



GREATER LOWELL
STRONGER TOGETHER
 2025-2030 COMPREHENSIVE
 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



2025 GREATER LOWELL ECONOMIC SUMMIT

THURSDAY • MARCH 20

UKG, CROSSPOINT TOWERS
900 CHELMSFORD STREET, LOWELL

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Build Session Topics

	Resilient Places and Networks	Economy 2.0: The New Paradigm	Regional Collaboration on Wicked Problems
	8 am - 10 am	10 am - Noon	1 pm - 3 pm
Business Engagement and Development	Future of Business Parks	LINC and Emerging Industries	Business Attraction and Retention
Municipal Capacity	Rural and Small-Town Economies	Leveraging State Funding, including LEADS	Infrastructure: Water, Sewer, Energy
Strong Places and Towns	Downtown Lowell	Town, City, and Neighborhood Main Streets	Arts, Culture, and Outdoor Recreation
Worker and Resident Support	Cars, Transit, and Active Transportation	Workforce Development	The Intersection of Economy and Housing

Top Strategies at a Glance

Business Engagement and Development

- [Future of Business Parks](#)
 - **Address business park vacancy by strengthening recruitment efforts, expanding financial tools for retrofits, and creating teaming between local Economic Development Organizations, planners, and utilities to close deals.**
 - **Create a financial support product for commercial to commercial retrofits.** There are state financial incentives for commercial to residential redevelopment, but no incentives for retrofitting existing buildings for different types of commercial uses.
 - **Improve upstream relationships and sourcing of tenants/firms.** Develop upstream relationships with brokers and the state of Massachusetts to coordinate the process of identifying and connecting with potential tenants. This relationship should work two-ways: (1) the state and brokers should understand the current site availability and potential desires; and (2) an entity in the region should understand the statewide site selection process and typical needs brokers are requesting on behalf of firms.
 - **Regional and local teaming to close on deals.** Historically, many potential tenants have exited the process of locating at a business park because of a host of issues. Many of these deals have been lost in the region because of factors like zoning, redevelopment cost, infrastructure (electrification, water, wastewater, etc.), and environmental mitigation. A team of planners, business park representatives, economic development officials, and infrastructure companies could help facilitate the process to close deals.
 - **Enhance zoning flexibility to allow mixed-use and innovative business park models,** e.g. MBTA Communities Act complaint zoning to allow for residential alongside commercial zoning.
- [Lowell Innovation Network Corridor \(LINC\) and Emerging Industries](#)
 - **Position LINC as a high-tech hub with a strong focus on talent and business attraction.**
 - **More frequent town halls or public communication.** Excitement for LINC is evident, but questions around project timeline and phases of the effort can create a sense of uncertainty about the effort. More widely sharing less sensitive information about the project could ease concerns or help those who will be affected by the construction and phases of the project plan to support the LINC effort and minimize disruption.
 - **Connectivity between LINC and small businesses in Lowell.** The LINC project could bring immense benefits outside of the development of LINC, including spending and connectivity to the Acre and Downtown Lowell. LINC

workers will bring increased income and spending to the area, and the capture of that spending could expand beyond LINC with better connectivity to downtown and the Acre, via safe pedestrian sidewalks, crosswalks, and possible shuttle service.

- **Leverage LINC for industry and workforce growth.** Launch a business recruitment campaign targeting life sciences, tech, and manufacturing firms. Establish a workforce pipeline program with UMass Lowell and local training centers.
- [Business Attraction and Retention](#)
 - **Support business attraction and retention efforts by acting as willing partners and assisting businesses through technical assistance and monitoring business needs.**
 - **Attraction: Agile permitting and concierge service provided by towns to streamline development and business permitting processes.** Take a coordinated “everyone in one room” approach to assist businesses with development and new business permitting. Minimize surprises for businesses by assisting companies that are navigating political processes or approval boards.
 - **Attraction: Partner with Commonwealth on the Business Front Door program.** Massachusetts operates and is piloting a statewide concierge service; a regional version could gain from lessons learned with this program, and supplement the statewide effort with region-specific programming.
 - **Attraction: Articulate zoning uses so less discretionary review.** Within this strategy, NMCOG has a role to support towns by providing technical assistance, helping communities understand best practices from throughout the region, and creating local permitting guides.
 - **Retention: Dedicated Costar/MLS tracking for upcoming lease expirations, matched with a business calling program.** This could eliminate surprise moves from businesses. Often, the municipalities are the last to know when a key business is going to terminate its lease and move.

Municipal Capacity

- [Rural and Small-Town Economies](#)
 - **Work to create codified regional economic development efforts through the hiring of a regional Economic Development Director.**
 - The hiring of a regional economic development director that works on behalf of smaller towns. This position can be collectively paid for by municipalities that lack capacity for their own leadership.
 - This employee can take on regional site selection, marketing, Main St. development, and more.

- Coordinating marketing and placemaking efforts across all towns.
 - Monthly economic development meetings between all NMCOG municipalities.
 - This work can bring much-needed capacity, economic development “wins”, and tax revenue to towns that lack the resources to take on economic development themselves.
- [Leveraging State Funding, including LEADS](#)
 - **Close in on 2-3 regional priorities that numerous stakeholders can agree on.**
These priorities can be formed through:
 - Robust communication and alignment with employers, local governments, elected officials, and civic leaders,
 - Regional visioning sessions that prioritize a bold vision for the future,
 - Creating an existing public-private economic development coalition that is prepared to aggressively pursue the fulfilment of these priorities and corresponding goals.
 - **These priorities can be used to:**
 - Better pursue state and federal grant opportunities as they come out,
 - Track funding opportunities over time to gauge the region’s competitiveness,
 - Guide local and regional planning efforts, from comprehensive to topic-specific plans.
 - **Potential Priorities listed for consideration include:**
 - Maintaining regional affordability,
 - Talent retention,
 - Stronger governments,
 - Competitive industries.
- [Infrastructure: Water, Sewer, Energy](#)
 - **Establish creative, usable business attraction, retention, and expansion incentives that accommodate the challenges municipalities face with infrastructure development, modernization, and expansion.** Ideas for achieving this include:
 - Use District Improvement Financing (DIF) at the municipal level, especially in small towns that struggle with infrastructure development,
 - Use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to provide a break to firms or developers who must pay for their own infrastructure,
 - Work with National Grid to forecast regional energy demand based on economic development projects in the pipeline,
 - Explore a more regional, collaborative approach to infrastructure development - following the lead of towns along the Cape,
 - Get strong representation from utility providers at community meetings to connect-the-dots between utility needs and business attraction and retention projects,

