don’t know)

* Of the 99 responses submitted
Local government resources and capacity.

Question
Does your municipal government struggle to provide adequate services to your residents and to comply with state regulations and reporting? (select one)

Responses*
- Yes: 62%
- No: 33%
- Don't Know: 6%

* Of the 89 responses submitted
Same responsibilities for all town governments, regardless of size, resources, or capacity.

Question

How many full-time equivalents (FTEs) does your town employ, not including school personnel and not including volunteers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses* by Town Population</th>
<th>Pop. &lt;1,000</th>
<th>Pop. 1,000-1,999</th>
<th>Pop. 2,000-3,999</th>
<th>Pop. 4,000-9,999</th>
<th>Pop. 10,000 and over</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Submitted Responses</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median FTE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>76.5</td>
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<td>Low number of FTEs</td>
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<td>6.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57.8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>[Chester-field]</td>
<td>[Hinsdale]</td>
<td>[Newbury]</td>
<td>[Lunenburg]</td>
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<tr>
<td>High number of FTEs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>85</td>
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<td>[Becket]</td>
<td>[Province-town]</td>
<td>[Sterling]</td>
<td>[Bourne]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Includes FTEs for: Town Hall, Police, Fire, DPW, Library, and Other (such as Senior Center/COA, Parks, Planning, Transfer Station, Building Maintenance or Custodial)

* Of the 89 responses submitted
Sharing municipal services.

**Question**
Does your town share services with another town or receive municipal operation services from a regional organization? (select one)

**Top shared municipal services:**
- Veteran’s Services
- Public Health Agent
- Inspection Services
- Animal Control
- Collective Purchasing/Procurement
- Ambulance/EMS

* Of the 90 responses submitted
Potential to share municipal services.

Question
Are there municipal services that you could envision your town sharing with another town or procuring from a regional organization? (select one)

Top services identified:
• Police
• Fire
• Accountant
• DPW
• Human Resources
• Inspection Services

* Of the 88 responses submitted
Constraints for small businesses.

Question

What constrains small business growth and expansion in your town specifically or in Massachusetts generally? (check all that apply)

Responses*

Massachusetts "Blue" laws | 2
Unskilled available workforce | 9
Local regulations | 14
State regulations | 16
Limited available workforce | 18
Other | 19
Lack of public water | 24
Limited customer base | 30
Lack of public sewer | 31
Lack of broadband | 38

Top “Other” identified:
- Transportation/Lack of Highway access (5)
- Local regulations (3)
- Location of community (2)
- Lack of or cost of housing (2)
- Too much state-owned land (2)
- Lack of space for businesses (2)

* Of the 226 responses submitted
Percent of local tax revenue from non-residential properties is relatively small.

**Question**
What percent of your local property tax revenue comes from non-residential sources? (select one)

**Responses**
- Less than 5%: 16%
- 5% to 25%: 31%
- 26% and over: 43%
- Don't know: 10%

**Question**
Have the number of businesses and/or percent of local tax revenue from registered businesses declined in the last 10 years? (select one)

**Responses**
- Don't know: 33%
- Yes: 27%
- No: 27%

* Of the 87 responses submitted

** Of the 101 responses submitted
So now what?

- Commission has identified three short-term goals:
  - Understand DEP regulations and options for water and sewer expansion in rural areas
  - Research and emulate national models for rural service delivery and funding
  - Work with the Rural Caucus and other rural advocacy groups to advocate and collaborate on shared priorities, e.g. short-term residential regulations

More information about the work of the RPAC is available at: www.mass.gov/hed/economic/eohed/dhcd/rural-policy-advisory-commission.html