A Green New Deal for Boston

An Action Plan for Achieving Climate Justice

Source: Natalia Liubinetska

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INTRODUCTION

> **"An effective Green New Deal is also a radical Green New Deal... from the Latin *radix*, meaning root: radical change is systemic change that tackles root causes rather than merely addressing symptoms."[1]**

For a moment, imagine the City of Boston as a 21st Century leader furthering climate justice and *greenovation*. [2] Envision an urban center where residents have access to intercity travel that's carbon-free, clean, quiet, safe, fast, and free. A city that has prioritized travel by electric train, dedicated bike lanes, or express electric bus over personal vehicles. A city with flourishing eco-districts and cultural centers, where streets are converted to vibrant pedestrian malls, with parks that host weekend farmers markets and open-air cinemas, and where vacant lots and dilapidated buildings are transitioned into gardens, small business innovation spaces, and community centers. It is a locale where people from all walks of life enjoy easy access to lush city parks, maintained urban greenspaces, and well-equipped playgrounds. Where families can swim and picnic along the banks of the Charles River and pristine Harbor beaches without fear of contaminated water.

A city powered by renewable and community-controlled energy, with justice-based transitions to make sure no worker is left behind. A city with attractive affordable housing for all – where the occupants become not just the emancipated consumers, but also the proud owners, of the energy produced by rooftop solar systems. A hub serving as a global leader in developing new clean renewable energy systems, zero waste, and green technologies, including an incubator for safer substitutes for toxic chemicals and hazardous substances. As a town that prioritizes the construction of net-zero, energy efficient buildings over energy hungry luxury high-rises for the wealthy. Where diverse newcomers can live without

fear and where their children attend integrated, well-resourced schools. A city where residents have access to healthy food options, a clean environment, world-class public spaces and feel assured they would be supported by strong social safety networks during an emergency and hard times. Where all residents are immunized against sea level rise, flooding, heat waves, and other impacts of climate change. A new kind of city where poverty, pollution, social and environmental injustices, and racial oppression are rapidly becoming stories from the past.

Image Source: Nenad Stojkovic

As a community, we often focus our attention on the immediate issues confronting our own neighborhoods. And they are significant. We are grappling with the outcome of decades of unjust social and economic policies, racism, class-based inequalities, gentrification, local food deserts, short-term thinking and opportunism. To find appropriate solutions we must share decision-making power equitably. It is only by crossing the class, ethnic, and racial boundaries that have come to divide our communities that we can truly emancipate ourselves from cycles of injustice and put forward a vision of the systemic change needed to move our city forward.

At this moment, the City of Boston is dealing with the largest public health emergency in a generation. But the coronavirus crisis provides insight into what we can achieve collectively from the government, the business sector, civil society, and community organizations alike when we are confronted with an existential threat to our way of life. Unlike the virus, climate change and urban injustices present more than just sudden shocks. They are also a type of slow and relentless violence experienced by the community, especially working-class families and low-income communities of color. In this context, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic are exacerbating existing economic inequalities, racial oppression, and social injustices of all kinds.

But we are now in a time of great social awakening. Profound grassroots mobilizations are now occurring in Boston and all across the United States. People understand we need something better than the status quo. In this moment, we must begin articulating an alternative vision for the City of Boston. And we are capable of making that vision a reality.

The ideas in this report are about changing the narrative around what is possible. Featured in the report are a sampling of policy proposals for a local Green New Deal (GND) and “Just Recovery” from the coronavirus pandemic. Ultimately, the aim of a GND for the City of Boston would be to mitigate the threat of climate change, attack poverty and economic inequality, close the wealth gap, and end the systemic oppression of people of color. It would work with the state and federal governments to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all neighborhoods and workers in the city.

A Boston GND would strive to create an abundance of highly rewarding jobs that pay a living wage, and help to ensure prosperity and economic security for all residents. And it would encourage investment in more equitable, green infrastructure projects and clean industries to sustainability meet the challenges of the 21st Century.

Source: Maya Gangan

It would secure clean air and water, climate and community resilience, healthy food, greater access to nature, and a sustainable environment for all. It would rectify many of the root causes of profound racial and class-based environmental injustices that plague the city.[3] And it must promote justice and equity by repairing the historic oppression of people of color.

A comprehensive, definitive Green New Deal for the city is something that will require thoughtful community leadership, accountability measures and a long-term engagement process. Compiled in this report are a number of concrete policy proposals that can inform this broader GND plan for the city. These proposals show what is possible and serve as food for thought for how our city can effectively tackle institutional change while addressing the everyday needs of residents. It is about advancing the conversation from visionary goals to visioning next steps using the legal powers of the city.

The ultimate purpose of this report is to jumpstart a larger conversation in the halls of government, in local businesses, offices and organizations, and in every neighborhood about the future city we want to create together. It is a call for bold, progressive change - we already have the policy tools, legal levers and public desire necessary to create a Green New Deal and Just Recovery for the city.

THE NECESSITY TO ACT

Image Source:Markus Spiske

"This is not just a crisis of systemic proportions but a crisis of the imagination."

- Ann Pettifor in *The Case for a Green New Deal*

The world is now confronting the twin crises of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) latest report makes clear we must cut global carbon emissions in half by 2030 and hit net zero carbon emissions by the middle of the century for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5C, beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

For Boston, a failure to achieve such reductions will result in as many as forty days over 90 degrees by 2030, and 90 days by 2070—nearly the entire summer. Up to 33 days each summer would reach 100 degrees or more. Sea level rise could reach over three feet by 2070, and over seven feet by the end of the century.[4] This change *is* coming. And it is our duty to act on the science using all of the tools we have before us.

In this context, returning to a post-pandemic "business as usual" of indiscriminate pollution and emissions is a recipe for disaster. Boston and Massachusetts are not immune to climate change, and must be part of the solution. Already, residents of the Commonwealth feel an increasing urgency for strong political leadership and action on this issue. In a recent statewide poll a majority saw climate change as a serious public health problem, especially for low-income communities. Some 72 percent of those who acknowledged the science of climate change agree that major or moderate changes to how we live will be necessary.[5]

And it's not just the escalating ecological impacts of climate change that necessitate an honest look at where we are headed. Four decades of neoliberal economic policies at the federal and state levels have increased financial insecurity and hardships for millions of Americans. We have comparatively less socio-economic mobility relative to similarly industrialized nations, especially for people of color and poor American families.[6]

"Whilst the disease is expected to be temporary, climate change has been a phenomenon for many years, and will remain with us for decades."

- United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres

Unjust political-economic systems of power have taken untold wealth from our communities and threatened the stability of the climate. **Billionaire wealth alone has grown astoundingly over the last few decades — and, for some "pandemic profiteers," even more dramatically since the COVID-19 crisis — as billionaire tax obligations have plummeted.** During the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, over 22 million people lost their jobs. Over the same three weeks, U.S. billionaire wealth increased by $282 billion, an almost 10 percent gain. According to the Institute for Policy Studies, if this inequality is not treated with both short and long-term reforms and government oversight, America's "pre-existing condition" of extreme inequality could overwhelm not only our economy, but also our democracy itself.[7]

Corporate bailouts and tax breaks for the super-wealthy in an era of crisis expose a hard truth: we need an urgent transformation of our increasingly unjust political and economic institutions. The most rational choice is to be clear about the issues separating us – deepening inequality, growing assaults on our civil and political rights, concern about our children's futures, and the compounding impacts of climate change – and assume our shared responsibility to carry out the investments and policy changes we need. Without reorienting the levers of government, without approaching the change we need with an eye towards justice, the burdens of these systems and climate change will continue to be piled upon new immigrants, the elderly, people of color, working class families, and (increasingly) the middle class.

Why does Boston need a local Green New Deal? Just take the issue of affordability. In the last ten years, rents and home prices have soared beyond the means of many residents. At a rate of $2,349 a month, the Boston area has the fourth-highest average effective rent of 79 major metropolitan areas across the United States. Only New York, San Francisco, and San Jose are pricier. [8] Boston is also the eighth most expensive place to own a home. With a median household income of $62k and an average home price of $645k, Boston's "house-poor" residents would have to shell out a whopping 58 percent of their monthly income to own a home, leaving less than half of their take-home pay for other life expenses and savings. [9]

Traffic congestion has worsened too. We have many more super-commuters today, and asthma rates from congested traffic jams in our neighborhoods have risen. In fact, Boston is ranked as the most congested city in the United States. The average Boston commuter lost over 149 hours — or more than six days — due to traffic in 2019.[10] The congestion nightmare is often worse for people of color, as they must cope with inadequate and unequal public transportation systems. In Boston, Black bus riders spend a week and a half more of their time sitting and waiting on buses than riders who are White.

"Boston has the 4th highest average effective rent"[8]

Image Source: Eric Allix

Access to quality public spaces, parks, tree cover and other environmental amenities, good food and community services is not distributed equitably across our city. A local Green New Deal can and must address these interlinked disparities. And for the changes do not control at the local level, as a city of nearly 700,000 residents we also have the power of the "public pulpit" to influence state level policy change on Beacon Hill. To realize a local Green New Deal, we need to have political leadership. But we also need to view each other as architects of our collective future.

For too long, we have been told there is no viable alternative to the current social and environmental injustices found in the city and the Commonwealth.[11] That solutions to the urban housing affordability crisis should be the purview of the real estate market, or that the cost of instituting free transit would be unbearably high. That significant procurement of renewable energy would be too difficult. We've been led to believe that larger, more meaningful interventions would be "too disruptive" or "not politically feasible". Yet the flood of proposals for free transit, eviction moratoriums, income-adjusted utility payments to small business grants, renewable energy, and grassroots mutual aid societies rapidly being implemented in cities across America during the pandemic shows us that is simply not true.

Why do we need a Just Recovery?

Emergencies like the Coronavirus pandemic have a way of revealing and magnifying pre-existing economic class and racial disparities of all kinds. The Massachusetts Public Health Association found that the COVID-19 infection rate among Latinx residents was three times as high - and for Black residents two and a half times as high - as the rate for White residents.[12] Boston has just begun tracking the demographics of the disease, but already it tells a haunting tale. As of February 1st, 2021, Black residents accounted for 24 percent of known Coronavirus cases in Boston while Latinx residents accounted for an additional 31 percent.[13]

We need a just recovery because everyday people, service employees, small employers, community groups, public sector workers, immigrants, working families and hourly workers are the backbone of a prosperous society. And they are also the lifeblood of a prosperous city. In an emergency, economic equality, racial justice, a clean environment for all, greater public ownership of resources, and strong social networks can have a deep, positive effect on how well we weather the storm.

As the government closest to the people, it is imperative that the City of Boston act in the absence of leadership at the federal level. The congressional stimulus bills alone will not save our cities. Federal action so far has left many critical areas of intervention unaddressed, including affordable housing, universal healthcare, climate change, food access, and economic recovery for small businesses. Currently, the federal government lacks a comprehensive vision for transforming American society and addressing the root causes of the climate crisis, racial injustice, and economic inequality. Many American cities are now taking bold steps to fill this void and offer more transformative changes.

Creating and instituting these visions is an awesome task, but we should not shy away from them. This is Boston's moment to act. We need a local Green New Deal and Just Recovery. We should embrace such a program because it is an opportunity for us to tap into a collective imagination of what is possible, of what we want our city to become. It is an opportunity for our city to be a leader in the movement for climate justice and for each of us to play a role in shaping a more just and sustainable future. We should reach for transformative change at this moment in time not just because it is necessary, but because it is right.

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WHAT IS A JUST RECOVERY?

How effectively we address the slow violences extant in our cities affects how well we, collectively and individually, weather sudden shocks and disasters. In a way, the impacts of Coronavirus are a teachable moment. The pandemic's unequal impacts have foreshadowed a potential future – one where the divisions in our social fabric are allowed to expand, where we avoid comprehensive planning, see community engagement as ornamental, and continue to believe that incremental and marked-based approaches will make cities and neighborhoods prosper. The systems and institutional structures we have built have a limited capacity to cope with runaway growth.

Nations all over the world are employing desperate measures to keep the infection rate from overwhelming health care systems. Similarly, the future impacts of climate change are already beginning to intensify, as positive natural feedback loops accelerate global warming and ocean acidification. And we are beginning to see exploitive labor relationships and economic inequalities buckle under the stress of the pandemic. "Essential" workers are highly exposed to the coronavirus but are forced to work to avoid being fired or to pay the bills. While those with means can retreat to summer homes, Main Street Americans - small business owners and wage laborers – are facing an existential threat to their livelihoods.

The pandemic did not create inequalities, it has revealed and widened existing chasms. These existing injustices spread disadvantage and disease through social vectors like concentrated poverty, racial and economic segregation, pollution hotspots and unequal access to social services like healthcare and childcare. It is for these reasons that we cannot advocate for a return to normal. Normal is deadly. The old normal had created perfect pockets of injustice for the virus to exploit, devastating our most diverse communities. We should be careful of a return to the old normal.

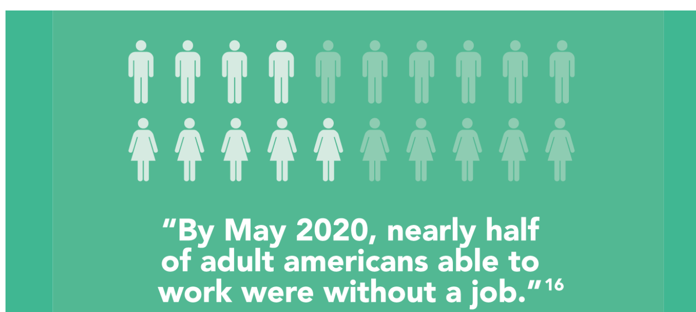
This health crisis has also shed light on how deeply interdependent we really are, and how critical it is that governments direct aid and assistance to where it is most needed. We rely heavily on low-wage migrant labor from Mexico and Central America to harvest our food. Our frontline healthcare workers are being asked to work overtime while faced with pay cuts as hospitals put off lucrative procedures. The United States Postal Service, which has provided affordable delivery to every resident regardless of where they live since the end of the Revolutionary War, is now threatened with bankruptcy and potential privatization by neoliberal politicians.

What we are seeing from the federal government is not a just recovery but its opposite – disaster capitalism – where private industries have found ways to directly profit off the crisis.[14] It has many forms. The bailout of major private industries, including the airlines, provides one example. Huge tax breaks for the wealthy is another, along with millions in federal aid funds to large corporations instead of small and local businesses. The bidding wars between state governments in the rush to buy essential protective equipment; and most insidiously, the offloading of risks and liabilities onto individuals because the health and economic wellbeing of citizens has not been prioritized, are dramatic instances of the injustices of neoliberalism. We must realize the stark disconnect between

widely used indicators of economic growth and the health of our nation. As of 2016, the wealthiest 10 percent of Americans held at least 84 percent of all U.S. stock.[15] Conversely, by May 2020 nearly half of adult Americans able to work were without a job.[16] Millions of families and individuals require more than a one-time stimulus check to make ends meet. This is not sustainable, nor is it just.

So then, what is a Just Recovery? At its core, it is about assuming the responsibility to ensure long-term and equitable decisions guide our way out of this crisis. The pandemic has already unleashed a tidal wave of popular responses that were thought unimaginable just a few months before. In cities and states across this nation, evictions and foreclosures have been halted. Public transit is now free in some cities, and many others have added hundreds of miles bike lanes. Free meals are being provided to schoolchildren, the homeless are being housed, local businesses are manufacturing equipment for essential workers, and municipalities are providing free childcare for healthcare professionals. Governments are instituting mandatory paid sick leave and mutual aid societies have blossomed all over the nation.

For many governments, this crisis is a clear reminder that the purpose of governance is to ensure the protection and wellbeing *of all people*. And fundamental to fulfilling that purpose is understanding that our collective prosperity and wellbeing is only as strong as the protection and opportunity we give the most exposed and burdened among us. Our actions going forward must wholeheartedly embody this solidarity, because now we know that divided, we fall.



A Just Recovery should take aim at the root causes of systemic and institutional oppression that have been laid bare in this pandemic.

A Just Recovery is also about more than transient solidarity in a moment of need. It is the exact opposite of disaster capitalism. Embodied in our recovery is a choice to act for the short-term or long-term. Do we just plug the leaks in our unequal system or do we take the time to craft a recovery that will ensure long-lived prosperity? The choices we make now are unimaginably consequential. They will affect public life, our society, our neighborhoods, our futures, our economy, and our climate for years to come. That is why a Just Recovery must put people and the climate first while situating collective response in this moment in time.

How would it do that? By addressing unequal access to health care and economic relief, embedding climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, and empowering our communities to be agents of change. But most of all, a Just Recovery should take aim at the root causes of systemic and institutional oppression that have been laid bare in this pandemic. The coronavirus is a threat to human life, and yet a Just Recovery is about more than just surviving. It is about transforming what we know does not support our wellbeing, our health and livelihoods so we are better prepared for everything we know the future could bring.

Image Source: Mike Von

As we grapple with the impacts of a resurgent, mutating virus it can feel unimportant to think beyond the needs of the day. And they are very real. We are at the precipice of an eviction crisis. Governments are making difficult decisions as they predict major budget shortfalls. Citizens have used their federal stimulus funds and must now risk a return to work. It is the responsibility of government to enact the emergency measures necessary to maintain stability and services, yet we cannot ignore our collective duty to think through what comes next.

The decisions and investments we make now and in the near future will have profound and lasting consequences. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, embedded in every decision are our values around what is worth supporting, our expectations of what recovery looks like, and our visions of the future. Embracing a short and long-term view of policy and its impacts means reorienting our temporal focus to allay some of our anxious assumptions about short-term tradeoffs.

What assumptions do we make about tradeoffs? One of the most prominent is the pitting of communities and public health against a prosperous economy. As the assumption goes, at some point, we will need to make the hard choice to sacrifice lives to the coronavirus so that the economy and stock market can rebound. This was epitomized in the “Die for the Dow” hashtag that trended back in May of 2020. How could mass death be good for the economy? The stock market is particularly detached from the daily lives of middle and working-class Americans and is primarily an indicator of wealthy Americans’ faith in the economy. The richest 1 percent of Americans own over half the value of U.S. equity.[17] As for pitting a healthy economy against public health, this is a false choice. Is there any economy at all without prosperous communities?