- Work with local and regional wastewater, water, and sewer utilities to address barriers and maintenance issues, including expansion, addressing Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs), and contamination of Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Strong Places and Towns

- [Downtown Lowell](#)
 - **Start with the basics: Improve sidewalk, safety and movement infrastructure** to make the experience of moving through downtown Lowell more accessible and pleasant.
 - Create outdoor green spaces that are vibrant and inviting to residents and tourists.
 - Make parking adjustments.
 - Increase services for unhoused population.
 - **Create or expand upon an existing one-stop centralized information hub that provides local residents with information about the suite of events happening in and around downtown Lowell.**
 - **Cultivate a culture of exploration** across downtown Lowell through targeted space activations to increase density and a sense of wonder and dynamism.
 - **Tell and broadcast a better and more positive story** of what Downtown Lowell has to offer.
 - **Raise funds for these improvements and programs through:**
 - **Business Improvement District,**
 - **Parking Benefit District,**
 - **District Improvement Financing (DIF).**
- [Town, City, and Neighborhood Main Streets](#)
 - **Create or expand upon an existing information sharing platform that exchanges key event information between consumers and business owners.**
 - An events calendar would help to **create a cross-Greater Lowell regional identity** and encourage **organizations to collaborate.**
 - Lean into traditional methods of communication that are working.
 - Residents need **better public transportation infrastructure** to get to main streets to encourage participation:
 - Transit,
 - Microtransit/Mobility as a service,
 - Sidewalks,
 - Bike paths.
 - There's a need for **education and expectations around parking.**
 - Need to re-frame parking mindset.

- “Just because you can’t get parking in front of a business shouldn’t impede you from getting to know the area!”
 - **Develop “third spaces” – businesses and community spaces – in suburban town and neighborhood centers that appeal to younger audiences.**
 - Suburban Main Streets aren’t seen locally as a community space for residents in their 20s and 30s, even when they have businesses that appeal to those age groups.
 - There needs to be a greater emphasis on serving **residents in the 20-40 age range** in suburban town and neighborhood centers, including more businesses and community spaces that appeal to that age range.
 - Towns can share more information about their young-adult-oriented business and community spaces through **social media**.
- [Arts, Culture, and Outdoor Recreation](#)
 - **Increase visibility of vibrant arts, culture and outdoor recreation assets throughout the region.**
 - **Create or expand upon a centralized information hub and calendar for arts, culture and outdoor recreation events** to share information with residents and market events.
 - Create or expand upon an existing **central calendar digital application** where community members can submit and post events.
 - **Leverage community organization connections** to apply for shared grants and share funding opportunities.

Worker and Resident Support

- [Cars, Transit, and Active Transportation](#)
 - **Create better last-mile connections.**
 - Analyze transit access and network connectivity between homes and jobs.
 - Ensure transportation options allow for workers to access jobs via transit.
 - Develop cross-town connections, rather than hub and spoke; consider shuttles or direct forms of connection; and build from existing links.
 - **Leverage transportation and multi-modal transit for placemaking.**
 - **Inspire regional collaboration on transportation issues related to:**
 - Sidewalk projects ,
 - Bikeshare,
 - Transit,
 - Microtransit/Mobility as a service,
 - Trailways,
 - On-street bike facilities.
 - **This effort requires transparency, communication, and coordination:**
 - Creation a regional transportation dashboard.

- Coordinate efforts among towns.
 - Conduct intensive interviews with users, companies, educational institutions, and transportation operators.
 - More closely align MassDOT programs.
 - Understand, make progress, and report to the public on goals, including tracking MassDOT projects in a clear and easy-to-understand way.
- [Workforce Development](#)
 - **Expand programs that enhance connection, coordination, and communication among workforce providers, educational institutions, and businesses.**
 - This is the most critical activity to undertake as a region, with defense as one industry, but not the only industry, to potentially target.
 - Assess gaps in what businesses need and what workforce institutions provide.
 - Include UMass Lowell, Middlesex Community College, secondary education, and other educational institutions along with traditional workforce training programs.
 - **Continue manufacturing training programs and support for companies.**
 - The Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC) has been a successful model for workforce development in the manufacturing sector and should be continued and supported.
 - **Develop and expand training for the culture of job training and the workplace.**
 - Due to diverse lived experiences and ages, many underemployed people who could be brought into the workforce may need assistance learning how, for example, to job seek and comport one's self in interviews and job fairs.
 - Employers may also need education or assistance on how to anticipate and work with people adjusting to American or modern work culture.
- [The Intersection of Economy and Housing](#)
 - **Use more form-based zoning and neighborhood-level mixed-use development to drive housing density and development.** Tools and ideas for accomplishing this effort include:
 - Achieving zoning reforms at the local level,
 - Education planners and zoning officials on regional goals and how to accomplish them,
 - Setting regional priorities and goals for planning outcomes that go beyond town level,
 - Aggregating sites and planning for their development, making them shovel-ready,
 - Engaging the public and local leaders through participatory planning (i.e. charrettes),
 - Developing municipal support for broader regional goals,

- Establishing creative incentives that catalyze churn in the housing market, such as a downsizing incentive for empty-nesters who own a single-family home.

Detailed Notes

8:00am - Future of Business Parks

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we revitalize the region's commercial and industrial parks to jumpstart redevelopment opportunities and economic growth?
 - **Address high vacancy rates** in business parks by **modernizing infrastructure** and **adapting spaces to current market needs**.
 - **Develop** strategies to **attract new tenants**, including incentives for commercial-to-commercial conversions.
 - **Improve regional coordination** to **market the Greater Lowell area** as a competitive business destination.
- **Who worked on this?**
 - Real estate development
 - Economic planning agencies
 - Utility providers (National Grid, Eversource)
 - Local businesses and business park landlords
 - Representatives from municipalities in Greater Lowell
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - Rezoning efforts: Some business parks are being converted into mixed-use spaces, including residential developments.
 - Incremental renovations: Some buildings are being retrofitted for new uses, but at high costs.
 - State and local initiatives: Efforts like the Massachusetts Business Front Door Initiative aim to support businesses in finding suitable spaces.
- **What has been the impact?**
 - Increased office space vacancies due to remote work trends and shifting tenant needs.
 - Older buildings struggle to meet modern business needs (e.g., electrical capacity, HVAC, flexible workspaces).
 - Companies move within the region rather than attracting new businesses from outside Greater Lowell.
 - Financial strain on property owners due to rising costs of renovations and lower property valuations.
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - Lack of targeted funding for commercial property redevelopment (most incentives favor residential conversions).

