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NMCOG Newsletter

December 2025

NMCOG News

Homelessness to Hopefulness: 2025 Housing Summit Draws a Full House and a Clear Call to Action

Nearly 100 elected and appointed officials, housing partners, and community members gathered on **December 10** at UMass Lowell's Coburn Hall for NMCOG's 2025 Greater Lowell Annual Housing Summit, themed *Homelessness to Hopefulness*. The evening served as both a compass and a catalyst, illuminating the urgent realities of housing instability in the region while charting a collective path forward for implementation of *At Home in Greater Lowell*, NMCOG's Regional Housing Strategy.

The event featured a powerful panel discussion with four leaders whose work spans the full housing continuum:

- Rachel Heller, CEO, [CHAPA](#)
- Julie Lemire, Executive Director, [House of Hope](#)
- Marty Martinez, President and CEO, [United Way of Massachusetts Bay](#)
- Greg Rittchen, Head of Real Estate and CFO, [Caritas Communities](#)



Together, panelists traced the systems and gaps that shape homelessness, underscored the depth of need across both individual and family homelessness, and shared how their organizations are responding. The conversation quickly became a collective call to action. Panelists emphasized the region's responsibility to expand affordable housing, strengthen wraparound supports, and confront the structural conditions that repeatedly push households to the edge.

Elected and appointed officials had the chance to hear directly from frontline staff, grounding policy conversations in lived experience and operational reality. This exchange added both urgency and clarity: the region has the tools, talent, and partnerships to make meaningful progress, but shared action is essential.

Participants then moved into table discussions, reflecting on the roles they personally and professionally can play in strengthening housing stability. The room buzzed with ideas for collaboration, cross-sector commitment, and local leadership.



To close the evening, NMCOG's consultant Health Resources in Action (HRiA) unveiled the new regional storytelling program,

an initiative designed to humanize housing production and elevate the voices of those most affected by the housing crisis. HRiA introduced the campaign's themes and invited attendees to help bring these stories forward throughout Part 2 of *At Home in Greater Lowell*.

Thank you to everyone who joined us in turning hopefulness into momentum. Together, we continue to build a region where every resident has a safe, stable place to call home.

For those unable to attend, the event was recorded live by LTC, and [can be viewed here](#). You may also [download presentations from the Summit's webpage](#). Whether you participated in person or by watching the video, [please take our exit survey](#) to help inform future events!

During the summit, the following resources and policies were discussed:

- [CHAPA's Massachusetts Housing Leadership Academy](#): participate in a free, six-month fellowship designed for city and town leaders, select and planning board members, and members of local boards and commissions who can impact housing. **Applications due Monday, December 15!**
- [Building for Tomorrow](#): a report from the Unlocking Housing Production Commission with recommendations for addressing Massachusetts' housing crisis.
- [Yes in God's Back Yard \(YIGBY\) Bill](#): proposed state legislation that would allow religious and faith-based institutions to develop housing on their own land "by right," bypassing certain zoning barriers to help expand housing availability.
- [Yes in My Back Yard \(YIMBY\) Bill](#): proposed state legislation that advances pro-housing policies to reduce development barriers and encourage more housing options across the state.
- [Our Massachusetts: Homes for a Thriving Commonwealth](#): a state-wide coalition of business, civic, non-profit, education, faith-based, and communities leaders working to achieve 222,000 new homes throughout the state for people of all income levels by 2035.
- [At Home in Greater Lowell](#): learn more about the *At Home in Greater Lowell* planning process and download Part 1 of the Regional Housing Strategy: Data and Goals.

NMCOG Launches Next Phase of Merrimack River Revive with GEI Consultants Leading Regional Flood-Resilience Modeling

The Northern Middlesex Stormwater Collaborative (NMSC), coordinated by NMCOG, has selected GEI Consultants to lead the next major phase of Merrimack River Revive, a multi-community initiative to improve watershed resilience, stormwater management, and climate preparedness across the Merrimack River Basin. GEI will develop a unified regional hydrologic and hydrodynamic model to pinpoint high-risk flood areas, assess infrastructure vulnerabilities, and prioritize green infrastructure and culvert upgrades, building on earlier work to map stormwater assets and standardize data. Supported by the state's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program, with matching support from The Nature Conservancy and technical collaboration from the Merrimack River Watershed Council and Lowell Parks & Land Trust, the effort will run through FY27 and guide future climate-resilient public works investments across participating communities.



[Read the full press release.](#)

NMCOG Presents Innovative Transit Study at MassDOT GIS Day

On **November 19**, NMCOG Transportation Planner II Blake Acton took the stage at MassDOT's annual GIS Day conference to share results from a major new analysis: the LRTA Jobs Accessibility Study. Blake's work mapped how effectively the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) and its peer agencies connect local workers to jobs across the region.



The study breaks new ground by combining detailed bus schedule data Census job flows, and advanced open-source tools to simulate thousands of real-world commutes. The results reveal where transit service is delivering for riders, and where targeted improvements could have the biggest impact all the way down to the individual bus route. These insights will help the LRTA and regional partners focus on investments where they can do the best for the economy and equity.