Source: Maya Gangan

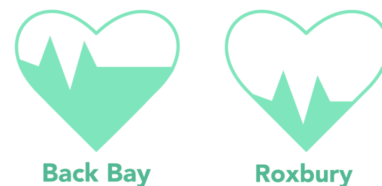
There is also a more sinister, racialized and class-biased underside to this assumption: that some American lives are expendable. And who are the expendables? The answer is people of color and those of the working class that lack the full resources of wealthier Americans. Short-term policy decisions like premature re-openings in the name of economic recovery are proving deadly. We should instead base decisions on epidemiological, public health data and the wealth of knowledge we have from previous pandemic. Reversing hasty re-openings, as we see happening all across this nation, have plunged low-income families and our local businesses back into uncertainty too. This unprecedented situation commands us to challenge these internalized tradeoffs that are just the latest manifestation of racism and class exploitation so we can adjust our mindset to see community and economy as not as in competition with each other, but as symbiotic urban features that thrive or dive together.

A tool for reframing our mindset is to see actions along a three-stage timeline: relief, recovery and re-imagining. Relief refers to the emergency measures, the policy decisions needed in the here-and-now to stop the collapse of communities. In the city, this stage is about preserving life and livelihoods through measures such as short-term grants, rent moratoriums, field hospitals, free transit and meals, and housing for the homeless. Recovery refers to the period of gradual reopening where intermediate health measures are still required, but cities are beginning to think creatively about how to reconnect people, communities and businesses. Streets are closed to cars, bike networks expanded, companies institute work from home programs, small business assistance programs form, and restaurants can seat customers outside.

The recovery period is actually much more than these simple measures. It is an immensely important time for evaluating our longstanding urban practices, creating spaces for discussion around urban problems and their solutions, and collecting ideas for how to improve life in the city. This means contextualizing our actions within the long arc of history and where our cities stand today. It also entails being honest about the practices, processes and laws that do not (or no longer) serve the public and seek justice for all. What inequities have been exposed by the pandemic and large-scale public outrage over systemic racism? For example, the differences in life expectancy between the Roxbury and Back Bay neighborhoods of Boston is an astonishing 33 years – and that was before Coronavirus exploded on the scene.[18] A true recovery stage engages in that uncomfortable dialogue, and sets the foundation and vision for a transformed city.

The final stage, reimagining, is about enshrining some of these solutions into daily urban life using the power of cities and their residents to create and demand change. The key questions here are who benefits and whose interests are being served?[19] Envisioning a just recovery and a Green New Deal are intertwined. We need a just recovery to protect our city and its most affected residents in the near term, and we can use our collective imaginations around what a Green New Deal might look like to breathe life into long-term solutions that drive towards justice.

"The difference in life expectancy between the Roxbury and Back Bay neighborhoods of Boston is an astonishing 33 years--



Back Bay **Roxbury**

--and that was before Coronavirus exploded on the scene."[18]

THE SCALE OF ACTION NEEDED

Source: Nicholas & Geraldine

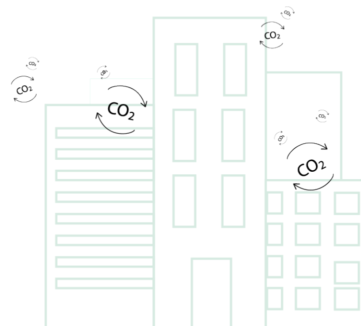
The original New Deal was both a dramatic and practical approach for solving America's economic crisis coming out of the Great Depression. As a nation, we again find ourselves in a moment of dire economic and ecological crisis. The widespread public desire for structural change is palatable.

The federal Green New Deal resolution is a response to this desire, and is ambitious in its scope. It sets forth the vision of a 10-year mobilization to reshape our country's infrastructure, energy systems, agriculture, transportation, environment, and economy. The resolution would achieve these goals though increased public control over resources and industries, public investments in large-scale programs, and by institutionalizing a commitment to equity.

What is the necessity of transforming these sectors?

Buildings account for around 40 percent of the nation's annual carbon emissions.[20] Our infrastructure has suffered from chronic neglect and is not designed to withstand future climate change. **A federal Green New Deal would repair and upgrade buildings and infrastructure to mitigate emissions, reduce the risks of climate impacts on communities, and ensure universal access to clean water.**

"Buildings account for around **40 percent**



of the nation's annual carbon emissions."[20]

Source: JP Photography

Our nation has consumed a disproportionate number of global natural resources and is among the countries most responsible for global emissions. **A federal Green New Deal would shift 100 percent of our power demand to renewable sources, build smarter power grids, and invest in various efficiency technologies.**

The U.S. agricultural and transportation sectors are responsible for significant pollutants and emissions, yet many American communities lack access to healthy food and suitable public transit. **A federal Green New Deal would support sustainable and family farming, create a more sustainable food system, invest in zero-emissions transit development and create affordable public options like high-speed rail.**

The IPCC has released dire predictions for crops, cities, coastal areas and our oceans due to acidification, floods, fires, extreme weather and sea level rise. We have the science to predict these outcomes – and the public's growing desire to prevent them. **A federal Green New Deal would restore and protect our ecosystems, invest in projects for climate resiliency, preserve open lands and transform environmental dumping grounds into economic development hubs.**

Our nation has suffered from four decades of deindustrialization, stagnant wages and explicitly anti-union policies. Worker powers have been eroded and we still have racial and gendered divides in our paychecks. Our 21st Century nation is seeing greater income inequality manifest today than it did in the roaring '20s. **A federal Green New Deal would create millions of high wage jobs, protect worker rights to unionize and institute trade rules to foster domestic manufacturing.**

As the federal Green New Deal resolution makes clear, this cannot be realized without a commitment to structural transformation, directing resources to previously disinvested neighborhoods, lifting up frontline voices, and restoring a safe and healthy environment for all to enjoy. Following the spirit of the federal Green New Deal resolution, cities can reimagine their collective powers to shape a more just and sustainable future at the local level that gets at the root of many urban inequalities that are tightly interlinked and interdependent. Local Green New Deals can transform municipal infrastructure, energy systems, transportation networks, our housing stock, local procurement, main street economies, and most importantly, reorient our institutions and processes towards the pursuit of justice.

This pursuit of justice entails finally doing something about institutionalized racial violence. For too long we have allowed the sacrifice of Black and Brown lives. This violence can manifest as police brutality but it also permeates nearly every other aspect of city life. Residents of color have lower incomes, significantly lower household wealth, disproportionate pollution burdens, unequal community investments, less access to transit and good food, and lower life expectancies than their White neighbors.

We have a responsibility to use the framework of the Green New Deal as a vehicle for furthering racial justice and ensuring Black Lives Matter.

What that looks like is a reallocation of policing funds for employment and educational programs and restorative justice services. It means examining how wealth is extracted from communities of color and restructuring local taxes and fees while making credit and technical assistance easier to access. It looks like divestment from fossil fuel companies that have disproportionately harmed our most diverse communities so we can invest in local green jobs programs and sustainable community-scale energy systems. And it is about enshrining residents' rights to clean water, a rigorous education, health care services, and secure housing.[21]

Cities and communities across America must decide:

What are the changes we want to see?

What is our vision of the future?

A Green New Deal is about shifting the conversation

from deeply embedded problems towards their solutions.

At its essence, a Green New Deal is about shifting the conversation from deeply embedded problems towards their solutions. In order to best position ourselves and our cities to lead the fight against climate change, it should be our priority to ensure every one of our residents, families and small businesses has the power, support and capability to be part of the solution. And that means providing good jobs, affordable housing, quality public services, fresh food, efficient transportation, renewable energy, open spaces, and vibrant local economies. It means ensuring access to the decision-making table. And it means providing freedom from the fear and oppression caused by racial violence, housing insecurity, inadequate public services, unaffordable cities, disinvested neighborhoods and a history of prioritizing multinational corporations over the needs of multiracial communities.

PRINCIPLES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Image Source: Kayle Kaupanger

To fundamentally change unequal urban dynamics and practices means embracing a transformative politics. It means being guided by a holistic set of principles that embodies our power and responsibility to bring about change.

What do these principles look like?

As the crisis is ongoing, it has left little time for hard-hit communities to reflect or contemplate long-term responses. The principles here are grounded in the federal Green New Deal's twin goals of social justice and climate safety, but also seek to capture the essential characteristics of principles proposed by grassroots and advocacy organizations, local groups and experts, and Green New Deal advocates.

They are not revolutionary - in many respects, they are not even new. They draw on fundamental truths embedded in generational and place-based knowledge of what it means to be sustainable and promote wellbeing. Nor are they intended to be prescriptive. **Every city's Green New Deal and every community's recovery will have to be guided by principles determined in a local and democratic manner.**

Perhaps most importantly, these principles seek to embed measures of accountability into what we decide to do next because no matter what, it is critical that our response reinvigorate the very purpose of government, which is to represent the collective will and power of communities and to act in the public interest.

PEOPLE-CENTERED

A just recovery is not possible if it does not prioritize our workers and communities and seek to build solidarity across diverse racial, ethnic, and class lines. There must be an equitable redistribution of public resources, opportunities, and power to neighborhoods, workers, and families in need. If cities emulate the federal response to this crisis, we risk enriching corporate executives and saving Wall Street while hollowing out at-risk communities and draining Main Street of its vibrancy. Core to this principle is putting people before profit. During the 1918 pandemic, city officials were torn over whether to reopen quickly to help aid their suffering economies. Studies of that pandemic have shown that the cities that acted most quickly, and kept in place social distancing measures and restrictions for longer, recovered faster and more fully than those that did not.[22] They also did not experience a second wave of high death rates as did the cities eager to reopen.[23]

It is tempting in the short term to bolster the profits of corporations that provide a significant tax base. But that would be tantamount to what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. referred to as, "socialism for the rich and rugged individualism for the poor." **Putting the profits of large companies ahead of the health needs of workers, consumers, and small businesses promises to inflict larger, long-term damage on the economy.** In this moment of crisis, it is the duty of local governments to pinpoint residents and small businesses teetering on the edge of financial ruin. Lifelines are for people, not corporations. While this principle may appear only to be relevant in times of acute need, it is not. Taking a people-centered approach also engenders a long-term view to enhance the social sustainability of our cities and continually evaluating municipal actions through the lived experiences of residents to ensure policy solutions are truly enhancing the common good.

DEMOCRATIC AND PARTICIPATORY

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on how a tone-deaf government can have a crushing effect on the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans. The feeble response of the Trump Administration and many Governors exemplifies why now is the time to refocus governance to be more responsive, democratic and participatory. Democratization means expanding access to city services and information so residents are supported and informed. More importantly, it means expanding participatory justice to ensure every one of us has the opportunity and ability to shape public discourse. How is this principle actualized? By creating just and inclusive institutional processes, by ensuring the clarity and accountability of decision-makers, by breaking down departmental silos, by making city data and progress indicators widely accessible, and by decentralizing power.

Why is it important to democratize our city? The answer is because it builds trust between local government and the people and can create greater efficiency in the distribution of urban resources. And it ensures decisions are not made in an echo chamber of well-intentioned experts. This ability to have more direct control over our neighborhoods, land, and resources restores to residents a sense of agency and voice. When we feel like our voices and our truths matter, we have more reason to "check in" and participate in local governance because we see our government as working for us. And an inclusive government and accessible city services are critically important to daylighting and dismantling cycles of injustice.

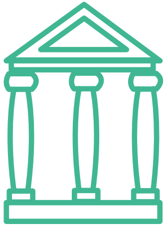
ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES

Our current political-economic system is not working. And it was failing us long before the Coronavirus pandemic took hold. It may be that the current crisis can serve as a catalyst for instituting a bold reorientation of our economy and government towards the promotion of social and ecological wellbeing. Addressing the root causes of this crisis entails a reevaluation of our existing policies and practices, and instituting new equity frames for any decisions we make going forward.

What is less obvious is that this principle demands that we understand the deeply intersectional nature of our existence. When we propose street redesign, how does it affect the vitality of local businesses, encourage multiple modes of transportation, affect housing costs, and who will be hired to do the job? **We no longer have the luxury of operating in policy silos. The various issues confronting cities like Boston are complex and highly interconnected. Our thinking must honor that reality.** Addressing the root causes of injustice is not just a pretty phrase. It is hard work. It is a commitment to reparative and transformative justice. Reparative justice means acknowledging past harms and seeking to repair the relationships we have with each other and the relationship cities have with their residents. Transformative justice seeks to dismantle systems that are not supporting us and replacing them with ones that are emancipatory.

"Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have the exact measure of the injustice and wrong which will be imposed on them."

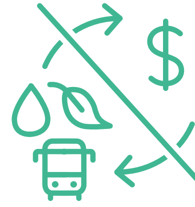
- Frederick Douglass



RIGHTS-BASED

How can cities ensure a just recovery? By placing our rights to a healthy and dignified life front and center. What constitutes a healthy and dignified life? One where the health of individuals and families is enhanced, and decisions are made to protect citizens from exploitative practices such as no-cause eviction and concentrated environmental pollution. It is a society where citizens have the right to access affordable housing and utilities, reliable public transit, clean water, nutritious food, healthcare, worker protections, a rigorous education, social safety networks, community centers and services, and an environmentally sustainable future.

Many of these rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the right to equal pay, food, housing, education and medical care.[24] Residents of a municipality have a duty to contribute to the proper functioning of local government through the payment of taxes and abiding by local laws. In return, it is the duty of local governments to protect resident's rights and ensure a sustainable collective future. **This is the "deal" aspect of a Green New Deal – a commitment to upholding the social contract between a government and its citizens.**



DECOMMODIFY SOCIETY AND NATURE

Commodification means transforming essential goods, services, ideas and even people's time into objects to be bought and sold in a market. They have a price. In cities today, much of our public housing, public transit systems, urban spaces, utilities like heat, electricity and water, and even some social services are commodities. We pay fees to use these services in addition to the taxes we give to support them. But by treating public services as commodities, capitalist private property rights often supersede the provision of services as a fundamental human right and right of citizenship. Privileging the pursuit of profits subordinates democratic planning and allocation of resources according to human needs. Public housing, mass transit, our schools, parks, and other city services are for public benefit, not private profit. To decommodify means to eliminate market pressures on public services. It means restoring the primary purpose of these public services – which is to serve the public who pays for them - and to restore public control over their management.

What does decommodification look like in practice? It can mean instituting restrictions on housing speculation and vacancies, bringing utilities under municipal control, ensuring general public access to environmental amenities (like parks and beaches), and requiring local procurement or community benefits for large private corporations and developments.

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

More broadly, this principle seeks to end exploitative practices, promote public ownership, and demand more of businesses that benefit from our urban environments.

How can we creatively harness the wealth of anchor institutions and major employers to enhance neighborhood development, create job pathways, and create climate resilient districts? A key aspect of de-commodification is creating local production and consumption loops, for example a farm-to-school lunch program or hire-local standards. Decommodification creates better access to affordable solutions by mitigating market pressures, and enhances community capabilities and wealth by prioritizing publicly-owned options.

Our cities need to rapidly decarbonize and shift our every action towards the long-term goals of social and ecological resilience. Why? Because it is in this decade that the multilayered threats of climate change are becoming manifest. Climate impacts like sea level rise and extreme heat expose and deepen underlying urban problems, especially for vulnerable residents unable to afford basic necessities like heating and cooling. Extreme heat is forcing cities to reevaluate their outdoor operations and how to protect vulnerable populations such as the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions. Much of the 20th century's drainage infrastructure and land use planning has not been designed to handle extreme weather. However, we can avoid becoming passive victims of the climate crimes committed by extractive industries and those who cannot see alternatives to "business as usual".

This moment presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to reimagine how cities operate and how they prepare residents for a changing future. If cities wish to be protectors of public health and wellbeing then they have a duty to act on climate science and do so in a way that builds solidarity across racial, ethnic, and class lines. Creating social and ecological resilience is also an investment in a regenerative and sustainable urban ecosystem that draws on nature-based solutions. This means "living in the donut"[25] , or becoming a regenerative, resilient city that works to meet everyone's needs while operating within ecological boundaries.

JUSTICE-ORIENTED

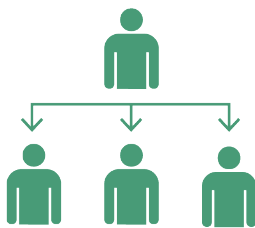
The terms "justice," "equity, and "resilience" are used interchangeably by government officials and many others. Do they all refer to the same concept? The answer is no. Resilience is the ability to recover from sudden shocks or longer-term stresses. It may apply to climate change and the pandemic, but framing our response as "building resilience" can also be used in a way that "naturalizes" these harms and avoid addressing deeper power relations. Do we really want to make unjust and exploitive social structures resilient? As a result, the concept of resilience can also individualize the problem and the responsibility to act. Equity goes a step further.

The goal of equity is to achieve fair outcomes for all, and so it is primarily focused on the fair distribution of and access to services, goods, programs, infrastructure and other publicly shared benefits. But even equity is incomplete because it fails to adequately capture how institutions, processes and structures have a role to play in creating or reinforcing unfair outcomes. Using health as a metaphor, equity would entail fairly addressing the symptoms of a disease, which is necessary for health maintenance, but does not go so far as to remove the source of those symptoms that are necessary for restoring good health. Justice does.

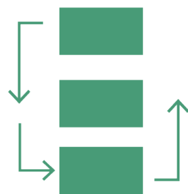
Justice means far more than fair distribution. It means understanding that past wrongs and the structures that support those wrongs must be corrected in order to truly transform our cities and emancipate our neighborhoods from structural violence. **Justice is distributive, participatory, reparative and transformative.[26]**

Distributive justice ensures no community is unequally harmed by our choices, and demands equity in the sharing of resources across the city. Procedural justice lifts up the voices, ideas and power of previously sidelined or silenced communities and brings them into the decision-making and implementation processes. Reparative justice sets a corrective goal of elevating our cities and neighborhoods to a state of shared wellbeing by providing new resources and acknowledging the impacts of existing or historical harms. Finally, transformative justice is about reforming or replacing the structural and institutional ways in which racism, class exploitation, discrimination and oppression continue to produce urban inequality. Justice is about achieving equitable power sharing, restructuring unjust structures, and creating a city that consciously supports us all. Through the lens of justice is the way we should approach our recovery and visions for a Green New Deal.