- Infrastructure constraints, including sewer capacity, water supply, and electrical grid limitations.
- Outdated building stock, making it difficult to attract tenants needing modern office or industrial facilities.
- Inconsistent regional strategy, with municipalities competing for businesses instead of collaborating to bring new investment to the area.
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**
(think new program, additional funding or capacity, etc)
 - State-backed incentives for commercial-to-commercial conversions (similar to housing incentives).
 - Public-private partnerships to modernize infrastructure (water, sewer, electricity, and transit).
 - Flexible zoning policies to allow for adaptive reuse of vacant properties.
 - Improved marketing and outreach to attract businesses from outside Greater Lowell.
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Infrastructure Investment – Address utility capacity issues and improve transportation connectivity.
 - Business Attraction & Retention – Develop regional strategies to position Lowell as a business-friendly hub.
 - Flexible Space Design – Support conversion of existing spaces into hybrid work-friendly, light industrial, or R&D spaces.
- **Top Strategy/Actions**
 - **Create a financial support product for commercial to commercial retrofits.** There are state financial incentives for commercial to residential redevelopment, but no incentives for retrofitting existing buildings for different types of commercial uses.
 - **Improve upstream relationships and sourcing of tenants/firms.** Develop upstream relationships with brokers and the state of Massachusetts to coordinate the process of identifying and connecting with potential tenants. This relationship should work two-ways: (1) the state and brokers should understand the current site availability and potential desires; and (2) an entity in the region should understand the statewide site selection process and typical needs brokers are requesting on behalf of firms.
 - **Regional and local teaming to close on deals.** Historically, many potential tenants have exited the process of locating at a business park because of a host of issues. Many of these deals have been lost in the region because of factors like zoning, redevelopment cost, infrastructure (electrification, water, wastewater, etc.). A team of planners, business park representatives, economic development officials, and infrastructure companies could help facilitate the process to close deals.
 - **Enhance zoning flexibility to allow mixed-use and innovative business park models,** e.g. MTBA zoning to allow for residential alongside commercial zoning.

- **Outcomes**

- Reduced vacancy rates in industrial and business parks.
- Increased investment in the Greater Lowell region.
- Stronger business ecosystem with a mix of office, R&D, and advanced manufacturing tenants.
- More sustainable, modernized business parks that align with future economic trends.

8:00am - Downtown Lowell

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we activate Downtown Lowell to improve quality of life and catalyze broader economic improvements in the area?
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - Anti-Litter Efforts
 - City Effort to expand downtown core & broader downtown Lowell
 - Lowell Forward Plan
 - Dynamic arts scene
 - Festivals, cultural events
 - Mill City Grows + theater
 - City provides tax deals to restaurants to provide extra support
- **What has been the impact?**
 - Increased/Increasing unhoused population
 - Residents have learned to have a negative self-image of Lowell
 - Low cost of Living is a key strength!
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - There are visual barriers, connectivity, disjointed, result of evaluation of city property
 - Downtown Lowell can feel disconnected and lacking a comprehensive theme
 - Restaurant turnover increasing
 - There are missing things to do in Downtown Lowell for mid-30s population
 - Young people are leaving
 - Transportation to and through downtown are a challenge
 - Adequate Parking
 - Young people aren't deciding to stay
 - There's a lack of sports bars, breweries and social spaces
 - Downtown activations aren't sustained
 - Sidewalk infrastructure, lighting, welcoming green spaces
 - Trash pickup
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**

(think new program, additional funding or capacity, etc)

 - Increase proliferation of tiny homes
 - Add in residential units - and additional supports (ie. grocery stores)
 - Finding and retaining employment bases
 - Create live, work, play hubs across downtown
 - Improve downtown transportation, and improving parking infrastructure
 - Expand lunchtime opportunities and spaces for employees and visitors who frequent downtown mid-day
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**

- Cultivate a culture of exploration across downtown Lowell
- Create outdoor green spaces that are vibrant and inviting
- Increase density and spontaneity through downtown activations
- Create housing options for working families
- Tell a better story of what Downtown Lowell has to offer
- **Top Strategy**
 - Create a one-stop centralized information hub that broadcasts downtown events and information to local residents
- **Tactical Actions**
 - Create a digital application that's broadly accessible
 - Work with local partners and event platforms to connect existing information channels
 - Make information easy to find, and access through coordinated and targeted outreach
 - Empower an economic development coordinator
 - Create a Business Improvement District
 - Raise funds through Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or District Improvement Financing (DIF)
 - Generate revenue through a Parking Benefit District
- **Outcomes**
 - Cultivate a shared regional identity
 - Keep and build community vibrance
 - Gathering knowledge on what models do or do not work
 - Connecting information to everyday people

8:00am - Rural and Small-Town Economies

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we create economic development tools and programs that work for all municipalities?
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - Collaborative multi-town group focused on sports tourism development
 - Connecting farmers and farms to small business resources and purchasers
 - Better programs for funding energy efficiency and infrastructure
 - Funding for developing projects-have rural communities
 - Zoning that attracts new development in smaller towns
 - Tourism-focused initiatives
 - Local economic development committees
 - Look to NMCOG for assistance-there's not much affordable housing and are working to get up to 5% affordable housing
 - Getting more people involved
 - Surveying businesses to better understand barriers and divides-residents want economic development
 - Destination Groton-Wanted to understand the positive and negative impacts of retail development in order to alleviate tax burdens
 - Nonprofits connect the local businesses and community
 - Collaboration is really strong
 - 250th anniversary celebrations-opportunity to promote the town
- **What has been the impact?**
 - economic development is done by volunteers in small towns
 - Better tourism marketing
 - Greater regional collaboration
 - Elected officials and legislators feel ready to work together
 - Increase in agri-tourism
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - Funding
 - Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) efforts
 - Capacity for local governments to do economic development
 - Diverse revenue streams in small towns
 - For some communities there is a stigma against them-is a challenge to bring in funding and opportunity
 - Housing affordability
 - Volunteers can only do so much-need an economic director, but cannot pay the salary
 - Overall a capacity issue

- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**
 - Expanded public transit
 - Partnerships between restaurants and other organizations so people know what is in the town
 - Want the downtown to be more pedestrian friendly and aesthetically pleasing
 - More interconnectivity
 - State regulations related to parking spaces-deters some businesses from getting approval
 - Dunstable working on a business directory-very expensive to redo the website (Need a regional web service)
 - Similar idea for a regional website for ecotourism
 - Marketing and branding
 - Commercial kitchen-can partner with an education system and bring in younger generation
 - Foster stronger connection to city of Lowell
 - Challenge finding the volunteer to do the work
 - A regional recreation partnership
 - Bigger marketing of the 250th anniversary of the US
 - Pedestrian friendly town centers and Main Streets
 - Expedited permitting processes
 - Cost-sharing for economic development across towns
 - Better regional marketing of small towns
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Increased economic development capacity for localities
 - Better regional connectivity on economic development and budgeting
 - Regionalization will have a greater impact than isolated community work
 - Working to build out stronger communities - placemaking i.e. restaurants, community hubs, bike paths, wayfinding, and more
- **Top Strategy**
 - Build stronger community assets
- **Tactical Actions**
 - Put more funding into place branding and marketing - regionally fund this, create a collaborative
 - Have a regional head of economic development / chamber of commerce / placemaking that works on behalf of small towns
 - Task force for each community
 - Need to stand out when applying for grants-need to catch attention
 - Partner with City of Lowell on all economic development efforts - NMCOG can help centralize the smaller towns
 - Have monthly economic development meetings across all towns
- **Outcomes**

- Need more momentum for population growth, housing, and economic development
- Stop siloing economic development efforts at the local level
- Need more businesses and residents to capture tax revenue

8:00am - Cars, Transit, and Active Transportation

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we better align regional transportation assets with the daily needs of workers?
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - Unreliable regional transit - routes, scheduling, funding challenges
 - Lack of drivers - better job opportunities elsewhere
 - Road Runner Service, LRTA
 - Fare-free service for the next year in the LRTA
 - Schedule is back to pre-pandemic, drivers have not increased
 - Traffic challenges
 - Increased congestion
 - Driver behavior patterns changing
 - Challenging traffic patterns leading to reduced use of multimodal transit
 - Bruce Freeman Rail Trail
 - General transportation improvement projects
 - Rourke Bridge
 - Need more communication about these projects
 - State routes
 - Challenges with Route 38 in Tewksbury - lights being redone but causing chaos during construction
 - Other infrastructure improvements to address congestion rates
 - Commuter Rail - Lowell to Boston connection
- **What has been the impact?**
 - Increased LRTA ridership increasing due to free fare, post pandemic levels
 - Increased ridership into Boston on the Commuter Rail
 - Issues with Greater Boston transit impacting the Lowell Region - no effective way to get around Boston due to hub and spoke model (arrive at North Station - then need to go out from there to reach employment - no direct way to access attractions)
 - Challenges with travel time (2+ hours)
 - Increased travel time in cars - all day congestion
 - Lengthened peak traffic
 - Lost predictability of traffic patterns
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - Access to other communities in the Greater Boston Area
 - Commuter rail
 - Want to make Lowell a hub - stops up along route 3
 - Gaps in transit connections to Woburn, etc

- Regular headways in Lowell - hub and spoke model (is not working)
- Street trees
- Access to/from Downtown Lowell to rail trails - defined bicycle lines, connectivity gaps for commuting and recreation
 - Bruce Freeman Rail Trail gaps to Downtown Lowell/ Gallagher Terminal
 - Bikeshare gap - there used to be one but all the bikes got stolen and program got pulled
- Bridge quality and congestion in/out of Lowell
 - Rourke Bridge
 - in/out of Dracut, MA
 - Don't have sufficient connection across the Merrimack for walking - not enough bridges and quality is a barrier, people are not comfortable with crossing them
- Whipple Rd in Tewksbury
 - No sidewalks
- Residents don't know about projects or updates, want information
- Fare Free LRTA - what happens when that peters out?
 - People depend on fare free
 - Seeking funding and stability
 - Will the drivers be there in the future?
- Getting to and through Lowell
 - Transit seems to stop at the NH border - huge barrier!
- No carshare
 - Non-profit, better than zipcar? (Chris Hayes)
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**
 - Transportation Dashboard - project portal for community members
 - Submit questions
 - Project dashboard
 - Communication!!
 - Demystifying the Transportation Improvement Program
 - Developing friendly regulations
 - Bikeshare!
 - Carshare!
 - Partnership with MassDOT for improved Bike/Ped facilities
 - Note from notetaker: NMCOG has launched a Bike/Ped plan, studying current conditions and establishing project areas
 - More community input
 - Regional partnerships to pursue more and improved grant funding
 - Better coordination and funding for regional transit
 - Save money with smaller vehicles (?)

- Improve off-road multimodal infrastructure (bike/ped) between NMCOG communities and out of the region
- Stated mode shift - moving people out of cars and into multi-modal transit
 - Vision Zero goals
 - Complete streets goals
- Coordination between neighboring towns
 - Regional coordination
 - Maintenance programs
 - Communication between departments of public works
 - Resident commuter plans
 - Bus routes
 - Sidewalks
 - Getting people to town center through multimodal transportation
- Opportunities for high schools to partner with the towns - experience transportation jobs
 - Learning about transportation planning, civil engineering, safety projects, etc
 - Workforce cultivation
- Walking and bike route maps
 - Town attractions and open space
 - How to get there within your communities and how to get to that space in other communities through multimodal transportation
- Marketing for initiatives
 - Bike positive Merrimack Valley campaigns
 - "Live free and ride"
 - Public transportation week
 - Bike week
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Time constraint - focused on one strategy for the last 10 minutes of the session
- **Top Strategy**
 - Closing the gap on connections together
 - Between major transportation hubs, stations, etc
 - Within the region and connecting the region to other hubs
- **Tactical Actions**
 - Sidewalk projects
 - Bikeshare
 - Public transit
 - Better timing, increased frequency
 - Establishing a connection
 - eg: experience of walking east to catch a bus going west
 - Trailways
 - On-street bike facilities

- Communication, collaboration with the LRTA
 - With towns, communicating what their needs are
 - Reevaluation of current routes
- Knowledge about our hubs of density
- Interview/focus groups with companies and communities on the impact of bike/car share
 - Learn how to increase across the Lowell Region
 - Large employers as a stakeholder
- Interview current stakeholders
 - Transit rider surveys
 - Transportation companies - LRTA, MBTA, Roadrunner Service Providers, etc
 - Town governments - planning board
 - MPOs (NMCOG) - bike/ped plan
- Understanding funding, property ownership
- Resources on projects
- **Outcomes - how would we know if we're successful?**
 - Ridership data
 - Reduced number of cars on the roads
 - "There's a feeling and a sensation when you go to a city that has consideration for people who aren't driving - you sense that friendliness, you get the feeling that people enjoy using the city."
 - College kids getting out of UMass Lowell into downtown
 - Increase in eateries/shops - general economic development of other businesses around the stations
 - Reevaluating the assumptions of our public transportation network