The presentation highlighted both the challenges and the progress LRTA has made since the pandemic, and offered practical, actionable recommendations for the years ahead.

[Read the full study here.](#)

NMCOG Engages Westford Academy Students in Environmental Justice Outreach for *Where Westford Plays*

On **November 18**, NMCOG staff conducted a Youth Facilitator Training and Visioning Session at Westford Academy for *Where Westford Plays*, the Town's update to its Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP). The workshop drew 17 students, including a strong turnout from youth of color, making this one of the most representative and inclusive engagement activities undertaken for the Plan.

The session served as Westford's Environmental Justice outreach effort, ensuring students, particularly those whose voices are often underrepresented in municipal planning, could help shape the Town's future investment in parks, trails, natural areas, and recreation opportunities. During the session, students discussed belonging, safety, access to outdoor spaces, and the types of programs and facilities that would better support teens across diverse backgrounds. They also received facilitator training and will be invited to support additional community engagement for the OSRP.



The thoughtful input shared by these students is already informing the vision and priorities for the next decade of open space and recreation planning in Westford. Their feedback will directly shape the next community outreach event on December 15 at the Westford Fire Station, where residents will have an opportunity to react to early themes and contribute additional ideas.

NMCOG extends its appreciation to Westford Academy students and staff for their active participation and partnership.

Upcoming Events and Opportunities

Register Today for *Where Westford Plays* Community Visioning Session

The Town of Westford, with support from NMCOG, will host a community visioning session on **Monday, December 15 from 6:00–7:30 PM** at the Westford Fire Station (65 Boston Road) as part of *Where Westford Plays*, the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan update.

Residents are invited to drop-in during this open house event to join the conversation and share ideas on open space protection, accessibility, recreation programming, climate resilience, and long-term community goals. The session is designed to foster belonging and ensure that community voices guide Westford's priorities for the next decade.

Date: Monday, December 15

Time: 6:00 to 7:30pm

RSVP: [Click here to register!](#)

All are welcome, and refreshments will be served.



Green School Works Funding Opportunity

The Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) is now accepting proposals for its Green School Works program, which funds projects that improve energy efficiency, cut carbon emissions, and strengthen climate resilience in public K–12 school buildings. School districts are encouraged to use this opportunity to modernize facilities while reducing fossil-fuel use and long-term operating costs.

Schools can learn more, register for the **December 9** webinar, and sign up for office hours through the [Green School Works website](#).

The application deadline is **February 13, 2026**. In addition, Green School Works Technical Assistance Services remains open for rolling enrollment for eligible schools serving income-qualified student populations, offering capital-planning support for creating modern, fossil-fuel-free, energy-efficient school facilities.

Community Biodiversity Grants Now Open for Projects that Protect and Restore Nature Across Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Community Biodiversity Grants Program is now accepting proposals for projects that advance the state's Biodiversity Conservation Goals by protecting, restoring, and connecting nature across Massachusetts. The program will award \$20,000 to \$200,000 to municipalities, state agencies, nonprofits, tribal governments, museums, and academic institutions to bring nature into every neighborhood, with applications due **December 26**.



Eligible projects include a wide range of nature-based and community-led efforts such as biodiversity monitoring; habitat protection and stewardship; river and wetland restoration; wildlife corridor enhancements; pollinator gardens, rain gardens, micro forests, food forests, and community gardens; as well as participatory science, educational programs, and public art or natural history exhibits focused on local biodiversity.

[Learn more and access application materials on the Community Biodiversity Grants webpage.](#)

Massachusetts Historical Commission Announces MPPF Round 32 and Virtual Workshops

The Massachusetts Historical Commission has opened Round 32 of the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF), a 50% matching grant program supporting the preservation of historic properties, landscapes, and sites listed in the State Register. Approximately \$1 million is expected to be available, with eligibility limited to municipalities and nonprofits; municipal applicants must also be in compliance or interim compliance with Chapter 40A Section 3A (MBTA Communities). Three virtual workshops will be held in January for prospective applicants: **January 8** (2:00 to 4:00pm), **January 21** (10:00am to 12:00pm), and **January 26** (2:00 to 4:00pm).

[Learn more and access workshop links on MHC's website.](#)

Attend a NMCOC Council or NMMPO Meeting!

NMCOG Council Meeting

The NMCOG Council meets the third Wednesday of each month via Zoom and in person at NMCOG's office.

Date: **Wednesday, December 17**

Time: 7:00pm

Location: online via Zoom or in person at 672 Suffolk Street, Suite 100, in Lowell

[View meeting details](#)

Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting

The NMMPO meets the fourth Wednesday of each month via Zoom and in person at NMCOG's office. Due to holidays, the November and December meetings were combined into one meeting held on Wednesday, December 3. The next meeting will be held at the end of January, 2026.

Date: **Wednesday, January 28**

Time: 2:00pm

Location: online via Zoom or in person at 672 Suffolk Street, Suite 100, in Lowell

[View meeting details](#)