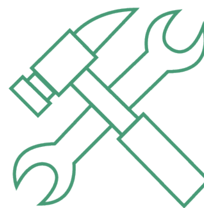
Justice is...



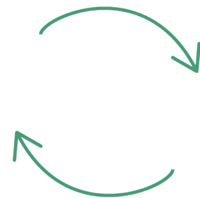
Distributive



Procedural



Reparative



Transformative

A Note on Personal vs. Collective Responsibility

There is another dimension to systems change, a more personal one. It is commonly understood that the American Dream is one in which boundless prosperity can only be achieved by hardworking, determined individuals through their own labor and perseverance. But this dream has also instilled in us a glorification of personal responsibility where success and failure is determined by our own actions.[27] On a personal level, system change is also about expanding that frame of responsibility to include a collective dimension. How are we responsible for each other, and how is our government, and society as a whole, responsible for supporting us? This understanding is essential for seeing public resources, money and policy for what they are: simply manifestations of our shared wealth, collective power and common purpose.

This unprecedented moment in recent history has granted us an opportunity to address not only the symptoms, but also the underlying causes that malign us. Supplied as they are with rich collective knowledge, data and the expertise of government officials, residents, activists, planners and experts, our cities have a moral obligation to act and make the transformative changes we need to decommodify, democratize and decarbonize our lives. City-scale versions of a Green New Deal and Just Recovery must embody principles for systems change in order to be the transformative visions they have the potential to be.

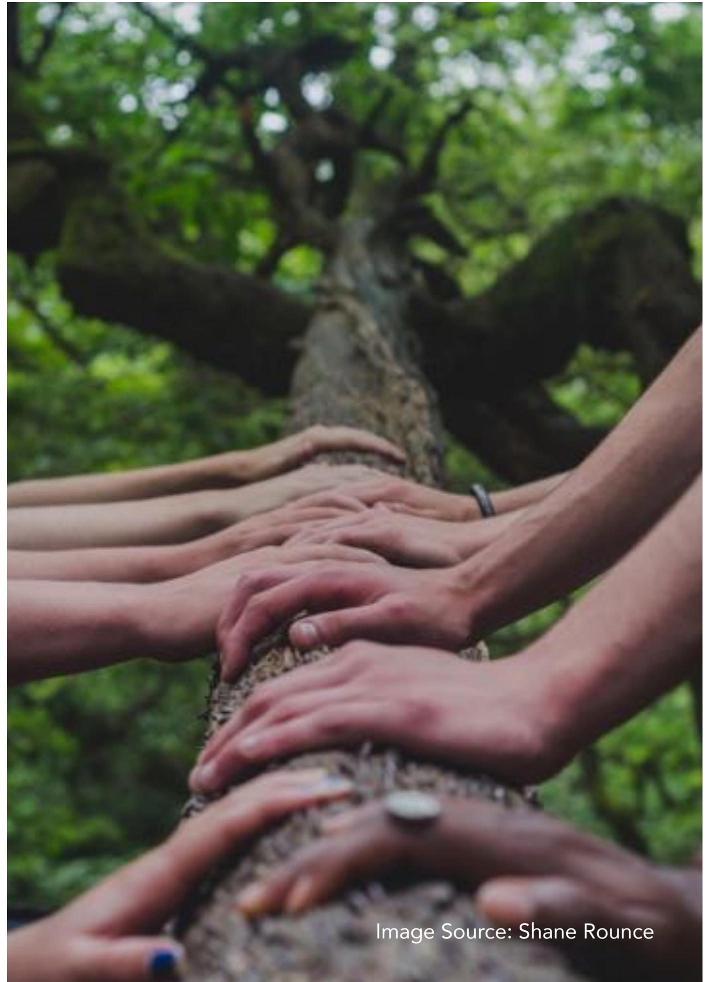


Image Source: Shane Rounce

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CITIES AS LEADERS

Source: eskystudio

Cities as Leaders

Nearly half the U.S. population lives in or around cities. They are centers of incredible diversity, culture, ingenuity, knowledge, wealth, and innovation. America's cities generate almost 60 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In fact, local government spending alone accounts for approximately 10 percent of our GDP.[1] Cities are a major center for solidly working class and middle-class employment.

Yet economic inequality is higher in urban areas, and the high cost of housing is becoming so pervasive it has affected even middle-income earners.[2] Urban areas overall are also responsible for over two-thirds of residential emissions and metropolitan air pollution has been shown to cause nearly as many deaths each year as alcohol-related crashes.[3] As such, cities also possess a special duty and obligation to be on the front lines working for solutions to the climate crisis and pandemic.

"America's cities generate almost

of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Local government spending alone accounts for approximately

of our GDP."[1]

Source: Natalia Liubinetska

Given the current crisis, cities must assume a larger role of leaders in the quest for climate justice and a just recovery. We are seeing a startling lack of leadership from the federal government in a time of tremendous adversity. Thus far, the federal response to the pandemic has been a boon for wealthy individuals and corporations, while gutting public services at a time when they are needed most. Left unsupported, our nation's cities and states have had to negotiate for essential equipment and have adapted by developing regional decision-making coalitions around when to open, what to regulate, and how to share supplies.

As tax collections have been postponed and businesses shutter their doors, the future economic outlook of our localities is more uncertain than ever. The predicted budget shortfall in 2020 in Massachusetts was expected to be around $6 billion: a drop of nearly 20 percent. Over 725,000 jobs are espected to be lost statewide due to the pandemic.[4] Full recovery for the state is not predicted to happen until 2024. Faced with the possibility of little top down support from Washington in the future highlights the present necessity and opportunity for progressive leadership and grassroots initiatives to show how we can overcome this crisis from the bottom up.

Cities are natural wellsprings of leadership. A Gallup poll found fully 71 percent of U.S. adults trusted their local government, over four times as many as those who trusted decision-making from Washington, D.C.[5] In cities we trust. The smaller municipal scale and proximity to voters can make city governments more nimble, responsive and collaborative than state and federal institutions. This means, ultimately, that cities must be more practical in addressing collective problems and accountable to the will of their constituents. More than any other level of government, there is a pressure on cities to be democratic and participatory. Mirroring the complex ecosystems that exist in nature, cities only truly flourish through symbiotic partnerships where power and access are shared amongst government offices, residents, advocacy organizations and businesses.

71%
of U.S. adults trusted their local government, over
four times
as many as those who trusted decision-making from Washington, D.C."[5]

Much as we may want to believe a federal bailout could put our lives and livelihoods back on course, there will be no "silver bullet" solution.

There is no single piece of progressive legislation that can remedy our longstanding ills, prepare us for climate change, and provide reparative justice to all who deserve it because the change we need cannot be neatly encapsulated in one action. The systems change we need cannot be encapsulated in one ordinance, law or policy. It is about altering processes and structures of governance to change the outcomes so that they bend towards justice. It means broadening our understanding of the potential of governance for good, and a loosening of our grip on the narrow frames of the past. It means seeing the city as an advocate for justice. It means effectively channeling the power and ideas of the people into designing better public policies and programs. Our cities cannot sit this one out. They have a responsibility to play a dynamic role as protectors of our collective wealth and common future.

THE POWER OF CITIES

What powers do cities have to enact meaningful change?

To answer this question requires first acknowledging the larger geopolitical context in which cities exist. In Massachusetts, as in so many states, all municipal power is derived from the State government, either through the granting of home rule authority or through specific and limited powers given to them on a more ad-hoc basis.

In Massachusetts – a home rule state – cities have some discretion to pass laws for the protection of public welfare, health, and safety. This delegation of power is not subject to broad interpretation. State laws usually take precedence over local ones. Local authority is expressly limited by the state or the state has already crafted relevant legislation in a particular area of law that circumvents local laws. Massachusetts cities control zoning and permitting yet it is the state that regulates building codes. The public transit we deem essential to good city living is funded and operated by the state. Cities may raise new forms of revenue, but only with express permission from the state. State preemption over local policymaking can be - and has been - used as a tool to either enhance or limit access to services, personal liberties, and the ability of cities to improve people's lives.

While the state may not be actively involved in a city's decisions, institutionalized paternalism can cast a large shadow over local policy. American cities derive substantial fiscal support from their state governments, and in return, there are few aspects of local life not affected by state power. The built environment, public infrastructure, sources of energy, transit systems, types of housing, educational standards, taxes and fees, environmental protections and personal rights are all inexorably shaped by the power of state government in ways that subordinate local decision-making.

This realization should not neutralize our belief in the power of local governance. On the contrary, **the powers cities hold are ultimately those they assert and assume responsibility for in negotiation with the state.** City power is therefore limited by the willingness of city officials and local residents to advocate for more autonomy. American cities already control substantial levers of power, including: direct spending on services; ownership of municipal property and other assets; operating budgets, capital expenditures and investments; zoning and land use; local procurement and contracting; property taxes and fees; local regulations; economic and environmental incentives; and finally, their advocacy power as representatives of vibrant urban communities.

What do these powers mean, and how can they be used?

DIRECT SPENDING

Local governments are important sources of employment (policemen, firefighters, teachers, planners, public health officials, landscapers, trash and recycling personnel, roadway technicians, librarians, researchers, city administrators and many others). Cities and towns in the U.S. employ over 14 million people,[6] ensuring millions of families are able to enjoy public employment benefits and economic stability. With fair hiring standards and racial justice training, local programs and employment can be a ladder out of poverty and path away from the school-to-prison pipeline.

In Greater Boston, for instance, there are many reasons to be concerned about the demographics of the municipal workforce. City and town employees are, as a whole, both older and Whiter than the region's labor force, as well as its population. An estimated 78 percent of law enforcement workers in the region, and 84 percent of firefighters, are White men, a group comprising only 35 percent of the resident population. Now is clearly the time for a transformative restructuring of public institutions at all levels of government in the Greater Boston area (and beyond) to achieve justice, health, and safety for all. Fundamental to this restructuring is a public workforce that represents the full diversity of the people they serve, and not just the residents of a specific city or town, but the entire region.[7]

Even more importantly, city leaders can create expectations for equitable decision-making practices and access to city services that imbue every municipal role and local action taken. **The programs and people cities invest in reflect our values.** As a result, cities across the country are creating Innovation Departments, Environmental Justice Committees, and Racial Equity training toolkits. Direct spending is a powerful tool that can be used to invest consciously in our communities and institutionalize justice principles.

MUNICIPAL ASSETS

Local governments control significant public assets. These include parks and open spaces, schools, public housing, municipal buildings, city vehicles, roads and sidewalks, ports, and airports, and utilities (primarily water and sewer, but in some localities also power and light). They have the power to decide how municipal property can be used or enhanced through maintenance, use restrictions, sales, renovations and investments. This includes renewable energy systems for the community. Cincinnati is well on its way to building the largest municipal solar farm in the country. Lansing, Michigan has removed all of its leaded water service lines.

When we invest in the public infrastructure knitted into our neighborhoods, it is an investment in the health, wellbeing and prosperity of the people who rely on them. What we do with our physical assets and infrastructure not only sets up our communities for a just resilient future but shows the world of the practicality and possibility of sustainable asset management.

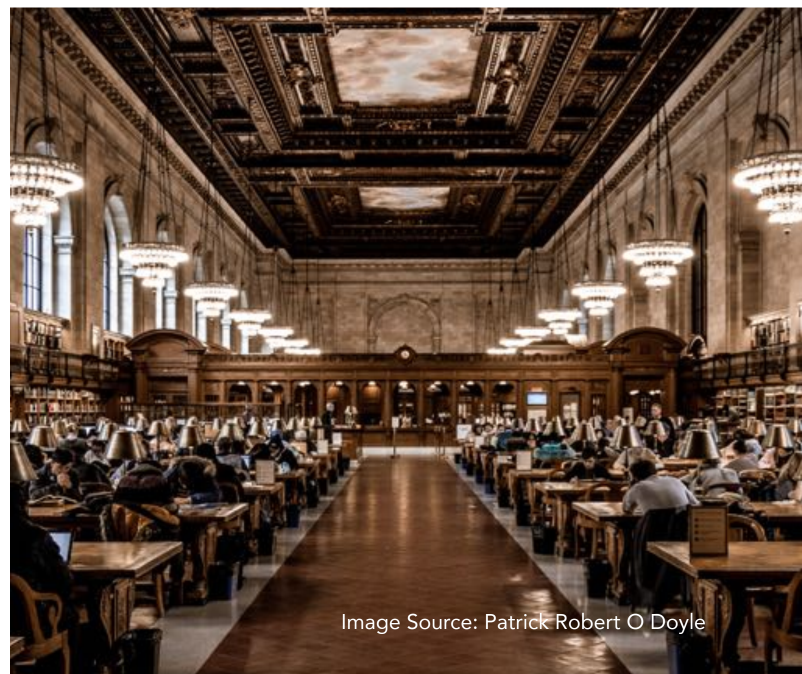


Image Source: Patrick Robert O Doyle

BUDGETS AND INVESTMENTS

Cities have both an operating budget with yearly recurring expenses for the provision of services and a capital plan for large-scale investments and upgrades. This is collective capital, and this money should be seen as a tool for achieving shared goals. Cities all over the world have instituted various forms of participatory budgeting that brings affected residents into what would otherwise be internal conversations around identifying projects and deciding what to fund. It is one of the most direct ways of democratizing municipal power.

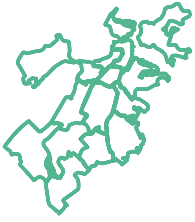
Each year, Boston's resident youth participate in choosing small capital projects to fund. Starting next year, one percent of local budgets in Scotland will be subject to participatory budgeting – totaling over £100 million.[8] In addition to direct spending to meet current needs, cities make investments. They take two forms: investments in capital projects, and those we trust to manage our investment assets such as employee retirements and municipal insurance.

City investment decisions speak volumes about the democratic principles and practices in the community. Preparing cities for the future through sustainable capital investments doubles as risk reduction, helping to ensure municipal bonds are safe and stable.

When it comes to capital projects, we are actively creating the future of cities and towns.

Ten years ago, San Diego released a plan for short and long-term investments in solar energy. The city now leads the nation in per capita solar installations.

Are capital projects designed to create affordable, vibrant, safe and resilient communities? Are these capital investments funded equitably, or do they place undue pressure on lower-income property taxpayers and renters? As for our investment assets, investment stocks and municipal insurance policies linked to fossil fuel companies and private prisons can have incalculable negative future consequences and go against our shared values. Should they not be invested with businesses that have a social and environmental conscience? A few local governments across California and officials in Washington, D.C. are going a step further – they are exploring the creation of public banks to ensure fairer access to funding for local businesses and individuals.



ZONING AND LAND USE

Through zoning and land use regulations cities can determine neighborhood density, the diversity of housing options, the placement of public amenities like parks and sidewalks, the aesthetics of a community, housing affordability requirements, parking availability, whether residents can grow their own food, place-based safety, suitable locations for businesses and industry, and regulate the location of environmental hazards.

Zoning can be dense, inclusive, mixed-use and transit-oriented, or it can accelerate gentrification hotspots, force people to drive, create urban heat islands, or compound other health and environmental risks. In many cities where housing is expensive, zoning rules for large residential constructions require the development of affordable housing, or linkage payments used to create affordable housing. Even then, it is not the existence of these policies that is important, but their execution. Where is the affordable housing being built? Can it accommodate various family sizes and is it built in a sustainable manner? When large tracts of land are up for sale and redevelopment, it is often through zoning and land use that cities have a once in a generation opportunity to intentionally design neighborhoods for vibrant, resilient living by setting development standards that will affect an area for decades to come. Cities have additional powers in their ability to grant zoning variances to individual projects. This is an immense power. When a project seeks an exception to accepted zoning and land use practices, is the variance aligned with our priorities? What community benefits are we asking for in return?

PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTING

Cities exert tremendous legal latitude over municipal procurement and contracted services. They are powerful tools to ensure our shared wealth is used to enhance the local economy, source sustainably, and benefit our communities. **These practices should seek reparative justice through employment requirements for our Black and Brown neighbors, low-income communities, women, veterans, small businesses, and individuals with nonviolent records.** We need to reorient our procurement and contracting practices away from a focus on the "lowest cost" and towards practices that embody our values. We can set an example for how to think beyond the "bucks" and see procurement and contracting as policy tools.

London, England has purchased over 200 electric city buses to improve air quality and reduce city emissions. Los Angeles has a Good Food Purchasing Pledge that generated over $12 million in healthy food purchases and 150 new jobs in its first year.[9] Many cities, including Boston, have instituted renewable energy purchasing requirements as part of their citywide climate action goals. But it is not enough to assume our cities actively engage in just and equitable agreements with vendors and suppliers; we should seek open and transparent procurement processes so that cities remain accountable.

TAXATION

There are a number of tax instruments cities use to raise revenue, including local hotel taxes, sales taxes, water and sewer (or other) utility fees, trash fees, business license fees, improvement district fees, parking fines, real estate transfer fees, and property taxes. The most prominent of these is local property taxes. Property taxes make up 73 percent of Boston's annual budget, yet this is not a burden shared by everyone since roughly half the property in the city is tax-exempt (because it is government-owned, owned by a nonprofit entity or otherwise exempt). This means raising property taxes for municipal services which residents, businesses, nonprofits, corporations, commuting workers and city visitors enjoy is a bill borne by only a portion of those who benefit, and can lead to increased housing prices. As a remedy, some localities have instituted Payments In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT), which are voluntary monetary contributions and community benefits made by tax-exempt entities to help pay for the wealth of city services they enjoy.

The state holds ultimate authority over what local governments can tax or whether local taxes can increase. However, cities have successfully advocated for power over multiple taxation tools. **And as tools, the power ultimately lies in how they are wielded.** Local taxes can be punitive, and lead to employer or resident exodus. Or, they can be artfully used as nudges to tax the unwelcome externalities of the market – vacant units in a high-cost city, excessive waste or water use, a plethora of short-term rentals, parking fees where traffic congestion is chronic - to raise revenues and drive local behavior towards pro-social and pro-environmental ends.