10:00am - LINC and Emerging Industries

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**How might we build attractive commercial and industrial assets that grow our existing and emerging industry clusters?
 - Leverage LINC (Lowell Innovation Network Corridor) and the Hamilton Canal Innovation District to attract high-growth industries.
 - Improve infrastructure, incentives, and zoning policies to accommodate key industry needs.
 - Strengthen connections between UMass Lowell, R&D facilities, and local businesses to drive innovation.
 - Ensure new developments are designed to support biotech, life sciences, technology, and advanced manufacturing.
- **Who worked on this?**
 - Economic development professionals.
 - Real estate developers and landlords.
 - Representatives from UMass Lowell and innovation hubs.
 - Industry leaders in life sciences, biotech, and tech.
 - City and regional planning officials.
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - LINC is an \$800 million project designed to create a high-density commercial and residential hub in Lowell.
 - State incentives for life sciences and manufacturing are available but underutilized.
 - UMass Lowell's Innovation Hub (IHUB) is fostering startup growth but is not fully integrated with LINC.
 - Some infrastructure improvements (roads, utilities, transit) are planned but face funding challenges.
- **What has been the impact?**
 - Growing interest from industry leaders, but challenges remain in securing major tenants.
 - Concerns over infrastructure readiness, including power supply, transportation access, and water/sewer capacity.
 - Disconnect between developers, businesses, and workforce needs, making it harder to align industry growth with available talent.
 - Potential economic spillover effects from LINC to downtown Lowell are unclear—some fear the development may be too self-contained.
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - Uncertainty in project timelines: Businesses are hesitant to commit without clear construction and move-in dates.
 - Lack of industry-specific infrastructure: Power, lab space, and flexible office layouts need upgrades.

- Housing for workforce: More affordable and workforce housing is needed to support industry growth.
- Stronger industry collaboration: LINC needs more engagement from biotech, tech, and advanced manufacturing leaders.
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**
(think new program, additional funding or capacity, etc)
 - Expand infrastructure investments to ensure LINC can support high-energy-use industries.
 - Provide targeted financial incentives for companies in emerging industries to locate within LINC.
 - Strengthen collaboration with UMass Lowell to retain graduates and attract R&D investment.
 - Develop clear transportation and housing plans to make LINC an attractive destination for top talent.
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Infrastructure & Utility Readiness – Ensuring LINC has the power, water, and transit capacity to support advanced industries.
 - Industry-Specific Incentives – Creating tailored financial and policy incentives for life sciences, biotech, and tech.
 - Workforce Development & Retention – Expanding training programs to connect UMass Lowell graduates with industry needs.
 - Urban Connectivity – Ensuring LINC integrates with downtown Lowell and the Hamilton Canal District.
- **Top Strategy**
 - Position LINC as a high-tech hub with a strong focus on infrastructure, talent, and business attraction.
- **Tactical Actions**
 - **More frequent town halls or public communication.** Excitement for LINC is evident, but questions around project timeline and phases of the effort can create a sense of uncertainty about the effort. More widely sharing less sensitive information about the project could ease concerns or help those who will be affected by the construction and phases of the project plan to support the LINC effort and minimize disruption.
 - **Connectivity between LINC and small businesses in Lowell.** The LINC project could bring immense benefits outside of the development of LINC, including connectivity to The Acre and Downtown Lowell. LINC workers will bring increased income and spending to the area, and the capture of that spending could expand beyond LINC with better connectivity to downtown and the Acre, via safe pedestrian sidewalks and crosswalks, and possibility of shuttle service.
 - Secure state and federal funding for infrastructure upgrades.

- Launch a business recruitment campaign targeting life sciences, tech, and manufacturing firms.
- Establish a workforce pipeline program with UMass Lowell and local training centers.
- Incentivize mixed-use development to create live-work-play environments that attract talent.
- **Outcomes**
 - More businesses committed to LINC, boosting economic activity in Lowell.
 - A stronger ecosystem for biotech, life sciences, and advanced manufacturing.
 - Improved infrastructure and connectivity, supporting long-term business growth.
 - A highly skilled workforce pipeline, retaining local talent and attracting outside investment.

10:00am - Town, City, and Neighborhood Main Streets

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we best support the region's numerous small businesses and main streets?
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - What are we defining as downtown/Main Streets?
 - Loose sense
 - Town centers
 - Areas of attraction
 - Where are downtown/Main Streets - what are we
 - Merrimack St (Lowell)
 - Cambodiatown (Lowell)
 - Railroad Sq (Pepperell)
 - Main St corridor
 - Now a rail trail (about 1.5 miles)
 - Not considered a green space
 - Connects to Nashua
 - Standout businesses: ice cream shop, gluten free bakery, fishing store, mom and pop stores, package store, etc
 - In Chelmsford - Vinal Square, Chelmsford Center
 - Old town hall converted into Chelmsford Center for the Arts
 - Connections to Bruce Freeman Rail Trail
 - Getting information from word of mouth and social media
 - Get help, give advice
 - Newsletters (email - mostly, physical)
 - Getting information from work
 - Lowell Sun
 - Group events
 - Brewery runs - group social events with the Bruce Freeman Trail
 - Biking groups - Lowell cyclists
 - People going outside and doing activities - when you go outside and interact with downtown areas and town centers, you're interacting with and buying things
 - Sighting businesses at/around trails
 - How to connect to downtown?
 - Primary malls in the area - Burlington mall
 - Mixed use space
 - Places people are going have clear established identity and walkability
- **What has been the impact?**

- People's brains are wired to what they're looking for, they already know how to find what they need
 - wants/needs vary across where you live, walkability, etc
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - What does Boston have that Lowell doesn't?
 - Nightlife, entertainment
 - Third spaces - people want to go to downtown and main streets for social events, spend time outside of home/work
 - Tyngsborough and Tewksbury have "main st" corridors but lack walkability and connection - things are very spread out
 - No "business" clump
 - Makes it hard to find an identity
 - Storefronts up to the streetscape
 - Parking is taking over - a lot of "walking through parking lots" to get to business, turn off for purchasing power
 - Region lacks identity, people don't connect and talk to each other within the region
 - People don't know what there is to offer
 - Lowell people leave for different reasons (megastore visits, etc), people from outside don't come in to experience what Lowell has to offer
 - Need better public transportation
 - Social media - tool?
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**

(think new program, additional funding or capacity, etc)

 - Tewksbury - working through the town Masterplan
 - Need better public transportation
 - Transit
 - Sidewalks
 - Bike paths
 - There's a reward for using this infrastructure, you don't go to get ice cream, you go on a bike ride and happen to get ice cream
 - Parking education
 - Need to re-frame parking mindset
 - Just because you can't get parking in front of a business shouldn't impede you from getting to know the area!
 - Issue in Chelmsford, Pepperell
 - Attracting the 20s-30s age range
 - Getting information from social media
 - Cultural issue - not a community space for the 20s and 30s that aren't small families
 - Why don't we communicate more between communities?
 - How do we play nice?

- We don't need to compete - everywhere has a uniqueness, how to develop it?
 - Even within communities - small businesses don't communicate
 - Identity establishment
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Information sharing between consumers and business owners
 - Are there organizations doing that now?
 - Pepperell and other communities grouping together with commerce chambers to fund a website/app for ecotourism
 - Small business association
 - Parking mentality change
- **Top Strategy**
 - Information sharing between consumers and business owners
 - Are there organizations doing that now?
 - Pepperell and other communities grouping together with commerce chambers (Central Mass, Nashoba) to fund a website/app for ecotourism (Small Town Collaborative)
 - Small business association
 - Connecting these information sites together
 - Merrimack Valley Tourism App - geared to people outside the region, not to people who live in the area
 - These are competing ideas
- **Tactical Actions**
 - Events calendar - everyone started their own, we need to work less in silos
 - Power in working together
 - Need someone to coordinate this - NMCOG?
 - Regionalization
 - Need funding - have to do it within the communities, makes it a challenge
 - Need to establish a regional identity
 - Different definitions of the region exist, they're competing
 - NMCOG taskforce for tourism and regionalism?
 - Feeling of siloed
 - Traditional methods of communication are good
 - Chamber model may be a barrier to small businesses - cost prohibitive
 - For Small Town Collaborative - it's no cost to the community or business to be involved, promoting all the businesses in the Collaborative geography
 - Address time and money challenges
 - Organizations unclear what they do - are they just sitting on money?
- **Outcomes**
 - Shared regional identity
 - Keep and build the communities robust and vibrant

- Vibrance = people out and about, out to eat, people not complaining about parking
- General statement strategies - What models have worked for other communities? What are the mistakes and successes we can learn from?
- BUILD CONNECTION AND COMMUNICATION
- Focus on locals, people who live here - start with people who are geographically close
- Overlap with arts and culture
- Funding/local revenue
 - Parking benefit district
 - Business improvement district
 - District Improvement Financing (DIF)

10:00am - Leveraging State Funding, including LEADS

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we better position the region to receive state funding relevant to economic development, infrastructure, housing, and more?
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - LINC
 - Greater investments in key industries, such as life sciences and manufacturing
 - UMass Lowell has been getting funding and is a gateway city-get incentives for multifamily housing
 - MassTech hub development
 - Support for renewable energy and clean tech
 - Additional funding for housing development, specifically mixed-use
 - The creation of a Business Front Door at the state level for businesses to use
 - NMCOG is an asset for towns looking to understand state funding opportunities
 - Dunstable received a Rural Development Fund grant from the state
 - Healey focused on economic stimulus to the state economy
 - Support renewable energy and life science industries
 - Infrastructure-Housing and transportation
 - Support general economic development
 - -Anything related to development is on the table
- **What has been the impact?**
 - The state system is built to support some municipalities and regions more than others
 - Regional planning groups and NMCOG's struggle to be visionary planners for the future
 - Communities have to strictly follow state regulations, limiting creativity
 - Regions have to fall in line w/ the state's economic agenda
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - Better regional collaboration and economic development infrastructure
 - No coordination w/ UMass Lowell, who is a big recipient of state grants as a public institution
 - Home rule-every town is doing their own thing-it's hard to coordinate
 - Hyperlocal mindset
 - Towns and cities are not a one size fits all-some will not be able to get everything
 - Everyone is trying to figure out things in isolation, rather than as a region
 - Potential for huge savings if we consolidate
 - Systematic problems
 - Difficult to navigate clean energy world and navigate the funding
 - Many roadblocks-people doing the work have a difficult time

- Power grid is strained
- Tension between state and towns-Towns need to align with what the state wants
- Overregulation
- Consolidated place to find the information
- End user is sometimes already defined for these grants-how to compete?
- NMCOG does not do the implementation-but we may need to think about if that is something we can do
- Threat of federal funding being cut-will make it more competitive
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**
 - Need to better understand the opportunities available for us - clarity at the state level
 - State should dedicate grant funding for regional projects-separate dedicated funding
 - Regionalization-great for some towns, but not others
 - Can NMCOG address two or three priority projects that towns can agree on?
 - A lot of competition-information is kept secret and creates siloing
 - How municipalities plan and welcome development-but because of the structure and systems in suburban communities-at a disadvantage
 - Need to work within these structures-Need to get communities to plan and welcome
 - Towns want different things-but there are still some threat
 - Need better regional marketing, websites, and promotion of priorities
 - Need better housing throughout NMCOG's municipalities
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Regionalism
 - Create strong regional partnerships among communities
 - Develop a singular identity for the region
 - Clearly establish regional priorities
 - Conduct a regional market and infrastructure study
 - Better align on the region's legislative priorities
 - Create a regional group that meets monthly to assess progress on key economic development priorities
 - Lobby for consolidated efforts at the state level to support regional economic development
 - Education
 - More clearly educate businesses and nonprofits on state-level opportunities
 - Create better access to state level resources
- **Top Strategy**
 - Better know regional priorities
- **Tactical Actions**
 - Create a forum or task force for setting and executing on key priorities
 - Establish who is responsible for setting regional priorities
 - Encourage municipalities to welcome new development to the best of their ability

- **Outcomes**
 - UMass works closer with Lowell and small town on regional economic development
 - Implementation actually occurs in small towns
 - There is transparency on the regional pursuit of grants
- **Partners**
 - UMass Lowell - they have the best state connections
 - Towns
 - Civic leaders
- **Cost**
 - Need more implementation capacity in towns
- **Potential Priorities listed**
 - Maintaining regional affordability
 - talent retention
 - stronger governments
 - competitive industries

10:00am - Workforce Development

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we ensure that local residents are set up with a pathway to high-quality, higher-wage jobs in the region?
- **Who worked on this?/ What's Already Happening?**
 - MassHire for Barriers w/ employment
 - MassHire healthcare grant - 2 years
 - MassHire: Behavioral Health - 2 years
 - UMASS Lowell - MCC
 - Lowell H.S - Tech Schools (Shawsheen, Nashioba)
 - Technical High Schools + Young Adults
 - Mass State Workforce Training Grants
 - Job Development for Valley Collaborative
 - Volunteers are a key component of the workforce
 - Top Three Industries in Greater Lowell: Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, IT Tech Sciences
- **What has been the impact?**
 - Define New roles in behavioral health
 - MassHire in wages after getting work
 - Public private investment in LINC project
 - Behavioral Health
 - Empowerment work
 - Low wages, unpaid hours
 - People are getting hired
 - Behavioral health industry is a growing sector in Greater Lowell
 - Moving people off of public benefits into contributors into the system
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - 500 hr unpaid volunteer work requirement to get a certificate in recovery coach
 - Language barriers
 - Move english language learning programs
 - Non traditional 2-3 shift in transportation
 - Not enough english language job training
 - Mass transit non servicing job centers
 - Cultural barriers
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**