LOCAL REGULATIONS

Cities have discretionary powers to regulate activities for the protection of public health and welfare. Across America, there are at least 50 cities and county governments that have enacted living wage ordinances higher than their state's standards. Some localities go further and require employers to offer paid sick time and fair hiring policies for people with past nonviolent offences. Many municipalities use their police powers to lower speed limits within neighborhoods or to set aside entire streets for pedestrian and bicycle use. As we learn more about the terrible impact of hydraulic fracturing practices for natural gas extraction in communities where it is sourced, as well as the prevalence and safety concerns of gas leaks across our cities, local governments like Denton, Texas and Brookline, Massachusetts have stepped in to institute natural gas bans. Local regulations are vulnerable to state preemption. Nevertheless, this has not prevented cities from interpreting this authority as enabling progressive, proactive and preventative measures in the public interest.

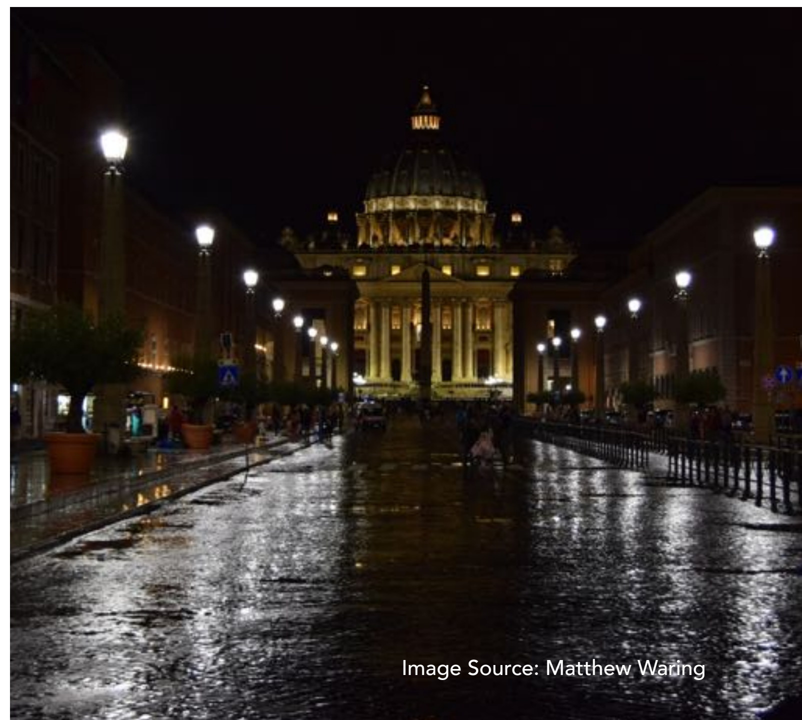
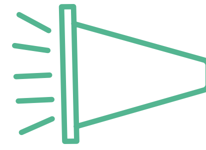


Image Source: Matthew Waring

INCENTIVES

Complimenting their regulatory and taxation powers to discourage undesirable impacts on the community, cities can use financial, permitting and land use incentives to encourage desired behaviors. Buildings and businesses that support local values such as onsite resiliency measures, hire locally, and create affordable commercial spaces might be given tax abatements or have their building permits fast-tracked. Municipalities might offer variances to developers in exchange for equitable community benefits agreements that provide needed affordable housing, open space, or climate resilient infrastructure.

In many fundamental respects, cities and local employers have a shared drive to promote neighborhood vitality, ensure economic success, and prepare for climate change. When seen as potential partners on the same side of a problem, cities, large employers, and small businesses can - and have - created mutually beneficial relationships for the exchange of technical expertise, financial investment, and social capital.



ADVOCACY

Beyond the hard powers enumerated in law lies the power of advocacy. **As the government closest to the people, cities and towns are attuned to community needs and can use that political power to elevate local concerns in state, national and international deliberations.** Given how profoundly the decisions of states and the federal government impact municipal budgets and operations, the daily lives of residents, and the vitality of local institutions, city governments spend tremendous effort seeking to influence higher-level policymaking. In a recent survey of mayors, forty percent had hired lobbyists for state level advocacy.[10] Cities also relied on good working relationships with state and federal delegations to negotiate for local resources.

As the pandemic evolves and fades, all levels of government will need to contend with budget shortfalls at exactly the time when we should be seeking unprecedented public investment in just employment pathways, renewable energy, reinvigoration of our public infrastructure, and strategies to prepare for the unavoidable climate impacts of tomorrow. We will need shrewd and persistent cities to advocate for the investments and funding we will need.

Cities should emerge from the shadow of state preemption and the comfort of the status quo to fully embrace their powers. Procedural justice and transparency in idea generation, decision-making, and policy evaluation are critical overarching practices to ensure these powers are used in an accountable and democratic way. Do they entrench cycles of poverty and injustice, concentrating wealth and services? Or are they used transformatively; to rectify slow violences and create just societies ready for a changed world?

The choice is ours.

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POLICY IDEAS FOR A
LOCAL GREEN NEW DEAL
AND JUST RECOVERY

“When it comes to creating a multiracial, multiethnic, multi-religious democratic society, we are still a developing nation. We’ve only really been thinking about this for half a century. And there’s still so much that we don’t know... but all knowledge is available to us if we seek it.”

– American Historian Vincent Harding[1]

Mobilizations for local Green New Deals and Just Recoveries should not be mischaracterized as an over-response to the dangers posed by climate change and COVID-19. They are the next step along the long arc of history, a collection of very practical, achievable, and logical responses to the larger instabilities and inadequacies of neoliberal capitalism.

These mobilizations are borne out of a realization that climate change, the pandemic, racial injustice and class inequality are instigators of corrosive disadvantage put into place by the current political-economic system, and the realization that we have the power to change these outcomes when we harness the energy of this moment and intentionally act on the experience, knowledge and solutions that exist all around us.

A commitment to procedural justice is essential to the success of such a vision by breaking down barriers to engagement, information, and empowerment. Procedural justice is about threading opportunities for participation and community leadership into the entire process – from idea creation, to implementation, to evaluation – to create spaces of co-production. It means more than “checking off the engagement box.” Procedural justice embodies a deep trust and respect for the public. It means ensuring democratic access to the City’s information and resources, and ensuring government accountability.

Transparency is a key element to procedural justice because it affords residents and communities an honest look inside the operations of the City, particularly where progress is (and is not) being made addressing social inequality and racial disparities. And that means measuring what matters. Is the City of Boston truly making progress on the indicators that matter most to the city’s residents?

1. Vincent Harding: Is America Possible?, *On Being with Krista Tippett (podcast)*, updated July 2, 2020. https://onbeing.org/programs/vincent-harding-is-america-possible/.

Are we closing the injustice gaps? It is easy for cities to hide behind glossy plans with scant follow-through. A true commitment to procedural justice means creating a process that reflects the values of our communities and invests in long-lasting solutions.

A federal Green New Deal approach alone is not the entire answer. We also need profound action at the local level. Each of us must come together to plan, organize, and define what a Green New Deal and Just Recovery looks like in our own communities. There are no hard rules for what programs, investments, policies, and process improvements can be part of this reimagining of the role of government. But what is non-negotiable is that such an approach pursues change that embodies principles of justice and sustainability. It is critical that the process be inclusive, the actions be justice-oriented, and that the solutions meet local needs over the self-interests of large corporations and indifferent government agencies.

This work is intended to instigate a broader public discussion and imagining of a Green New Deal and Just Recovery using the City of Boston as an example. Summarized here is a collection of ideas and solutions that touch on many of Boston's most pressing problems and inequities. It builds on the concerns, feedback and ideas shared by environmentalists, social/environmental justice activists, labor representatives, planning experts and urban researchers in the Boston area during a Green New Deal breakfast in October 2019. It references numerous reports and projects spearheaded by local organizations that have helped elevate the public discussion in Boston. It draws on information and insights from meetings with individual issue-area experts, activists, and practitioners. And it ties into the wealth of innovative solutions already being explored in cities across America and even beyond our borders. This work is not a list of what "should" be done. It is an exploration of the potential of cities to show what we are capable of achieving in the pursuit of justice and sustainability.

We must recognize this moment in time when so many interconnected, deeply rooted and unsustainable practices are laid bare for what it is: a call to action.

It is a call for the critical transformative changes that we have put off far too long. We should not be overwhelmed by the scale of intervention and speed necessary to address the interlinked crises of climate change, racial injustice, and economic inequality. We are neither powerless nor alone in our desire to right the wrongs of today and yesterday. We must act swiftly and boldly.

With the powers we hold as residents of America's largest cities and smallest communities, we are capable of channeling our collective energy towards solutions that reflect the values of a diverse public and set us on a path towards creating a more just and sustainable future.

We created the systems.

We can transform them.

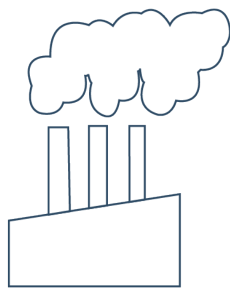
ADDRESSING THE "GREEN GAP"

Why take action?

The history of America's public lands and spaces is a history with deep roots in the violent dispossession of nature from indigenous tribes and the systematic exclusion of communities of color from green spaces through racist policies like redlining.[1] A national study found that low income communities in Massachusetts are 60 percent more likely to live in nature-deprived areas, whereas nature deprivation affects 85 percent of Black residents and 90 percent of Latinx residents – over six-fold that of Whites.[2] Worse, children have far less access to nature that the average American.[3]

While parks and greenspace are often within walking distance for residents, Boston ranks in the bottom of major U.S. cities in the amount of greenspace per resident. The city has twice as much roadway per resident as greenspace.[4] Notwithstanding multiple plans and initiatives to increase our urban forest, only 27 percent of land in Boston was covered with tree canopy as recently as 2017 – with Downtown, Charlestown, East Boston, and South Boston all having less than ten percent canopy.[5]

"Low income communities in Massachusetts are 60% more likely to live in nature-deprived areas



Nature deprivation affects 85% of black residents & 90% of Latin X residents

The areas with most potential for tree canopy correspond with neighborhoods that suffer extreme heat during summer, where surface temperatures on asphalt and roofs can reach 140 degrees on a typical summer day, causing a host of health impacts.[6] In addition to the existing structural inequities in tree coverage, numerous factors have complicated the growth of our urban forest, including a short care period for new saplings, insufficient protection of trees during development, the safety and space constraints posed by utility lines, excessive road salt, and methane gas leaks.

Nature is not just an amenity. It offers a host of measurable public health, economic, and climate resiliency benefits. Living in proximity to trees and greenspace has been shown to enhance physical activity, reduce obesity rates, mitigate exposure to air pollutants, improve pregnancy outcomes, reduce cardiovascular disease prevalence, decrease mortality, and have a positive impact on mental health.[7] Trees also serve as efficient and affordable carbon sinks. An average mature tree can sequester approximately 50 pounds of carbon annually[8]; with Boston's 300,000 trees that translates to about 680 metric tons of sequestered carbon per year. Shade trees are effective at mitigating urban heat islands, and on average reduce urban air temperatures between 2 and 4 degrees Fahrenheit, though the cooling benefits of trees are felt well beyond where they are planted.[9]

Urban areas with dense tree cover also benefit from lower levels of particulate matter, including PM 2.5.[10] This creates health co-benefits because viruses like COVID-19 can attach themselves to pollution particles. Studies have shown higher mortality rates from the virus in more polluted communities.[11] Rounding out a host of benefits are the economic savings provided by trees. A 2017 study found Boston already saves up to $352,000 in avoided health costs and missed work days annually from tree planting and maintenance, even though the City spends comparably less on maintaining our urban forest.[12] The national economic value provided by air quality improvements and carbon sequestration of urban trees and shrubs alone is $3.8 billion,[13] not to mention the stormwater mitigation, heat and noise abatement, public health and aesthetic value of urban nature.

Source: Maya Gangan

Addressing the Green Gap

Since the first urban canopy goals were made over a decade ago, the City of Boston has lost canopy coverage. The 2017 tree canopy assessment found that a full 41 percent of the city's land area could be modified to accommodate tree canopy coverage. That is in addition to the existing 27 percent land coverage currently in the city.[14] There is no doubt we need a comprehensive urban forest strategy. The factors affecting tree retention, growth, management and health are complex and demand a holistic approach.

Boston's recently passed budget provides funding for the formulation of an urban forest master plan in 2021, but we can proactively address one of the most glaring injustices of our canopy now. Numerous analyses of our inconsistent urban canopy and urban heat island hotspots exist. The City can use these maps to establish priority planting zones that can be used to reorient current Parks and Recreation Department planting efforts to focus on the areas of highest need while maintenance and care of existing trees continues citywide. Any private development or reconstruction occurring within the priority planting zones would need to contribute either to the growth and maintenance of the area's tree canopy and heat island reduction through tree planting, white roofs, rooftop planting, permeable pavement or other suitable adaptations.

One way in which the City can meet these goals is through a zoning overlay district, which would lay out specific urban forest and heat island reduction parameters for both public and private development. In addition, tree canopy targets can be integrated into the goals for the City's Eco-Districts. Since urban greening can accelerate neighborhood gentrification, it is important to coordinate tree planting in priority zones with education

Cities Taking Action

Portland, OR: The City of Portland clearly lays out its commitments to distributional and recognitional equity in its latest tree planting strategy. After conducting a year of research and outreach to identify barriers to tree planting for communities of color, immigrants, refugees, and low-income residents, the City has identified priority planting areas and defined strategies for culturally-specific outreach (among numerous other recommendations).

Augusta: Augusta, Georgia passed a tree ordinance in 2017 that sets out minimum canopy coverage requirements for all land undergoing development. Minimum canopy coverage is least 30 percent. This can be achieved by preserving existing trees onsite and adding on the anticipated coverage of newly planted trees ten years from the time of planting.

Houston: Through a major public-private investment partnership called Bayou Greenways 2020, Houston is increasing access to natural areas, trails and forested spaces for 1.5 million residents, in particular historically underinvested communities. Bayou Greenways 2020 connects the city's neighborhoods through multiple green ribbons totaling 150 miles.

Los Angeles: California's Coastal Conservancy has been funding urban greening in historically underserved communities of Los Angeles since 2008. In addition, the city's Green New Deal has set a goal to increase urban canopy coverage by 50 percent in low-income and heat-impacted areas by 2028.

Image Source: Anna Earl

on renter's rights. The City must ensure a robust community visioning process to determine what vegetation is most appropriate for the current community to help avoid planting becoming a marketing strategy for a gentrified neighborhood.

The City's Parks and Recreation Department can also collaborate with arts organizations in the vicinity of each priority planting zone to envision ways to activate these new green spaces using culturally appropriate public art and interactive features to draw in existing neighbors. Delineating specific areas for planting will help ensure tree survivability in the interim period until we implement and fully-fund a comprehensive urban forest master plan. Doing so also shows a commitment to addressing the intersectional injustices present in "green gap" areas: a history of disinvestment, an existing lack of urban nature, and heat island hotspots.

A number of nonprofits with missions to improve public access and the availability of nature already exist in Boston. The City can partner with these organizations to ensure public education on tree planting and community visioning around what to plant reaches a broader audience. The City and its partners should also be clear on the delineation of responsibilities for tree maintenance over the long-term, with the City providing technical assistance for as long as needed. There should be a designated point of contact in City Hall for each priority zone to coordinate with the community and relevant municipal departments. Boston can explore additional funding for its priority planting zones through the state's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program since program funds can be applied to urban forestry initiatives. Some of the funding could be earmarked to fund education and maintenance programs run by partner nonprofits.

Companion Policies

- **Link tree planting to methane gas leak repairs.** As leaking underground pipes are repaired, ensure utilities are also replacing any trees that have been killed by the leak, whether a new tree be placed in the same location or a more suitable spot nearby.
- **Pass a Heritage Tree ordinance** that protects trees above a certain diameter and age. Removal of a Heritage Tree can either be subject to a public hearing or, in certain cases, be banned outright with commensurate fines for violations. The Heritage Tree ordinance can apply to both public and private land.
- Bring together the city's electric utility providers and local nonprofits focused on urban greening to scope out the viability of a **utility-sponsored planting program on private property** to reduce energy (see Sacramento's partnership program).
- Explore mechanisms for **incentivizing tree planting** and protection on existing business, commercial and industrial properties through programs like City Forest Credits.
- Partner with state agencies and local horticultural and landscaping employers to **support creation of a "Roots to Re-Entry" training program** for residents transitioning back into their communities from prison to gain greenspace management and horticultural skills. Philadelphia's Roots to Re-Entry program has reduced recidivism rates by over 50 percent.
- Consider the benefits and liabilities of **planting fruit trees in public spaces**, including the increased management such trees would need.

Resources:

- Vibrant Cities Lab Toolkit
- Urban Forests Case Studies
- The Nature Gap
- Urban Green Equity on the Ground

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AN AFFORDABLE GREEN ENERGY TRANSITION

Why take action?

Massachusetts has tremendous green renewable energy potential and is well positioned to lead the way into a clean energy future. If small-scale energy generation facilities are included, renewables made up almost 20 percent of the state's electric generation in 2018.[1] Rooftop solar alone could produce almost half of the state's annual energy needs.[2] Investing in renewables offers numerous returns: energy resilience, market stability, long-term affordability, and in some cases, total independence from the grid.