(think new program, additional funding or capacity, etc)

 - Rethink hospital translation svcs into jobs - training interpreters
 - More funding for training capacity
 - Digital literacy

- Youth careers
- Expand tech school trades programs
- Childcare
- AI Training how to use it
- Fewer restrictions on labor laws prohibiting volunteering
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Expand Connector Programs
 - Continued manufacturing training programs and support for companies
 - Training for training
- **Top Strategy**
 - Expand Connector Programs
- **Tactical Actions**
 - GAP Assessment
 - Partner UML/MCC w/ MassHire on workforce employer needs
 - Business incubators
 - Easy Method for businesses to engage with agencies/governments
 - Develop training on how to be a supplier to bug business in defense
- **Outcomes**
 - Aligns job training programs with area industries
 - Optimize & streamline MassHire
 - Area has competitive workforce
 - Increased people in the labor pool and/or decrease in unemployment rate

1:00pm - Business Attraction and Retention

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we better collaborate as a region to attract and engage key businesses?
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - Regional Economic Development Orgs - Middlesex 3
 - Tech Hubs strategy - marketing the region's strength for advanced technology
 - Regional planning agency - NMCOG
 - UMass Lowell - provides anchor
 - Tewksbury
 - Technical zoning fix: Business zones to include common topic names/areas of interest; an update of the phrases that were used 10 to 20 years ago
 - Coordinate and capture: Reuse of business space for new companies as one exits
- **What has been the impact?**
 - Workforce training grants
 - Working Capital - Mass LEADS support
 - Local businesses boost one another and support city/regional efforts
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - Municipal constraint: many do not have the budget or capacity to take on an active economic development planning role
 - Zoning uses could change for less discretionary review
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**

(think new program, additional funding or capacity, etc)

 - Better use of Mass Tech Hub Grant Program
 - Effective coordination and redundancies
 - Proper zoning in place?
 - Dedicated economic development business staff?
 - Availability of space/opportunities?
- **Top Strategy**
 - Concierge service provided by towns for various activities, i.e. Development or new business permits – "Everyone in the same room"
- **Tactical Actions**
 - **Support business attraction and retention efforts by acting as willing partners and assisting businesses through technical assistance and monitoring business needs.**
 - **Attraction: Agile permitting and concierge service provided by towns to streamline development and business permitting processes.** Take a coordinated "everyone in one room" approach to assist businesses with

development and new business permitting. Minimize surprises for businesses by assisting companies that are navigating political processes or approval boards.

- **Attraction: Partner with Commonwealth on the Business Front Door program.** Massachusetts operates and is piloting a statewide concierge service; the NMCOG regional version could gain from lessons learned with this program, and supplement the statewide effort with region-specific programming.
- **Attraction: Articulate zoning uses so less discretionary review.** Within this strategy, NMCOG has a role to support towns by providing technical assistance, helping communities understand best practices from throughout the region, and creating local permitting guides.
- **Retention: Dedicated Costar/MLS tracking for upcoming lease expirations, matched with a business calling program.** This could eliminate surprise moves from businesses. Often, the municipalities are the last to know when a key business is going to terminate its lease and move.

- **Outcomes**

- Retention of existing businesses
- Not losing potential business deals because of cumbersome approval process, political reasons, or unresolved permitting.

1:00pm - Arts, Culture, and Outdoor Recreation

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we leverage the area's ample outdoor, arts, and culture assets that matches the unique identity of the region?
- **Who worked on this?**
 - Mill City Grows - Wildlife Conservation
 - Serves over 200 families with farming resources, education & cooking
 - Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust
 - Groton Hills Committee of Performing Arts
 - Destination Groton Committee
 - MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) State Forests
 - Pawtucket Farm Wildlife
 - Mosaic Lowell
 - Arts Elevate
 - Lowell Litter Krewe
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - Vibrant Farmers Markets, Farm Stands & Farm Tourism
 - There are farmers markets available every day in the summer throughout the region
 - Shawsheen River
 - Bay Circuit Trail
 - Middlesex Canal
 - Beautiful Billerica
 - Middlesex Canal
 - Western Ave Studios
 - Open Space Recreation Plan
- **What has been the impact?**
 - Arts, Culture and Outdoor Recreation are underfunded and under prioritized
 - Community Camaraderie
 - Mental, physical and mental health
 - There's a need for youth volunteers
 - Lowell has a strength in the arts, culture and outdoor recreation asset class
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - Arts and culture are broadly underfunded
 - A lot of arts and culture contributions aren't properly recognized
 - Incomplete streets
 - I.e. some trails aren't completed
 - Information sharing and community awareness - residents and community members don't always know what's happening

- Research on gaps on what community needs and broad preferences are
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**
 - (think new program, additional funding or capacity, etc)
 - A central information hub with regional events
 - Deeper community engagement to share events
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Create a centralized information hub and calendar for arts, culture and outdoor recreation events to share information with residents and market events
 - Create a central calendar software where community members can submit and post events
 - Events or specific spaces where artists can perform their art in person
 - Connect trails
- **Top Strategy**
 - Increase Visibility of arts, culture and outdoor recreation assets
- **Tactical Actions**
 - Leverage community organization connections to apply for shared grants and share funding opportunities
 - Translate calendar to the over 70+ languages that are spoken in Greater Lowell
 - Community Arts Tours
 - Creating a central repository for arts & culture events
 - Complete Bay Circuit through Lowell and Billerica
 - Create packaged weekend events for residents and tourists
 - Increased signage in multiple languages
- **Outcomes**
 - Embraced diversity
 - Increased Visibility of arts, culture and outdoor recreation events
 - Increased understanding of how arts, culture and outdoor recreation contributes to economic development
 - Increased sense of belonging
 - Increased community JOY

1:00pm - Infrastructure: Water, Sewer, Energy

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we ensure the region's infrastructure is adequate to attract and accommodate new developments, businesses, and residents?
- **What's Already Happening? / What has been the impact? / What are the gaps?**
 - Energy is becoming more of a problem
 - Tewksbury controls water and sewer
 - National grid is a private provider, say they don't have the capacity to contribute to expanding electricity supplies, etc - long timelines
 - Don't have the load capacity for electrification (moving from carbon-based energy supplies)
 - How can you develop if you don't have an electricity supply?
 - Towns are trying to facilitate economic development - problems with energy
 - Misalignment between market, town priorities, and existing infrastructure
 - Projects are all maintenance
 - Studies alone are cost prohibitive
 - Can't get to answers to address problems in a cost effective manner
 - Clashes between state and local priorities
 - Capacity and infrastructure isn't there
 - How do you measure impact? Opportunities?
 - Getting crossed off lists before you know you're on it.
 - Lead time
 - Lots of hoops to jump through
 - AI energy and data storage demand - electricity demand
 - Wastewater
 - Greater Lowell area (minus Billerica) regional wastewater plan
 - Plant exceeding wastewater capacity
 - Water capacity because of current plant's inability to expand (built on an island)
 - State regulations limit economic ability, also need to meet sustainable environmental regulations
 - This region doesn't have a regional reservoir, water comes from the ground
 - Concerns about what is going into the aquifer in terms of construction and development - PFAS, etc
 - At stormwater and wastewater capacity - Tyngsboro, Chelmsford, Dracut
 - Tewksbury concern about management of stormwater runoff
 - Not enough room to keep stormwater managed off site

- Standards for control measures create a conflict with what people want to see in development - landscape features, building spacing, etc
 - Standards differ for new and re development
 - Runoff into wetlands - "screwing ourselves on another end"
 - Currently in drought
 - All primary pathways to growth are stifled for the time being
 - In a context of a high inflation economy, it's challenging to get community support
 - High water/energy/sewer bills
 - Cost component is significant
 - Current system is inefficient way to provide water supply - nuances of scale and scope
 - Regional water utility might be needed!
 - Towns and then within towns there are multiple water districts
- **What has been the impact?**
 - MA has the highest energy cost in the country, can't compete with other states and regions
 - MA investment into wind/hydropower is fraught, decommissioned working nuclear power plants
 - Businesses cannot expand in local towns and have to consider relocation
- **What are the Gaps?**
 - Other best practices in other parts of MA - regional efforts
 - Potential for infrastructure investment to drive economic development - needs to be at the state level
 - Infrastructure and funding for transitioning to electrical power
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**
 - What is being done in other parts of MA?
 - More regional approach, collaborative - might be out of necessity because of town sizes, needs to be more of this
 - Locals guard autonomy, yet state's initiatives with housing/energy etc, haven't come to fruition because missing regional solution
 - Current scale doesn't work!
 - The power exists, the infrastructure doesn't exist
 - Old systems
 - Need to address AI, multifamily housing, etc development
 - Growing SO FAST that infrastructure costs are on the customer
 - Permitting, easement, staffing challenges
 - Level of investment has gotten worse
 - Utility capacity
 - State is not coming to the table to help municipalities with infrastructure

- Revenue justification - National Grid
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - Stronger business attraction and retention incentives to maintain existing businesses
 - Adopt increased regionalization in water management, energy infrastructure development, and infrastructure development in general.
- **Top Strategy**
 - Stronger business attraction and retention incentives to maintain existing businesses
- **Tactical Actions**
 - National Grid - forecasting
 - Identified top 300 energy users, segmented into regional approaches and trying to “energy finance” as these customers expand
 - Towns themselves don't really see the National Grid reps when they're promised, limited interactions, not a lot of coordination
 - More voices at the table from the municipal level
 - Tewksbury used TIF to retain a business, that business invested the tax savings to expand infrastructure for its expansion
 - Need community managers of utility companies at public meetings that pertain to real estate development and planning
 - Better connect utility providers to local governments and their plans moving forward
- **Partners**
 - Need the state to be a better partner in infrastructure investment
- **Cost**
 - The reality is that the region cannot fund infrastructure modernization and development alone
 - Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding sadly has not had the impact that municipalities hoped for

1:00pm - The Intersection of Economy and Housing

Our group discussed...

- **How might we...**
 - How might we minimize the region's housing shortage to accommodate our region's existing and future workforce?
- **What's Already Happening?**
 - **Preventing More Housing**
 - Restrictive zoning
 - Unpredictable permitting process
 - Cost of construction
 - Concerns regarding parking and traffic
 - Environmental Regulations
 - NIMBY
 - Limited typology of housing
 - Transportation-fear of traffic
 - Vacant/blight discourages development
 - -Being able to utilize those properties-structural integrity is a problem
 - Public support in general
 - Cost of land
 - **What's being done**
 - MBTA Communities Act-creating some housing, but some communities are fighting it or electing paper compliance
 - Education about what housing means for the economy-the public doesn't make the connection
 - Parking reform in Lowell-apartments can use parking garages
 - 40Bs
 - Tiny housing developments for unhoused and low income individuals?
 - -Dover, NH example
 - ADUs permitted under the Affordable Homes Act
 - Communal living
- **What has been the impact?**
 - Stagnant housing production
 - Cost of materials-tariffs will affect that
 - -Cost of net zero-gone up 25%, even though the state predicted 4-5%
 - Risk and predictability is not there
 - Historic tax incentives have helped-for lease product only
 - -50% tax abatement and 10 year opportunity zones
 - Fear of density
 - ADUs
- **What Else Can Be Done/Is Needed?**

- Sewage disposal
- Education and technical assistance
- Transportation demand ordinance (incentives a town could offer a business)
- Need new ways of doing things
- Tax incentives from towns
- Zoning changes to streamline the development process
- 40R-eligible for 40S and will be reimbursed (but is harder to navigate)
- Public needs to be educated or need a rebranding of housing needs messaging
- Assembly Row and Lynnfield-placemaking
- Get seniors to downsize
- 40Bs for 55 and older-popular in the past, but not now
- Towns partnering with developers
- County based vs town based permitting
- **Which Strategies Will Have the Greatest Impact?**
 - By-right Zoning
 - Placemaking space mindset (smaller scale)
 - Zoning must allow more housing typology
 - Education and communication about the connection between housing and the economy
 - Tax incentives for development of housing
- **Top Strategy**
 - By right zoning for predictability with potential for:
 - Guidelines
 - Form based zoning
 - Neighborhood level mixed use
 - Diverse housing options with a mix of incomes
- **Tactical Actions**
 - Zoning reform
 - Education
 - Regional strategies-go beyond town
 - Site planning and aggregation
 - Public Outreach (charettes)-be involved in social media
 - Gain municipality support
 - Downsizing incentive?