The cost of renewables and storage have rapidly decreased and will continue to do so as they become the investments of choice over fossil fuels. By mid-2018, over 2,400 solar systems had been installed in the City of Boston. Installations average around 300 per year in the city, a substantial increase from just ten years ago. But we are falling far short of our potential generation, which is around 1 TWh (terawatt-hour), or 15 percent of our current electrical demand.[3] It is not just residential properties that have shied away from renewable systems. Large commercial properties like the Boston Convention Center have floated the idea of a solar rooftop, but not implemented it.[4]

The need for a renewable energy transition is accentuated in the Boston area by the high costs of conventional energy sources. The cost of energy provided by electric utilities was a whopping 67 percent higher than the national average in December 2018, and natural gas 42 percent above average.[5] Interviews conducted with 72 low-income Dorchester residents found instances of extreme hardship posed by energy costs, creating the dilemma: do we heat or eat?[6] Energy costs negatively affect businesses as well. A study of small businesses in the Boston area found 65 percent had concerns about energy costs and nearly three-quarters were exploring energy efficiency measures.[7]

Energy efficiency improvements, including air sealing, smart thermostats, improved insulation and LED lighting on single-family homes alone could reduce utility bills by about 27 percent - saving Massachusetts residents $1.5 billion a year.[8] Further savings can be achieved with battery storage technology. One study found that in Massachusetts, 40 percent of annual electricity costs came from the most expensive 10 percent of hours[9] because that is when electrical demand is highest and more expensive, fossil-fuel based "peaking" power plants must be turned on to meet demand. Meanwhile, the cost of lithium ion storage batteries has dropped 85 percent in the last ten years – and in another ten years, they will cost half what

Source: Maya Gangan

they do today.[10] In Boston, deep energy retrofits could reduce energy use by 30 to 40 percent, whereas more standard retrofits would still reduce energy use by at least 20 percent.[11] Every $1 million we invest in retrofits generates the same amount of local economic investment as a new single-family or multifamily construction.[12]

Aside from cost and efficiency, there are public health considerations for investing in electrification and renewable energy. A UCLA study recently found that natural gas appliances at home can create air quality that is two to five times worse that the air quality outdoors.[13] Gas appliances also emit air pollutants such as particulate matter and carbon monoxide, which have been linked to respiratory illnesses and cardiovascular disease.[14] These combined investments reduce pollution, bring energy prices down, solve reliability concerns, and ultimately, can take the place of fossil fuel infrastructure.

An Affordable Energy Transition

Boston can leverage its excellent AAA bond rating to issue new Green Municipal Bonds earmarked to accelerate the installation of solar and efficiency measures for municipal parking lots and buildings such as schools, offices, police and fire stations, and community centers. Green Muni Bonds are similar to normal municipal bonds but have been earmarked for green investments and are accompanied by compliance reporting to ensure the bonds are used for the prescribed purpose. The first Green Muni Bond issued in the U.S. was issued by the state of Massachusetts in 2013. Just three years later, they accounted for two percent, or $6.5 billion of all municipal bonds in the U.S.[15]

Image Source: Biel Morro

Aside from the concrete benefits to the city, Green Muni Bonds have grown rapidly as a desirable investment opportunity and have been oversubscribed in Massachusetts and elsewhere,[16] and have been used by numerous U.S. cities for water infrastructure upgrades. They are also clear signal to bond rating agencies that the City is serious about climate adaptation at a time when municipal bond ratings may be downgraded because of climate risk.[17] As part of its project identification study for suitable renewable energy and efficiency upgrades, the City should also explore how Green Muni Bonds can be used to fund community solar projects. Research from 2016 has already identified 42 areas across Boston that have high potential for community energy solutions.[18] Community solar projects would be installed, funded and owned by the City and placed on one or more private buildings. The long-term goal of municipally-funded solar (both city-owned building and community solar systems) will be to achieve enough generation to meet a significant portion of the city's electrical demand and Community Choice Aggregation goals from locally generated energy.

There is a great deal of enthusiasm and desire for a transition to renewable energy, but the upfront costs of renewables and retrofitting often make the transition unaffordable to homeowners and businesses. To complement its Green Municipal Bonds, Boston can authorize local building owners to use a Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program through a one-time municipal opt-in. Massachusetts passed PACE enabling legislation in 2016, making it a more practical option for municipalities. Program guidelines and financing should soon be

Cities Taking Action

Hayward: Through bonds voted on by ballot measure, the Hayward Unified School District installed 5.3 MW of solar photovoltaic, electric vehicle charging stations, and battery storage across 33 school buildings. The installations are expected to create $65 million in energy savings for the school district.

Ashville: Ashville became the first city to issue Green Muni Bonds in 2015 when it raised $55 million for multiple water infrastructure and water service improvements.

Morris County: This county in New Jersey has created an innovative financing mechanism that combines government bonds and power purchase agreements to install rooftop solar on city buildings. After issuing bonds in 2010, the country has built 3.2 MW of solar energy on 19 schools and government buildings.

Houston: The City of Houston launched PACE in 2016 and that same year, there were already PACE projects worth $100 million underway citywide. Houston PACE projects have focused primarily on energy efficiency and renewable energy installation, but PACE is also seen as tool for investing in water conservation systems.

Milwaukee: The City of Milwaukee created a local PACE program through a unique public-private partnership that leverages private capital for upfront investments rather than relying on state funding entities.

West Palm Beach: This Florida city became one of the first in the state to offer PACE financing in 2012 for energy efficiency, renewables, and also water conservation projects. It expanded the program in 2016 to include residential properties and passed a local ordinance enumerating consumer protections for program participants.

available, so Boston would be among the first cities to allow PACE. A notable exception to the program should be made by the City to limit it from applying to any new natural gas infrastructure.

PACE is a program that entirely covers the up-front cost of energy efficiency upgrades or renewable energy installation. The building owner then pays for the upgrade over the course of many years through an "betterment assessment" addition to their property tax. Building residents and owners would benefit from substantially reduced energy costs, numerous health improvements, and (if there are energy efficiency upgrades) greater resilience to extreme weather. If the building is sold, the assessment stays with the property until it is paid off. Currently, the program can be applied to commercial and industrial buildings, buildings owned by nonprofits, and multifamily buildings that have five or more units.

Boston's neighborhoods have varying degrees of access to current efficiency and renewable energy programs since technical assistance is not widely available in multiple languages and houses can be deemed unfit if the roof or structure is unsound. The PACE program could be applied to solve a number of underlying access issues, including structural improvements to make buildings ready for solar or efficiency measures. The Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) and Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) could provide wraparound assistance, including translation services and application assistance to interested parties. Ultimately the city can explore how PACE projects can also become sources of local renewable energy generation for the city's Community Choice Aggregation program.

Companion Policies

- **Revisit Community Choice Aggregation** during periodic electric contract negotiations with the utility to increase the default percent coming from renewables. When feasible, consider making the default 100 percent renewable, with an "opt-out" option.
- Cities not constrained by state preemption may enact **bans on construction of new natural gas infrastructure** to protect resident health and safety.
- Research the potential for **utility municipalization** which involves the city buying utility infrastructure from a private utility and putting it under government control, which removes the profit incentive to restrict the availability of more affordable, renewable energy services.
- Pass an ordinance requiring **medium and large buildings to publicly post their energy efficiency "grade"**, a program similar to publicly posed inspection grades.
- Bring together a coalition of large institutions and facilities like hospitals, universities and factories to discuss ways the city can support the implementation of **clean district energy solutions as well as renewables procurement and energy efficiency upgrades.**
- Use the political and economic influence of city government to **advocate for statewide legislation promoting 100 percent renewable energy** and the creation of funding pools to help cities achieve that goal.

Resources:

- How to Issue a Green Muni Bond
- How to Issue a Green City Bond
- Climate Bonds Initiative
- MassDevelopment: PACE
- PACE Financing of Renewables and Efficiency
- Grid Alternatives
- RE-volv Solar Seed Fund

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PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATIVE HOUSING

Why take action?

Housing stability has become a luxury not everyone can afford. Half of Boston's renters are rent-burdened and a full quarter of renters pay more than half their income in rent.[1] The structural and institutional roots of this problem can be traced back to exclusionary zoning and predatory lending by banks beginning in the early 20th Century. Families of color were denied the same homeownership opportunities as Whites, pushing them into the rental market where rental discrimination was – and still is – rampant. A recently released study of Greater Boston found that 86 percent of renters seeking housing with a housing voucher experienced discriminatory behavior. [2] Even for those seeking housing without a voucher, five times as many Black renters did not receive a reply compared to White renters.[3]

Housing stability is foundational to family health and wellbeing and key to social mobility. Just over a third of Boston residents own their own home.[4] Over the last 25 years, Greater Boston has seen a greater concentration of people living in poverty at the same time home values have increased significantly. Less than a third of available houses in the area were priced below $300,000 in 2016.[5] Gentrification and displacement are now widespread as housing becomes a vehicle for speculative investment instead of a place to live.

Much of the energy around housing stability has been focused on creating affordable places to rent, but families also need affordable places to live long-term. While 27 percent of all rental units in the city are income-restricted, only three percent of ownership units have this safeguard. And affordable ownership opportunities are distributed unevenly across the City's neighborhoods – with a high of 10 percent of all ownership units in Roxbury to a low of 0.2 percent in West Roxbury.[6] These disparities contribute mightily to further wealth and racial segregation. Homeownership is strongly related to better family health outcomes and higher life satisfaction. It also has numerous positive benefits for children, including academic achievement and improving nutrition.[7]

Promote Development of Cooperative Housing

We need to consciously create diverse housing types that people can afford. Nonprofit and resident-owned cooperatives have a long and proven history of creating greater social support and civic engagement, reducing carbon footprints and crime, and strengthening housing stability.[8] Simply put, cooperatives are a mechanism for removing housing from the pressures of the market and bringing the costs, management, and capital investments under collective control.

Cities Taking Action

Vienna: The municipal government owns almost a quarter of the available housing stock in the city. Local government subsidizes the cost of cooperative construction and provides project loans with near zero interest rates. The City also provides complimentary services including eviction prevention, a developers cooperative housing competition, democratic participation for city-owned housing tenants, and actively acquires land for social housing.

Zürich: The citizens of Zürich held a referendum in 2011 to mandate that a third of the city's housing stock be cooperatives by 2050. The City creates public cooperatives, subsidizes non-profit cooperatives and leases land necessary to build on favorable terms. Rent prices are controlled by law.

New York City: Through long-term partnerships with the City, the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board (UHAB) helps residents form affordable, limited-equity housing cooperatives. UHAB provides interested residents seed money, technical assistance, regulatory advice, access to energy efficiency and solar power opportunities and management training to create a cooperative. The program has created homeownership opportunities residents in over 30,000 units.

Half of Boston renters spend at least 30% of their income on rent

A quarter of Boston renters spend at least 50% of their income on rent

Source: Aidan Crosby, Kailey Williams

Boston could support the development of cooperative housing in a number of ways. First, by expanding the Department of Neighborhood Development's scope to include a portfolio of cooperative services. Services such as providing seed grants and low-interest loans, offering technical and legal advice on formation and management, and connecting cooperatives with knowledgeable building and sustainability experts. The Urban Climate Corps and Just Transition Jobs Training programs could provide city-funded onsite resilience and energy upgrades. Second, the City can foster the creation of affordable cooperative housing on privately owned properties and act as a liaison between the City and private or nonprofit developers. In exchange for meeting long-term affordability requirements, private developers could receive property tax deductions. And finally, Boston can support cooperative growth through various development and zoning incentives such as density bonuses, fee waivers and permit fast-tracking, and providing long-term ground leases of municipally owned land. One of the methods to raise funds for these expanded services is through an Empty Homes tax.

Companion Policies

- Create zoning and tax incentives to **encourage the development of cooperatives and Community Land Trusts.**
- Adopt a **community impact fee for luxury developments, large-scale projects and projects seeking variances** to raise further funds for affordable housing, transit improvements and community services within the same district.
- **Convert single-family zoning districts and parcels** to multifamily, particularly near community services and transit lines.
- **Relax zoning and permitting restrictions on Accessory Dwelling Units.**
- Implement a **Tenant Opportunity to Purchase or a Right of First Refusal law** for rental units so tenants have a chance to buy when a landlord wants to sell.

Resources:

- National Association of Housing Cooperatives
- Cooperative Housing International
- National Co-op Research
- Policies for Shareable Cities

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DIVEST/REINVEST IN A CLIMATE JUST FUTURE

Why take action?

Boston's retirement system serves over 46,000 retirees and adds roughly 700 new people annually.[1] The City of Boston's Retirement Board controls approximately $5.4 billion in assets – not including teacher's pensions, which are controlled by the state. Of those funds, almost a million is invested in for-profit prisons and gun manufacturers. Another $23 million is in fossil fuel and pipeline companies.[2]

Holding public investments in private prisons, gun manufacturers, fossil fuel companies and other industries that profit off the immiseration of our people and nature is a violation of the City's responsibility to engage in socially and environmentally responsible action. With over 2.3 million people in prisons – disproportionately men of color - our country has the highest incarceration rate in the world.[3] In addition, our nation has a gun violence problem. Over 38,000 Americans lose their life to gun violence each year.[4] Meanwhile, over 100,000 Americans die each year from complications related to air pollution, at a cost to society of over $886 billion.[5] Almost 60 percent of these avoidable deaths are associated with our continued use of fossil fuels. Furthermore, climate change poses an existential threat to the future of humanity and the planet. Why would Boston be investing retirement funds in the very industries that are destroying the future of those retirees?

There is more than just a moral reason to divest. There is also an economic one. Over the past decade, investments that excluded fossil fuels performed better in terms of risk and returns, and the demand for fossil fuel power is predicted to decline from 2020 onwards.[6] The S&P 500's energy sector, which includes companies like Exxon and Halliburton, has yielded the worst return of all sectors in recent years, and especially this past year.[7] A long-term view of the energy sector shows renewable energy is rapidly becoming more affordable and cheaper than fossil fuels. The future is renewable. Fossil fuel companies and investors will be left holding billions in stranded assets and plummeting stock values as the oil and gas markets dry up, and lawsuits against these companies pile up. Boston must divest from corporations that profit off racial oppression, violence, and climate change. It needs to become part of the solution and reinvest in ways that enhance local wealth, equity, and climate just solutions.

Divest/Reinvest

Boston has divested before. In 1984, Boston passed the most far-reaching ordinance divesting from Apartheid South Africa of any major American city at the time.[8] 2020 has seen a wave of divestment by municipalities and large institutions such as universities.

Two of Boston's current investment priorities are to pay down unfunded pension liability and retain the city's AAA credit rating. This means ensuring a good return on investment and making sound, long-term investments. As the last ten years – and particularly the last year – have shown, extractive industries are fraught with unnecessary risk and threaten our ability to fully fund our pension system. If we are concerned with long-term prosperity and sustainability, our investments should reflect these values.

"It's important that Boston - as the cradle of liberty - send a message that it objects to human rights violations."

-Former Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn when the city divested from Apartheid South Africa

They should be transferred to companies that help create a more climate just city - such as electrification and renewable technology.

The city can direct the Retirement Board to immediately stop new investments in gun manufacturing, prisons and fossil fuel companies as we construct a plan to fully divest and invest in socially responsible enterprises. Full divestment will take some time as the assets identified for divestment are held in numerous diversified portfolios. In order to do so, Boston can devise clear inclusion and exclusion criteria for current and future investments while improving public reporting on the status of our existing holdings. Boston should also go further by reinvesting a portion of the freed funds into building local wealth by channeling investments through community-based financial institutions (CDFIs). There is already a wealth of CDFIs in the Greater Boston area investing in affordable housing, small businesses, and community projects that the city can bring into the divest/reinvest planning process.

Source: Aidan Crosby, Kailey Williams

Cities Taking Action

London: The City of London made a commitment to divest city pensions from fossil fuel companies in 2016. The City's pension authority manages close to £10 billion. It is actively working on full divestment this year, and has implemented a climate change policy to evaluate the climate risk of all future investments.

San Francisco: In 2018, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to pass a resolution to screen municipal insurers for investments in and underwriting of coal and tar sands projects and to end relationships with insurers that do not have a full divestment plan.

New York City: New York City has been fully divested of private prisons since 2017, having sold off $48 million in shares. The City is also on its way to divesting the nation's largest pension fund from $5 billion fossil fuel holdings over five years and has committed to investing over $4 billion in climate solutions such as wind, solar and energy efficiency.

Portland, OR: Portland's City Council created a Socially Responsible Investments Committee six years ago. Based on social and environmental considerations, the Committee reviews investments for inclusion or removal from the city's Corporate Securities Do-Not-Buy List. The Committee's recommendations must be adopted by the City Council.

Portland Clean Energy Fund

Companion Policies

- Implement a practice **to screen any municipal insurance policyholders** for fossil fuel investments and other investments that do not meet socially responsible standards. Divest the City from existing insurers that do not meet these standards.
- **Reform the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program** for nonprofits to ensure large and successful institutions are contributing what they can to their city, and that investments made "in lieu" of property taxes benefit the community.
- Study the feasibility of a **municipal carbon tax or fee**. Revenues can be used to make renewable technology more affordable, including electrification and solar installations.
- **Explore creation of a municipal bank** which could provide low-interest loans to local small businesses and community-based resilience projects.

Resources:

- How To Divest Invest: A Guide
- MassDivest.org
- The Reinvest Report
- Decarbonizing Your City's Insurance
- C40 Divest/Invest Forum

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FARE-FREE EXPRESS TRANSIT ROUTES

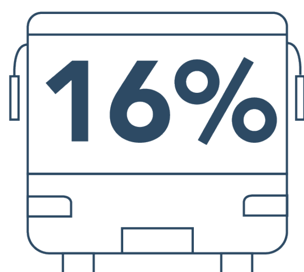
Why take action?

Accessible, safe, non-polluting, efficient and affordable multimodal transit can be a big draw for cities. But in Greater Boston, nearly one in six residents have considered leaving the area to get away from the overwhelming traffic.[1] Before the pandemic, the MBTA carried around 1.2 million people every day.[2] Ridership has been increasing, and not just because Boston is growing. Who wants to suffer the country's worst morning and evening commutes and lose 149 hours annually to traffic congestion?[3] Our transit systems do not provide safe, reliable or economical alternatives.

Meanwhile, only a small minority of city residents have easy access to protected bike lanes,[4] while the system itself is inconsistently connected. The MBTA is facing both new and growing structural problems that have resulted in infrequent service, numerous derailments, increasingly long commute times, overcrowding, and deferment of critical infrastructure improvements. Because of service inequities in reliability and frequency, low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color in the city have longer transit commutes than average.[5] While MBTA buses carry the highest number of low-income and people of color compared with other public transit services,[6] Black riders spend an average of 64 hours more each year on a bus than White riders.[7]

Source: Maya Gangan

"Cost of transit eats up to



of household incomes."[9]

Another inequity plagues the system: unaffordability. For some neighborhoods in the city, the cost of transit eats up to 16 percent of household income.[8] This is a reality made worse by a 41 percent rise in far increases since 2012.[9] To achieve a climate just future, shifting more resources and residents towards public transit over gas-burning cars is crucial. Nearly a third of all air pollution emissions within Boston are caused by transportation, and it is a major factor in the elevated cases of asthma among both children and adults in the City.[10] A recent study by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America found that Boston is the country's 8th most challenging place to live with asthma because of the City's poor air quality, poverty, and other social factors that make asthma worse.[11]

Cities Taking Action

Park City: Park City, Utah has provided fare-free transit town-wide for over 40 years. Since transportation is a main source of municipal emissions, the town is converting its bus fleet to all-electric buses with the help state and federal funding.

Kansas City: The city has proposed a long-term initiative for fare-free transit citywide. This year, Kansas City rolled out free fares for students, seniors and one pilot bus route which together account for 25 percent of the city's total ridership.

Lawrence: The City of Lawrence recently launched fare-free service on three key bus routes throughout the city and ridership has increased by a quarter. The program is paid for through cash reserves and is intended to maximize access to transportation for those who would otherwise not be able to afford it.

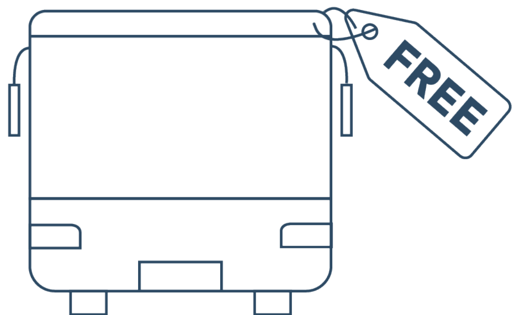
Fare-Free Express Transit Routes

One of the ultimate transit equity achievements is implementing a citywide fare-free transit system. Fare-free transit is about affordability, and for Boston, it would cost as little as $36 million per year to fully fund.[12] But it actually creates a large array of positive local impacts. Ridership almost always increases – sometimes substantially, like in the Salt Lake Valley where the introduction of one free bus increased ridership eightfold.[13]

It is especially important to efficiently connect lower-income residents and neighborhoods of color to employers citywide and help close the racial gap in income and wealth inequality. Many of these residents lack alternative transportation options to access key jobs and City services. The importance of this can be seen in how some of Boston's busiest bus routes have retained high ridership throughout the pandemic, including the 23 and 28 buses and the Silver Line 5.

Fare-free transit provides key benefits to lower-income residents and eases the high costs of urban living. And it also takes a big bite out of total transportation-related air emissions and greenhouse gases. Getting to that long-term goal will require coordination with other metro-area cities and a number of state agencies. In the interim, Boston can rollout fare-free transit on key routes. These routes are the most populous and those serving environmental justice communities who are most burdened by the MBTA's costs, pollution, and unreliability. Boston's planning and transportation departments can also expand the city's bus-priority lanes to include critical sections of fare-free routes.

Closing the Racial Gap through Fare-Free Transit



The initial rollout of the program could be partially subsidized by better municipal enforcement of the state's anti-idling law, transitioning to electric powered buses, and instituting a residential parking permit fee in Boston. Similar parking fees exist in neighboring cities, where a parking permit costs between $25 and $40 a year. Rapid implementation of such a program would help residents shift away from a return to the car as the city recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resources:

- Transportation for Massachusetts Recommendations
- Livable Streets Alliance
- C40 Mode Shift Implementation Group
- Implementation and Outcomes of Fare-Free Transit Systems

Companion Policies

- **Institute transit impact fees** for new development that are collected in a citywide fund and used to finance equitable, multi-modal transportation improvements across the city.
- **Improve existing bike lanes with protective infrastructure** and link up unconnected lanes.
- **Plan for care-free districts and days** to promote biking and walking in cultural districts and smaller commercial areas.
- Determine if **congestion pricing** can address local and regional transit inequities.
- **Regulate what time of day delivery trucks can operate** to reduce congestion and emissions.
- **Implement vehicle miles traveled (VMT) fees** for ride-hailing services to curb empty ride-hail driving and idling.
- **Expand transit service to include late-night hours**, which disproportionately benefits service workers, students, low-income residents and residents of color.
- Advocate at the state level for **rapid electrification of public transit vehicles**. Potential funding sources include federal transportation grants, gas taxes, and carbon pricing, though there are equity considerations for any taxes and pricing mechanisms.

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FINANCING INFRASTRUCTURE EQUITY

Why take action?

Management of stormwater and sewer infrastructure is not a particularly visible municipal responsibility. However, this infrastructure plays a critical role in safeguarding public health and our urban environment. How they are designed and managed also has profound equity implications. High water bills have put a financial strain on millions of Americans. By 2022, water bills may be unaffordable for over a third of American households.[1] Those that cannot pay up must stare down the threat of water shutoffs or even liens on their homes.

Source: Maya Gangan

Thousands of Boston residents had been threatened with water shutoffs annually. Those facing shutoffs are disproportionately residents of color.[2] The Boston Water and Sewer Commission (BWSC) must not only contend with structural problems caused by outdated infrastructure but also with the impacts that climate change will have on an already overburdened system. Many of the buildings in the Boston area were built before older leaded pipes were phased out. Some 20,000 of them have lead service lines.[3] About 80 percent of Boston has separate infrastructure for stormwater. The vast majority of the remaining drains combine stormwater runoff and sewers, known as combined sewer overflows (CSOs). This causes a problem during intense rain events as these systems reach flow capacity untreated sewage is dumped into local rivers and the bay. In 2017, ten outfall pipes along the Charles River dumped over 29 million gallons of raw sewage into the river.[4] The problem is not limited to the Charles River. The BWSC responded to over 200 system overflow events in 2019, including ones inside buildings.[5] Overflow events can render water bodies unswimmable, whereas nuisance flooding from stormwater systems on private property can aggravate asthma and negatively affect indoor air quality.[6]

Cities are replete with impervious surfaces that cannot absorb water, such as concrete, asphalt, and brick. When it rains, water cannot seep through into the ground. The water instead picks up a host of toxic pollutants from our roadways on its way into the stormwater infrastructure and out into waterways. Boston's lack of greenspace density and the impacts of climate change on the City only worsen the problem. The City's drainage system is already easily overwhelmed. Future stormwater and nuisance flooding is predicted to affect 7 percent of Boston's total land area in 2050 during intense storms. Towards the end of the century over 11,000 buildings will be directly exposed to stormwater flooding across every neighborhood of the City.[7] Incentivizing the capture and filtering of water runoff onsite is critical for climate adaptation, and can also generate significant public health and equity benefits.

Cities Taking Action

Philadelphia: The City phased out its old potable-water based fee structure in favor of one based on impervious area to better reflect the properties contributing runoff. The City offers income-based payment plans (and in some cases bill forgiveness) for residents as well as grants for stormwater retrofits to non-residential property owners.

Washington, D.C.: The City lowered its base sewer fee and added a new Impervious Area Charge that employs a tiered system for calculating rates. Residential customers have seen little difference in their bills, whereas commercial properties with large impervious surfaces are now contributing equitably. The City has instituted a Stormwater Retention Credit Program where property owners can reduce their stormwater fees and even sell credits.

Cincinnati: The City charges a flat fee based on property size and a variable fee based on land use and property area. One and two-unit residences just pay the flat fee, whereas commercial, industrial, institutional and other land use types have their utility bills calculated using an Intensity Development Factor.

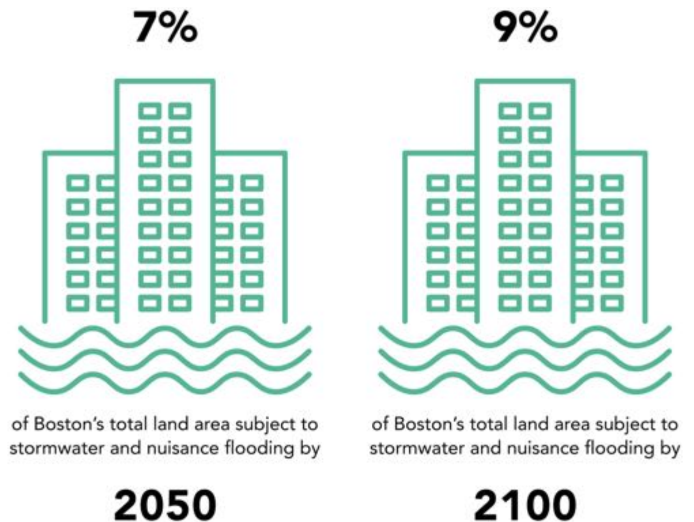
Financing Infrastructure Resilience & Equity

The City of Boston can convert its existing water and sewer fee structure to a more equitable stormwater fee based on land use and the extent of a property's impervious surfaces. As a fee, it can apply to tax-exempt entities as well, incentivizing owners large and small to reduce their runoff. The funds are stored in an enterprise fund that must be completely disbursed every year, meaning there is a municipal incentive to rapidly invest in green infrastructure. Some of this enterprise fund can be used to cover the costs of Urban Climate Corps projects that have a direct impact on stormwater infrastructure and resilience. Developers and private entities seeking to repurpose or renovate existing buildings or land will also be incentivized to build-in onsite stormwater management to reduce their fees, which in turn reduces the infrastructure burden citywide.

Migrating over to a stormwater fee from the current rate structure may reduce the cost for residential households but should still be accompanied by a form of credit relief for residents. Water is a human right, and it is essential for healthy living. No resident should ever have to fear their water will be shut off. Instead, to ensure payment BWSC can implement ratepayer payment assistance plans based on income or disability. Meanwhile, all types of property owners would qualify for stormwater credits based on the types of site-suitable stormwater infrastructure or other low-impact development upgrades installed on their properties.

Companion Policies

- Collaborate with the US Green City Bonds Coalition to pursue green municipal bonds for large-scale climate resilient infrastructure investments.
- Institute a local excess waste fee to fund a municipal re-use and recycling center where construction materials, office items, electronics and some household materials can be repurposed. The center could train residents in recycled product design using 3D printers.
- Hire resilience liaisons to propose and coordinate climate-resilient infrastructure and development upgrades across relevant municipal departments.
- Explore large-scale stormwater and resilience projects including creating "Sponge City" districts where all stormwater is managed on-site. Sponge city/onsite stormwater management.
- Begin a community conversation around future managed retreat and waterfront buyouts.



Source: Aidan Crosby, Kailey Williams

Resources:

- NRDC Report: Making it Rain
- Stormwater Financing/Utility Starter Kit
- Democracy Collaborative: Building Resiliency through Green Infrastructure
- Building an Equitable and Just Green Infrastructure Strategy
- U.S. Green City Bonds Coalition
- The Smart Sponge City Project

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HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE FOOD

Why take action?

One of the many underlying vulnerabilities the pandemic has exposed is severe food insecurities among low income Americans, immigrants and black and brown communities. Roughly four in ten Black and Latinx households have struggled to feed their families during the crisis – double the rate of White families.[1] Unemployment reached nearly 20 percent in April, while the portion of temporary job losses that become permanent increased throughout the spring and summer,[2] dramatically increasing the number of families that are food insecure. Urban school districts struggled with school closures during the pandemic's first outbreak because of how it would affect children's access to nutritious meals – the second largest anti-hunger initiative in America.[3]

Source: Maya Gangan

The YMCA of Greater Boston blew past the previous year's total distributed meals in the first three months 2020.[4] Project Bread, a statewide anti-hunger organization, has reported a 300 percent increase in need, suggesting that about 38 percent of Massachusetts residents are having trouble putting food on the table.[5] One in seven families struggled to access food even before the pandemic.[6] Whereas food insecurity and hunger were estimated to cost the state $2.4 billion in avoidable healthcare costs and special education for undernourished children.[7] Between 2007 and 2017, food insecurity in the state increased 27 percent.[8]

The city has good grocery store coverage, although there are some localized food deserts in some parts of the city. Food insecurity is driven not only by one's ability to reach the store, but also by food affordability, a knowledge of food assistance programs, and the cultural appropriateness of available foods. The average monthly SNAP benefit in Massachusetts was a mere $134 in 2019, or about $1.36 per meal.[9] Just eating a healthier diet costs about $1.50 more per day than an unhealthy one.[10] In this respect, the pressure to buy unhealthy but cheap, heavily processed fast food is unmistakable, and is contributing to negative health outcomes nationwide.

About 18 percent of Boston's population were found to be food insecure in a recent survey. This citywide statistic conceals startling neighborhood and family-level disparities. Around 27 percent of Roxbury and Mattapan residents surveyed had trouble affording or accessing food, while female-led households, divorced households, Latinx families, and residents who spoke English as a second language suffered disproportionately.[11] Only 40 percent of

Cleveland Urban Farm

schoolchildren participate in breakfast programs - and 68 percent in school lunch - when nearly 75 percent live at or below the poverty line.[12]

What of locally grown food? The City has recently switched to a local supplier for fresh school lunches (an enormous improvement over previous lunch procurement arrangements) yet only nine schools in Boston have school gardens.[13] Acquiring land in the city for gardens is prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, Article 89 - which allows for various agricultural uses within the city and related approval processes - can be confusing to those seeking to create urban gardens. And our food distribution system not only adds cost but is highly vulnerable to climate risks. About 94 percent of the city's food arrives by truck[14] from vast distribution centers like the New England Produce Center in Chelsea that is vulnerable to sea level rise and severe storms. The city has rolled out numerous programs to provide free or reduced meals during this time of crisis to stem widespread hunger.[15] But the pandemic has also revealed our system's weaknesses and preexisting access and affordability problems that need to be addressed with renewed vigor.

Healthy, Affordable Food

Every dollar invested in a community garden yields around $6 in produce, or between $500 and $2,000 worth of fresh produce per family annually.[16] Boston can emulate other successful models around the country by enabling the use of underutilized or vacant public lands to grow fresh food, teach agricultural methods, and build food markets through long-term leases or more permanent easements with the city's existing agricultural land trusts. In some cases, it may make sense to sell the land to a local land trust.

To begin, the Mayor's Office of Food Access will need to create a publicly accessible inventory of all suitable municipal land, including vacant public lots, grassy strips, building yards, supportive rooftops, school grounds and existing public parkland that can serve a dual purpose. As part of this process, the City should inventory abandoned and vacant private land as well for potential future purchase and agricultural allocation. Part of the Office's expanded role would be to coordinate partnerships with small-scale sellers such as corner stores, convenience stores, food cooperatives, food banks, and farmer's markets so that excess produce can be sold to local stores.

Cities Taking Action

Seattle: Seattle's P-Patch Program is nearly 40 years old and continues to play an important role in local food access, particularly during the Covid-19 health crisis. P-Patch covers nearly 34 acres across the city and allows residents to grow food in public gardens and other city spaces. In 2019 alone community gardeners provided over 38,000 pounds of organic produce from P-Patches to local food banks, senior centers and other partners through the city's Giving Gardens program.

Cleveland: The City of Cleveland has around 45 urban farms, many of them formed from city partnerships with nonprofits and individual farmers to renovate vacant land. It costs the city to maintain vacant lots (mowing, illegal dumping, and crime prevention), so after the 5-year pilot leases expire, the city intends to transfer titles to community groups or individual farmers. In addition, the City's economic development department provides up to $3,000 to urban farmers for farm improvements such as greenhouses, irrigation and rain barrels.

Chicago: In response to an increasing lack of open space and local desire for community gardens, the City of Chicago took the unusual step to co-found and fund NeighborSpace. NeighborSpace is a nonprofit land trust charged with stewarding 109 community gardens in the city and permanently protecting land from development. It also provides liability insurance for gardeners, technical assistance, and supports community control of the land.

Philadelphia: Philadelphia acquired thousands of vacant lots over years of disinvestment. Among many of innovative land programs, the city's Land Bank is returning land to productive open space and agricultural use. Lots can be leased or bought for permanent preservation for a nominal fee and the support of local civic organizations or neighbors.

To fund the expanded responsibilities of the Office of Food Access, private land procurement, and to subsidize the purchase of locally grown foods, Boston can negotiate with the city's large anchor institutions that are exempt from property taxes to increase their Payments In-Lieu of Taxes (PILOT). Our major institutions have long been critiqued for paying a fraction of the PILOT payments they should considering the wealth they gain from being surrounded by the city's resources and talent.[17] Furthermore, directing funding and other assistance towards urban agriculture is a way for our anchor institutions to show how they are providing concrete community benefits, contributing to solving local food insecurities, and creating long-term relationships with land trusts and local residents.

Urban agricultural partnerships also offer an opportunity for residents and communities to benefit from our anchor institutions through workshops or community classrooms – for example hydroponics cultivation in freight containers. The Urban Climate Corps can also be leveraged to provide wraparound services for the program, including ecological resiliency trainings, additional labor and talent necessary to transform the land, and assist with soil testing or remediation. Two often overlooked benefits of creating local food sources and distribution networks are increasing food availability and social resiliency in the face of climate change and natural disasters.

Companion Policies

- Incentivize the **creation of urban agriculture and public activation spaces on privately owned land** through tax incentives for temporary uses or zoning incentives for permanent uses.
- Contract out to nonprofit organizations that are skilled in connecting local farmers with markets to help growers within the city **find outlets at local convenience and corner stores**. This would provide an accessible first stop for fresh, local food.
- **Relax zoning and garden approvals across the city** to allow for easier creation of both private and community gardens as well as the farming of chickens, goats and bees. This should be coupled with an education campaign on farming techniques and legal compliance.
- **Create pop-up farm stands at public gathering points** like transit stations where residents can quickly purchase food and where EBT/SNAP benefits are doubled. See MARTA market.
- Explore feasibility of **providing free school breakfasts and lunches pared** with food waste educational programming.
- **Disseminate healthy eating and local food program information through community centers** and health centers to increase their use by residents who do not know they are eligible.

Resources:

- Municipal Strategies to Increase Food Access
- Good Food and Good Jobs For All
- Growing Urban Agriculture
- A Menu of Actions
- Urban Farming Institute

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GROWING THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

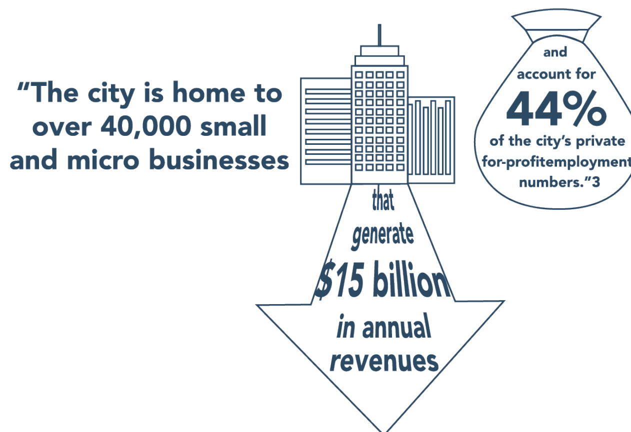
Source: Maya Gangan

Why take action?

Small businesses are foundational community anchors, providing avenues for employment, innovation, district vitality and sustainability.[1] Across the state, the vast majority of clean energy workers are employed by small businesses. And Boston itself has a thriving small business community. Small businesses in Boston want to take part in energy efficiency and sustainability measures since they improve business resiliency and profitability.

Still, many have raised concerns over the structural barriers preventing implementation, such as cost, unfamiliarity with program benefits, and lack of access to resources.[2] The city is home to over 40,000 small and micro-businesses that generate $15 billion in annual revenues and account for 44 percent of the city's private, for-profit employment numbers.[3] Only 20 percent of the city's small businesses are located downtown. Most are sprinkled through Boston's communities and along commercial districts. The majority of micro-businesses with less than ten employees are concentrated in our most diverse neighborhoods. Even though they represent 32 percent and 35 percent of Boston's businesses, minority owned and women-owned businesses in the city have lower than average revenues and employment rates.[4] As a result, they are at greater economic risk during uncertain times.

This is in part a product of deeper, structural inequities, including disparate access to startup capital, municipal procurement opportunities, technical assistance, linguistically inclusive resources, and professional business networks. Just over five percent of the city's procurement contracts have gone to local veteran, minority or women-owned small businesses, while less than two percent of city contracts for Coronavirus-related services went to local small businesses of color.[5] The Black Economic Council of Massachusetts recently surveyed some of its members and found that 90 percent were experiencing negative financial impacts of the pandemic while half did not have the financial reserves to stay in business more than another three months.[6] A full two-thirds of the city's small businesses closed during the spring Pandemic peak, but just 36 percent of small businesses in Boston had applied for federal public assistance programs and the city's small-business grants by May.[7] Setting aside the federal mismanagement of small business assistance programs, many small business owners also worry about additional debt and are unaware that portions of PPPs and disaster loans can be converted into grants.[8] Unrealistic rehiring restrictions further limit applications due to recovery phasing and lack of full staff demand. Many unbanked businesses have also been shut out of many relief efforts that must pass through financial institutions.



Cities Taking Action

Detroit: A coalition of private, public and philanthropic partners created Detroit Means Business to help small businesses achieve success in the city. Two key offerings include free introductory coaching and bilingual webinars in financing, operations, strategy, human resources and marketing.

Chicago: The Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago one of the nation's oldest and largest city-supported small business incubators. The incubator space has a manufacturing focus and provides affordable business space, operations assistance, financial assistance, comprehensive human resources consulting, and connects businesses to the local entrepreneurial community.

San Diego: The City of San Diego provides a host of small business resources through the city's website. The city's Online Business Portal that helps startups determine what permits they will need for different locations and predict their startup fees. San Diego also offers financing incentives and expedited permitting for businesses that meet certain local economic development criteria.

Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator (LACI) was founded by the City of Los Angeles and the LA Department of Water and Power. It provides area startups with access to tools, space, and exposure to people and initiatives to kickstart a number of clean energy initiatives that align with the city's growth priorities and Mayor Garcetti's broader Green New Deal plan.

Seattle: Restaurant Success is a partnership between the City of Seattle, state agencies, and the Seattle Restaurant Alliance. Restaurant Success provides a comprehensive guide to opening, orientation workshops, permitting and licensing; tools to help restaurateurs easily navigate the process; and phone interpretation in over 200 languages.

Growing the Small Business Community

Boston's Coronavirus relief grants have provided essential support to nearly 1,700 small businesses across the city as of mid-2020.[9] But it is also critical to consider longer-term forms of municipal support beyond finite cash assistance programs. A 2016 city report identified nine areas of small business need, including: support for women, immigrant and minority-owned businesses; greater access to affordable real estate; assistance navigating city services and regulations; greater availability of capital; the creation of effective industry-specific and peer networks; and targeted technical assistance or business coaching.[10]

One tried and tested approach that addresses many of these structural concerns is the creation of a Small Business Incubator. Boston is already well-known as a hub of innovation and can build on the incredible resources and deep knowledge clustered in the metro area. Boston can identify area business alliances, state-level partners, and private sponsors to help the city build an incubator. The incubator itself would be both a physical space and a virtual resource hub. Among the physical resources this space could provide are subsidized rents, built-in networking, peer-to-peer learning, and sustained access to technical, regulatory, municipal procurement and management training through in-house staff.

A focus of the incubator can be on integrating a sustainability focus into local business operations. This can be achieved through technical and regulatory assistance on available renewable energy and energy efficiency programs, as well as workshops and partnership opportunities for place-based sustainable practices. Virtual services could include certification assistance for women, veteran and minority-owned small businesses, telephonic regulatory and technical assistance in Boston's spoken languages, and streamlined access to financial resources.

The city can engage area credit unions and larger banking corporations to increase access to business capital and startup financing backed by the city and other incubator partners. In addition to corporate partners as well as state and federal funding, a local tax on large retailers similar to Seattle's or Portland's would help cover operating expenses.

Resources:

- Small Business Majority
- Community-Wealth.org
- Project Equity
- Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago
- American Sustainable Business Council

Companion Policies

- **Limit the proliferation of "formula" or chain stores** in commercial districts unless the chain has gone through a neighborhood hearing process and is in line with other considerations, such as a location that is not already served by existing businesses providing similar services.
- Partner with commercial property owners and community land trusts to **facilitate the reuse of vacant buildings and business spaces.**
- Explore the feasibility of a **citywide universal basic income**.
- **Develop a local currency to foster spending in the local economy** and to educate residents and tourists alike on how consumer spending can be used as a tool to invest in community.
- Identify barriers to local procurement and **implement a small-business equity procurement strategy for municipal contracts** as well as a procure-local requirement for municipal sub-contractors.
- Craft **guidelines for sustainable workplace options** including transit passes, flexible hours, work-from-home schedules with area business councils and advocacy organizations.

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JUSTICE FRAMEWORK & AUDIT

Why take action?

When cities measure progress towards equity, they tend to review population data like income levels, housing cost burdens, transit access, and graduation rates for different neighborhoods and demographics. A review of these measures shows Boston has work to do. And a lot of history to overcome. Once envisioned as an opportunity to build a "true neighborhood with families", the $18 billion development of the Seaport district has instead created the least diverse neighborhood in Boston. A neighborhood defined by its lack of schools, public buildings, subway access, and affordable housing – where housing costs are sky-high, and a scant 3 percent Black.[1]

Low-income residents and residents of color have higher energy insecurity and less access to government programs that would help them achieve efficiency in the city. Air pollution and related illnesses are more prevalent in communities of color. The results from a nationwide survey of Black individuals shows Boston is considered the least welcoming of eight major American cities.[2] Only 4 percent of households earning $75,000 or more across the Greater Boston area are Black.[3] Evidence of other disparate benefits and outcomes permeate throughout our society, our economy, and our democracy. Even today, the majority of non-White municipal employees make less than $60,000 annually.[4] Female employees still average less than male City employees, even though they represent over half of all workers.[5]

Only 4 percent of households earning $75,000 or more across the greater Boston area are Black" 3

Achieving just outcomes for residents requires a truthful look at the operations and institutions of local government. Holding up this reflexive mirror entails the uncomfortable work of exposing dated and discriminatory practices, and impressing upon every City employee their responsibility to pursue justice and resiliency. Examination of municipal processes and institutions creates greater equity both inside and outside City Hall and ripples out into neighborhoods to ultimately be reflected in the prosperity of the whole City.

When asked how their cities measured equity, few out of 115 mayors had standardized metrics.[6] But it is not an impossible task. Many cities across the U.S. have instituted racial equity lenses or departmental action plans and have operationalize their equity work by starting with training for departmental staff and leadership.[7] In the past few years, City government has made visible efforts to acknowledge the deep injustices that exist in Boston. These actions include creating an Office of Resilience and Racial Equity, crafting a Resilience Strategy with input from over 11,000 residents, passing an order that requires equity reporting as well as training for municipal employees, and in June, creating a cabinet-level Equity office. These measures are constructive and commendable. *And* we can do more because racism, sexism, and unequal access to opportunity are still endemic across Boston and within City Hall. There is a necessity to do more.

Cities Taking Action

Austin: The City recently developed an Equity Assessment Tool that has proven useful in identifying inequitable policies and practices. The City partnered with the Center for Place-based Initiatives to perform a citywide equity assessment that delved deeply into departmental operations, budgets, public engagement and alignment with local priorities.

West Linn: In April of this year, the City of West Linn requested proposals for a citywide equity audit and municipal training program to be completed by an outside organization.

Madison: The City of Madison has three racial equity tools: one for hiring, another for assessing other processes, and a fast-track tool for projects with a short timeline and limited budget. The City requires every department to complete at least three equity analyses or equitable hiring tools a year and is transparent with the public about how it is applying the tools.

Seattle: Borne out of community pressure, in 2005 Seattle was the first city in the nation to create an initiative focused on institutional racism. It has since adopted a racial equity lens and toolkits, partnered with local organizations to offer racial equity training in the community, built core teams across offices that do intensive anti-racism training together, and publishes each department's racial justice work plans for public accountability.

Long Beach: The City is in the midst of creating a Framework for Reconciliation, which includes acknowledging racism as a public health crisis. It is hosting a series of town halls on many key issue areas, including: policing, youth services, housing and homelessness; convening stakeholders to review the gathered data; and proposing short, medium and long-term corrective actions to the City Council.

Source: Maya Gangan

Justice Framework & Audit

To truly get the measure of where our government stands as an institution, we need a comprehensive justice audit of City departments and operations. Why justice and not equity? Equity is about fair outcomes for all; justice is a more holistic term that embeds an additional mandate to correct systemic and structural discrimination. A justice audit is not about collecting population indicators. It is an audit of internal municipal processes, hiring, decision-making, leadership, budgets, and communications to identify discriminatory practices and policies. It entails interviewing entry-level employees as well as senior management in City Hall and conducting a representative community survey to collect data on access to government services and barriers to justice.

It is important that this work be done by an entity or nonprofit that understands Boston's history and operates outside of the walls of City Hall. In fact, the City already contracts out for smaller-scale disparity studies. An independent study of Boston's severe disparities in contracting with women-owned and minority-owned businesses is currently underway.[8] A justice audit will provide the necessary data and baseline information on operations to inform what we need to address within our own house.

Equipped with this knowledge, Boston can then craft a justice framework to inform government decision-making going forward. The city has already committed to equity training for municipal employees and annual departmental reporting on progress towards each office's own equity goals. So why add a framework? The answer is because

Source: Aidan Crosby, Kailey Williams

this work is incomplete without a framework to guide our actions. The justice framework is critical because it is a public statement of values with specific principles that the city will employ through all operations.

As a citywide framework, it sets a clear tone and expectations for what does and does not orient outcomes towards justice. It is therefore a more powerful action than requesting each department review their own operations. Perhaps most of all, the framework can be made enforceable, thereby creating a strong incentive for all municipal employees and contractors to think proactively about how their work can achieve justice. Such an approach would grant real power to the City's Equity and Inclusion Office. Its development would culminate in the passing of a local justice framework ordinance after the completion of the justice audit and an open discussion with the public on what values and principles should be included. If we are serious about pursuing participatory justice, then this is not a process that can (or should) be rushed.

Resources:

- Metathemes: Designing for Social Change
- Racial Equity in Government Decisionmaking
- Government Alliance on Race & Equity
- Race Forward
- Greenlining Institute

Companion Policies

- **Mandate that important and timely public documents be simultaneously made available in the city's most spoken languages**, so all residents have equal access to this information as well as critical services.
- Institute mandatory **racial and social justice training** for city employees and ensure employees who wish to raise concerns have a safe and accountable office where they can do so.
- Set up a **Racial & Social Justice Policy Review Committee** that analyzes pieces of municipal legislation, executive orders, and budget allocations for their justice impacts.
- **Formalize interdepartmental communications** to ensure city processes, policies and plans align and work towards shared justice goals.
- Create a **visible online platform and continuous series of listening sessions to gather real-time feedback** from residents, community organizations, businesses and employers on how the City can adapt its operations, policies and programs to equitably serve the community.
- **Advocate at the state level for the passage of environmental and racial justice legislation** to enshrine the proactive protection of communities under state law.

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ECO-DISTRICTS FOR JUST DEVELOPMENT

Why take action?

While the quality of life for all of Boston's residents is compromised by the contamination of the air, land, and water with toxic chemicals and other pollutants, not all areas of the City are impacted to the same degree. Exposure means living in closer proximity to polluting industrial facilities, hazardous waste sites, trash transfer stations, bus depots and highways, and other unwanted land uses. **Working class families in Massachusetts face a cumulative exposure to environmentally hazardous facilities and sites that is four times greater than higher-income communities.**[1] The exposure for communities of color is an unbelievable twenty times greater than for predominantly White communities.[2] Of the ten most densely polluted census blocks in the state three are in Boston.[3]

These striking inequities are placing Boston's White working class neighborhoods, immigrant communities and people of color at substantially greater risk of exposure to human health risks, including asthma and respiratory illness. Boston's Chinatown neighborhood which is adjacent to a major highway, has the worst air quality of any neighborhood in the state.[4] These same neighborhoods are also on the frontlines of climate change impacts, and in greatest need of the protections afforded by climate just mitigation and adaptation measures.

Environmental racism and class-based inequalities are largely by design. Environmental injustices have a centuries-long history, and examples from the past 50 years are plentiful. Targeted "urban renewal" of the South and West Ends of Boston in the 1950s and 60s demolished entire neighborhoods, displacing thousands of residents

"Of the ten most densely polluted census blocks in the state three are in Boston."[3]

– many of them immigrants. Despite intense public outcry, the City went ahead with the projects, appropriating urban spaces for a new highway, commercial development and expensive residential high rises.[5] Boston has suffered from a lack of comprehensive planning and needed zoning reforms in the intervening years to keep up with the changing needs of our communities (aside from a district-by-district initiative in the 1980s).[6]

No other city department in the nation has the same concentration of decision-making power as the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), with so little public accountability that it has earned the moniker, "Boston Planned Displacement Agency". Without clear and enforced guidelines on what each neighborhood really needs, Boston has seen a surge in luxury real estate development (a sizable proportion of these units are used as investment properties and sit empty[7]) at a time when rents for many for working and middle-class families have become unaffordable.

In addition to gentrification and displacement, this kind of development has other cascading effects. The dearth of middle-income housing is a major reason the number of children living in the city has dropped significantly in the past fifty years, even while our population increases.[8] Newly priced-out residents then add to the traffic nightmare when they are forced to commute to work from outside city limits. Meanwhile, entire neighborhoods have felt so invisible and left out of the economic development boom that residents form neighborhood councils to their voices in City Hall.[9]

Source: Maya Gangan

Eco-Districts for Just Development

In the absence of comprehensive planning and responsive zoning, Boston's development operates in a patchwork manner. Any community benefits gained from development are those demanded through a complex and opaque public engagement process or through the City's linkage programs and Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP). These projects require developers to provide between 13 and 18 percent affordable housing in larger construction projects, although these affordable units can be separately located in another neighborhood entirely. The lack of system transparency means it is difficult to tell how many developers are keeping up their end of the deal.[10]

An innovative way to address our patchwork development and community needs simultaneously is by creating Eco-Districts. **Eco-Districts are designated planning areas in the city that have intentionally set goals for advancing comprehensive district sustainability** through practices such as resilient construction, smart infrastructure, renewable energy, access to public services, affordable live/work spaces, community health, vibrant public places and environmental justice. Eco Districts are intentionally created in neighborhoods of the city that have faced the aggregate impacts of environmental and social vulnerability along with political and economic disinvestment. The City would bring together planning experts and community advocates to identify potential Eco-Districts (for example, areas at risk of gentrification, climate-vulnerable areas, areas with existing health hazards, historically disinvested communities) and pinpoint the types of investments needed.

This process must identify necessary changes to existing zoning codes, create a zoning overlay district, or recommend the creation of a Planned Development Area (PDA) for the district with a set of district-level requirements. These requirements must specifically address the "pernicious paradox" – or the environmental gentrification that occurs when a neighborhood is redeveloped and

Cities Taking Action

Minneapolis: In 2016, the City's Green Zones Workgroup developed data-driven recommendations to seek environmental justice in overburdened communities through the creation of two Green Zones. Approved by the City Council, each Green Zone has a detailed workplan for achieving climate change, environmental justice and racial justice goals.

Austin: In this booming city not everyone was benefiting from the economic growth. So Austin developed a district-scale master plan with the impacted community to transform a brownfield into an EcoDistrict. Austin's EcoDistrict focuses on eight areas of impact: green building, living infrastructure, resource efficiency, mobility and connectivity, habitat creation, health and well-being, prosperity and public spaces.

Washington, D.C.: D.C.'s National Capital Planning Commission launched the SW Ecodistrict plan in 2013 to transform a disconnected and aging neighborhood into a sustainable live-work neighborhood with cultural attractions. Given the size of the district – 110 acres - full transformation has been phased to take place over 20 years.

Los Angeles County: The Green Zones program aims to enhance public health and land use compatibility in some of the county's most disproportionately impacted communities. Using a series of ground-truthing events and interviews with the community, Los Angeles County is creating land use policies and zoning regulations while simultaneously documenting existing pollution and health risks through a new environmental justice screening method.

remediated.[11] Any proposed public or private development in the designated Eco-District would need to identify how the project furthers applicable Eco-District goals through, for example, a Community Benefits Agreement and meets the City's zoning or PDA requirements. Another way to counter displacement is to substantially increase the required percentage of affordable housing within the Eco-District.

Transparency and accountability is a critical component. An online dashboard for each Eco-District that tracks development projects as well as overall progress towards district goals would help ensure both. If the area is covered by a Neighborhood Council or other anchor community organization, they would be part of the Eco-District goal identification process and play a role in ensuring development accountability. We need not look far for a successful example. The Talbot-Norfolk Triangle Eco Innovation District in Boston is a 13-block community-led development initiative that has produced local jobs, retrofitted over a third of the district's residential homes, built community gardens and parks, installed renewable energy systems and created resilient stormwater infrastructure.

Companion Policies

- **Require Community Benefits Agreements** for development projects over a certain size or impact. Agreements would be made between the developer and neighborhood councils or community organizations, the city's role would be to ensure they are realized.
- Launch a **citywide comprehensive plan focused specifically on addressing urban injustices** and the threat of climate change through the built environment and public services. Such a plan is an alternative way to identify prime areas for Eco-Districts.
- **Decentralize power from combined planning and development agencies** into a planning board and a development department subject to government oversight.
- **Mandate that any private development receiving tax breaks or other publicly shouldered incentives detail the environmental and climate justice costs and benefits** of the proposed project, including pollution, affordability and transit impacts. This is similar to a recommendation from the Congressional Select Committee on the Climate Crisis to amend the NEPA process.

Resources:

- **Local Policies for Environmental Justice: A National Scan**
- **Sustainable Development Code: Green Zones**
- **Sustainability Districts for NYC Report**
- **LA County Environmental Justice Screening Method**
- **EcoDistricts.org**

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JUST TRANSITION EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

Why take action?

In a recent survey of 110 mayors, nearly a third said that the lack of jobs that pay a living-wage is the primary barrier to social mobility in their city. Another nine percent saw the top obstacle as a lack of affordable educational opportunities.[1] Though Boston was benefiting from a rapid economic development and building boom prior to the pandemic, the economic opportunities of this growth were not shared by all. The city's young adults and Black residents saw unemployment rates that were 50 percent higher than the citywide average.[2] Latinx and Asian residents had some of the highest poverty rates – over 30 percent – while the median income for women in the city was only 85 percent of men.[3] Without a high school diploma, it is tough to make ends meet in our expensive city. Of the 15 percent of residents over age 25 without a diploma, about a third live in poverty.[4]

At the same time, in many of Boston's low-income neighborhoods residents are unable to afford the building retrofits, energy efficiency investments, clean energy technologies or even the maintenance necessary to qualify for renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. COVID-19 has exacerbated these problems and more.

This also puts impacted families at greater risk of suffering substantial financial and health impacts caused by climate change. At the state level, Massachusetts is a leader in energy efficiency, solar installation, and clean technology leadership. The clean energy industry in this state employs almost 112,000 people,[5] yet many of these jobs are out of reach to our lower income residents and residents of color. Those workers in the fossil fuel industry and other sectors that stand to lose their jobs as we transition to a cleaner and more just economy must especially be targeted for retraining and reintegration into the workforce as part of a local Green New Deal.

"The city's young adults and Black residents saw unemployment rates that were 50 percent higher than the citywide average." 2

30%

"LatinX and Asian residents had some of the highest poverty rates

Median income for women in the city was only

85%

of men."3

Cities Taking Action

Washington, D.C.: The city's Green Collar Jobs Initiative is a cooperative effort between the city, nonprofits and academic institutions to better prepare D.C. residents for green jobs in clean energy, energy efficiency, environmental restoration and high-performance buildings. The initiative connects trainees to environmental job opportunities, builds green municipal buildings through an apprenticeship program, and fosters connections with local businesses.

Philadelphia: PowercorpsPHL is a two-phase program for unemployed or underemployed youth. The program focuses on work-readiness and skill building first, while in the second phase Corps-members can engage in "industry academies" such as green infrastructure, construction, electrical and solar training or urban forestry. The program has achieved a 92 percent job transition success rate.

Minneapolis – Saint Paul: Beginning in 2006, the twin cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul partnered with BlueGreen Alliance to identify the best strategies and opportunities for expanding the local green economy. Together, they launched Thinc.Green, an initiative to expand municipal green purchasing, recruit green employers to the region and recognize local leadership in green manufacturing.

Just Transition Employment Pathways

Thoughtful city-supported initiatives that give residents experience in sustainable sectors (including public transit, renewable energy, retrofitting and waste management) have the potential to address the gross economic inequality, decline in labor rights, neighborhood climate preparedness, and the necessity of a just transition. The City of Boston can expand existing partnerships and also create new ones with local industry, technical schools, and state entities to prepare residents for future employment in the green jobs sectors.

The city can also work with community-based organizations to identify specific neighborhood needs and ensure that residents benefit. In addition, the city can work with interested local unions to devise pathways for individuals who complete Just Transition-related programs to become union members and share their new knowledge with the larger union. Greater Boston has a number of existing jobs training programs the City can learn from, including MassCEC's offshore wind workforce training, and more local examples such as the green jobs work experiences pioneered by Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation.

With the support and technical assistance of the City, Boston's Madison Park Technical Vocational High School is a place where green jobs training can begin before youth graduate from high school. It is important that any municipal workforce training or certification program to be fully financially supported by the city and its partners ensure trainees receive a living wage, earned time off, and health benefits.

Companion Policies

- **Implement hire-local requirements** for city climate resiliency, sustainability and energy efficiency projects.
- Create a **summer training program** to foster collaboration between residential youth and local nonprofits or businesses that need assistance implementing resiliency projects.
- Pass an **ordinance banning the use of CORI records to determine eligibility** for municipally-supported jobs programs, educational training, licensing, and housing.
- **Institute Community Workforce Agreements for municipal resiliency projects** to ensure more residents benefit from work experience in sustainable construction and planning.

Resources:

- Promising Practices in Green Job Creation
- Cities and Clean Energy Workforce Development
- Green Jobs in a Global Green New Deal
- Climate Jobs New York
- Community Workforce Agreements

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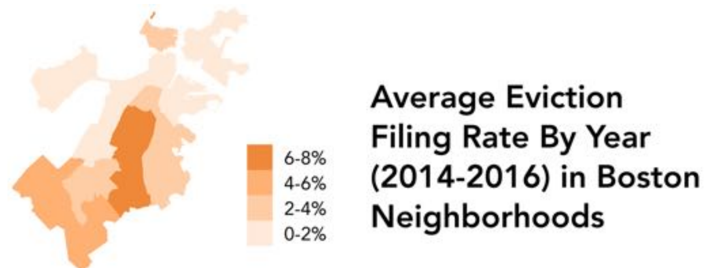
RENTERS RIGHT TO COUNSEL

Why take action?

After nearly a century of structural racism and segregation perpetuated through redlining, urban renewal, land speculation and foreclosures, cities are now the frontlines of the housing affordability crisis. In less than ten years, rents across the U.S. have risen 150 percent.[1] Boston currently holds the ignominious titles of being among the priciest places to rent nationwide and the third most gentrified.[2] The pandemic has exacerbated our city's housing crisis, and when the statewide eviction moratorium lifts, housing advocates predict over 20,000 evictions will be filed immediately.[3]

Evictions happen in both Boston's subsidized and market-rate rental housing. However, evictions from market-rate housing trends closely with neighborhood racial composition and lower property values.[4] On top of being traumatic and confusing, the eviction process is made worse by disparities in legal representation between landlords and renters. Every week roughly 750 tenants are taken to Housing Court in Massachusetts. Of these tenants, less than nine percent receive help from an attorney.[5] For too many residents, eviction results in long-term housing instability or even homelessness. These effects ripple through families as children are uprooted from their schools, eviction records haunt affected residents, and families grapple with the psychological trauma of losing their home.



Source: Aidan Crosby

Renters Right to Counsel

Boston can support state legislation to a Right to Counsel or advocate through a Home Rule Petition for local authority to pass a Right to Counsel ordinance. A Right to Counsel would protect renters from unwarranted or potentially illegal evictions. Instituting tenant rights to legal representation has been shown to double the number of families who retain occupancy.[6] And it would cost the state less too. For every dollar invested in a full Right to Counsel, Massachusetts would save $2.40 in shelter, healthcare and foster care costs for the homeless.[7] It is a more just way to approach the post-pandemic predictions of greater housing instability.

Cities Taking Action

New York City: NYC was the first city to pass a universal access to legal services. The program served over 87,000 residents and kept 84 percent in their homes within the first year. The City saw evictions drop by nearly a quarter over four years after instituting legal services for tenants.[8]

San Francisco: One of the most expensive cities in the country, San Francisco passed a Right to Counsel by ballot measure in 2019. Since then, eviction rates have declined and over 700 residents facing eviction retained housing. The program overwhelmingly benefits extremely low and low-income residents.

Newark: Nearly 80 percent of Newark's residents are renters. In 2018, the Newark City Council enacted a right to counsel ordinance for tenants making under 200 percent of the federal poverty level. It is expected the program will help 5,000 to 7,000 renters annually.

A Right to Counsel is also a mechanism for addressing one manifestation of systemic racism and ensuring people's right to housing is better protected. In addition to a free Right to Counsel during eviction proceedings, companion programs could provide other forms of housing assistance such as anti-harassment legal services and help educate tenants on their rights. Six cities across the country have instituted Right to Counsel legislation as of this year. To fund these legal services, the city could reallocate funding from the police budget or pass an Empty Homes Tax, which would levee a fee on units left unoccupied for more than six months a year.

Companion Policies

- Work with other cities to **advocate for the reinstatement of rent control** by the state.
- Institute an **Empty Homes** tax like Vancouver's for units left vacant more than six months.
- Revisit **Just Cause Eviction legislation** to curb no-fault evictions.
- Expand the current Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) to a fourth option which would **set aside IDP funds for community-based affordable housing organizations.**
- Advocate for a **Tenant's Bill of Rights** at the state level.

Resources:

- Evictions in Boston Report
- National Coalition for a Right to Counsel
- Investing in Fairness, Justice and Housing Stability
- National Low Income Housing Coalition

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SHIFTING SERVICES FROM POLICE TO COMMUNITY

Why take action?

As of July 15th, 598 people have been killed by US police in 2020,[1] and the racial disparity in police brutality between Black and white citizens is startling. A Black man is 3.2 times more likely to be killed by police than a White man.[2] Accountability can be hard to come by: due to weighty protections such as qualified immunity, 99 percent of such deaths do not result in the responsible officers being charged with a crime.[3] This disparity is part of a larger problem of police brutality, racial profiling, and sentencing disparities experienced by people of color with the police and legal system. The consequences of such violence creates psychological trauma, depression, anxiety, and outrage in the community.[4]

The history of policing in the US originates in the 1800's, when small forces of White men were formed to beat escaped Black hostages (slaves) and forcefully return them to their "owners".[5] By the mid-20th century, police were tasked with violent suppression of working-class immigrants on strike, as well as the enforcement of oppressive racist policies. As protests over the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Elijah McClain, and many others have spurred massive protests sweeping the country, governments are rightly reevaluating the nature of policing in their communities. In Boston, twelve people were killed by police between 2013-2019.[6] But that statistic is an incomplete picture of how police violence happens.

Source: Maya Gangan

The Boston Police Department's (BPD) 10-point system to classify someone as a gang member often encourages racist assumptions. In fact, their methodology has been the subject of an ACLU lawsuit.[7] As of 2019, 76 percent of suspected gang members in the city's database were Black.[8] Our current system is not just the consequence of discriminatory methods. Police today are unfairly overburdened with the task of responding to a variety of social and physical emergencies for which they are not trained. Citizens in crisis have just two options, fire or police, as opposed to a third option: professionals equipped to rapidly respond to mental health crises, domestic abuse, and struggles of the unhoused. Cities have sought to avoid significant reforms and instead regulate policy behavior "around the edges" through use of body cameras and other technology. However, such programs have had minimal impact on outcomes.[9]

Cities Taking Action

Eugene: Eugene has found a cheaper, more helpful way to respond to mental health crises: contracting with a nonprofit mobile crisis intervention program called CAHOOTS. Last year, CAHOOTS responded to more than 24,000 calls, about 20 percent of the area's 911 calls. Their budget is only $2 million.

Providence: The mayor of Providence signed an Executive Order in July committing the city to a truth, reconciliation and municipal reparations process for Black, Indigenous People, and People of Color. This commits the city to investigating the city and state's history of racial oppression, using that to inform a citywide discussion around reconciliation, and finally, take reparative measures to reverse those injuries.

Asheville: On July 14, the Asheville City Council voted unanimously to establish economic reparations for the city's Black community. The resolution seeks specifically to foster the creation of generational wealth and to boost economic opportunity through municipal policies and programs.

Shifting Services from Police to Community

This moment of reckoning means we have an incredible opportunity to reimagine the future of public safety and fundamentally change the nature of policing. Boston Police are currently forced into the unsuitable catchall role for an expansive list of social and law enforcement services. Chronically underfunded social services such as affordable health care, mental health services, after school programs, job training, and art programs need to be seen as investments not only in the flourishing of communities but also as investments in crime prevention. The City spends roughly $60 million a year on police overtime alone. For perspective, the total budget for all municipal libraries is $40 million.[10] Since 2011, Boston's police overtime budget has increased 84 percent, or $35.5 million.[11]

If Boston has the funds for such overtime increases then we have the ability to fund community-based reparative justice and services instead. This year, Boston has reallocated $12 million in police overtime funds. We can improve upon that to create a comprehensive community investment plan before the next municipal budget is passed in July 2021. Over the next year, the city should convene a series of "truth and reconciliation" neighborhood discussions. The discussions will help to identify appropriate municipal and community-based investments in youth violence prevention and workforce reentry training programs, as well as funding for services that foster neighborhood stability, affordable housing, education, employment, health, and other components of a Boston Green New Deal.

"The City of Boston's Retirement Board controls
$54 billion in assets;

Companion Policies

- **Refuse to issue municipal bonds to cover the legal costs of police misconduct and brutality.**
- Negotiation of police union contracts offers a critical moment to demand a change in disciplinary practices, **review antidiscrimination training, demand accountability, and set limits on the use of overtime.**
- Investigate city charter reform to **give city council power over line item budget changes** which will increase the balance of municipal powers and serve as another public accountability check on municipal spending.
- **Create a transparent, public system for documenting instances of police violence.**
- Remove officers from schools in order to reduce unnecessary student arrests and **seek non-armed alternatives to cut back on the school-to-prison pipeline.**
- **Lend municipal support to statewide reparative justice legislation,** such as reforming qualified immunity policies.

Resources:

- Public Investment in Community-Driven Safety Initiatives
- Toolkit for Promoting Justice in Policing
- Chicago Task Force Recommendations for Reform
- NAACP Pathways to Police Reform
- CAHOOTS
- Vision for Black Lives

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CREATE AN URBAN CLIMATE CORPS

Why take action?

Reinvigorating a form of the original New Deal's Conservation Corps is a popular idea with the American public, and numerous local Conservation Corps already exist across the nation. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated under-employment and unemployment problems in the City of Boston, especially for people of color and youth. Boston's Climate Corps could complement our popular summer youth jobs program and include employment and training in the spring and fall.

Cities can create Urban Climate Corps versions of this program to address climate-related mitigation and resilience work that simultaneously addresses employment inequities across neighborhoods and racial lines. In Boston, recent planting efforts have not effectively expanded our urban forest[1] while historically redlined neighborhoods like East Boston and Dorchester have less greenspace and tree cover.[2] This increases the urban heat island effect and related health consequences like acute asthma attacks and heat exhaustion and stroke. In addition, thousands of Boston residents are threatened with water shutoffs each year because they cannot afford their water bills. Residents currently struggling to pay their water utilities are also disproportionately families of color.[3] The Coronavirus pandemic has underlined the absolute necessity of access to clean air and water. An Urban Climate Corps would help residents create their own on-site water harvesting solutions, releasing them from the menace of high water bills.

Tree Canopy Coverage in Boston Neighborhoods

Source: Aidan Crosby

Create an Urban Climate Corps

An Urban Climate Corps would educate members about sustainable land use, green and just design principles, provide skilled employment, and proactively prepare neighborhoods for climate change. Program employment would focus on youth and residents in need access to job training such as adults working on their GED and residents with nonviolent CORI records. Corps members would work to improve the quality of open space, enhance parcel level climate resilience, weatherization of energy inefficient buildings, engage the community in sustainable practices, and increase tree equity across the city. The program would also train Corps members on how to install green infrastructure such as cisterns, rain gardens, and permeable pavements or restore wildlands and wetlands.

Cities Taking Action

Seattle: The Seattle Conservation Corps provides a year of employment for homeless individuals as well as life skills development. Over 80 percent leave the program with stable housing and over 90 percent finish with a new job lined up.[4]

Austin: Using some of their federal Coronavirus aid, the City of Austin plans to create a Conservation Corps to employ residents economically impacted by the pandemic. Residents would receive a living wage to create urban art, care for trees, protect watersheds, restore habitats and work on other nature-based projects.

Los Angeles: Employing youth from under-resourced neighborhoods, LA's Conservation Corpsmembers can receive paid work experience not only in habitat restoration and tree planting, but also planting community gardens, building affordable housing and environmental remediation.

These efforts would produce a multitude of benefits, such as lowering the cost of residential water bills while reducing stormwater runoff, pollution and building energy. Green Corps projects would also significantly enhance the integrity of parks and other public spaces.

The program would connect Corps members with their neighborhoods while they learn about environmentally resilient practices and receive certifications in professional development. One potential revenue stream for such a program would be a Stormwater Fee as the projects would significantly improve the resilience of our stormwater infrastructure and create water conservation and reuse systems.

Companion Policies

- **Create an urban arts program** to train residents in interactive art, murals, sculpture and public beautification.
- **Partner with social justice and community-based organizations** to pilot eco-districts.
- **Provide technical and logistical assistance to local garden exchanges and re-use programs.**

Resources:

- Jobs and Equity in the Urban Forest
- The Corps Network
- SEI Climate Corps

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3. Martha F. Davis, A Drop in the Bucket: Water Affordability Policies in Twelve Massachusetts Communities, *Northeastern University School of Law: Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy*, 2019, 1, https://www.northeastern.edu/law/pdfs/academics/phrge/water-report-2019.pdf.