

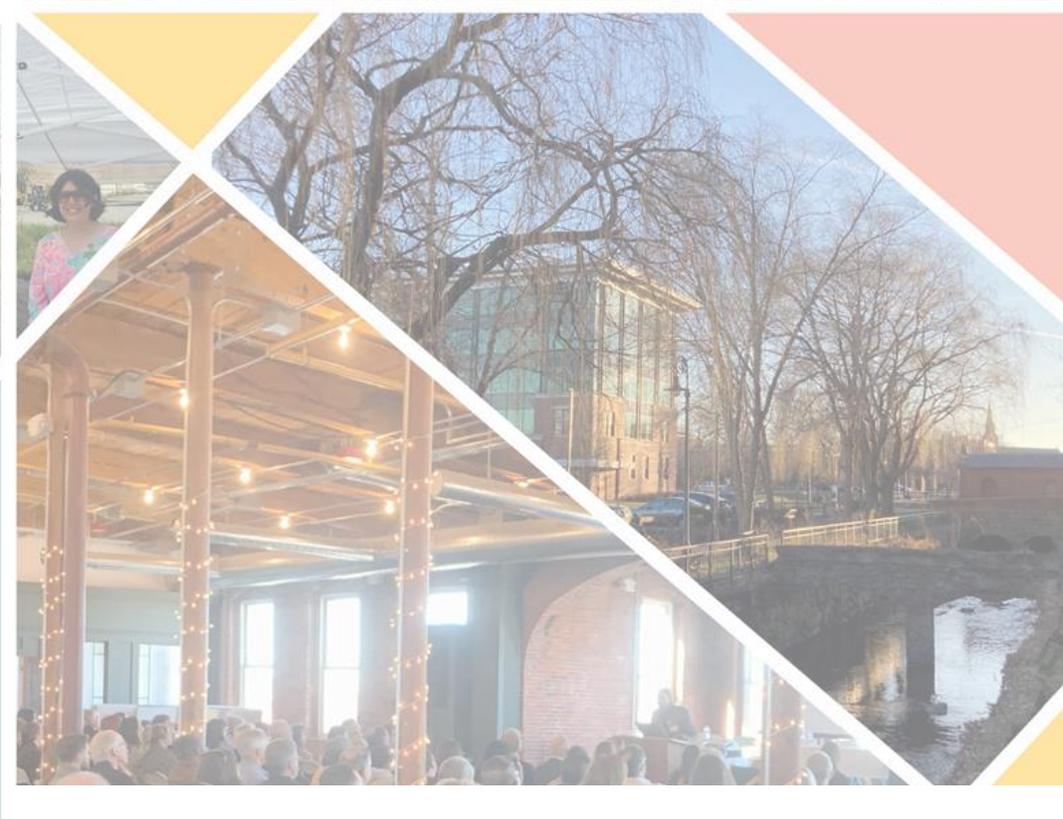


NMCOG STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028

ADOPTED BY THE NMCOG COUNCIL ON 1.15.2025



**NORTHERN
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- Chuck Walkovich (Pepperell)
- Gerald Frechette (Lowell)
- Jayne Wellman (Tewksbury)
- Mary McBride (Billerica)
- Pat Wojtas (Chelmsford)
- Jennifer Raitt
- Kelly Lynema
- Former NMCOG Council Member and Chair: Andrew Deslaurier (Billerica)

With assistance from Christopher Glenn Hayes, Carlin Andrus, and former NMCOG Council Member Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen (Westford).

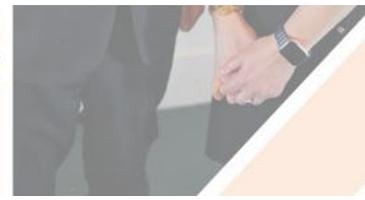


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PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The main purpose of this document is to provide a high-level strategic roadmap for the Northern Middlesex Council of Government's next three years. It discusses the historical and current mandates that define the Council, its governance structure, its mission, vision, values, and core competencies and the current operational realities. These various factors influenced the articulation of overarching strategic principles, key outcome describing success, and several critical inputs upon which that success relies. The intent of this framework is to support the prioritization of goals and to help organize these goals within the agency's broader strategic picture.

This document can serve several functions. Very simply, the descriptive overview may be useful to new staff, Council members, stakeholders, and the public who are seeking a better basic understanding of the agency. As an articulation of strategic priorities, it can help employees align their efforts where they will make the most impact and help guide the development of scopes of work to better address agency and member community needs. Lastly, it provides a benchmark against which all Council progress may be measured through time.

The NMCOG Strategic Plan establishes the guiding principles for how we achieve our mission. At its core, the strategic plan aims to position NMCOG as the leading planning advisor and advocate for the region.

NMCOG MISSION AND VALUES

NMCOG MISSION

NMCOG leads transformative change and regional growth, fostering collaborative, inclusive, and equitable planning that ensures climate resiliency, democratized data, economic opportunity, preservation of natural resources, housing abundance, municipal stability, regional coordination, and safe and accessible transportation.

Values

Our ambitious approach drives us to continuously seek innovative solutions, while our regional focus ensures that our efforts benefit the entire region. We are practical in our planning, delivering results that are both impactful and achievable.

Communication and dialogue are the foundation of our work, enabling us to build strong relationships and foster collaboration across all sectors. We are dedicated to leveraging resources effectively and are proud to be viewed as a trusted partner by our stakeholders.

Our work fosters democratic principles by creating inclusive and equitable platforms for civic engagement, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and empowering people to shape their communities' future while promoting participation, collaboration, and the incorporation of diverse voices to reinforce trust and accountability in local and regional governance.

Inclusivity is central to our mission; we promote cooperation and teamwork. Working collaboratively, we maximize impact and deliver exceptional service to our communities.

Our leadership is responsive, and empowering member communities to achieve their goals. Together, these values shape NMCOG's commitment to being a responsive, inclusive, and effective partner in regional planning and development.



INTRODUCTION TO NMCOG

NMCOG has a rich history of regional collaboration and planning dating back to the early 1960s. The journey began in January 1961, when the first formal meeting to organize the group was held. By 1963, the Lowell Area Planning Committee was established to explore enabling legislation for regional planning districts. This same year, the Massachusetts General Laws c. 40B, § 3, which govern regional planning, were enacted, leading to the formation of the Greater Lowell Area Planning Commission (GLAPC).

In 1965, the GLAPC collected its first member community assessments to support operations, and by 1966, Harold Kramer was hired as the first Planning Director, thanks to funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Commission continued to grow, with Dunstable and Pepperell joining in 1967.

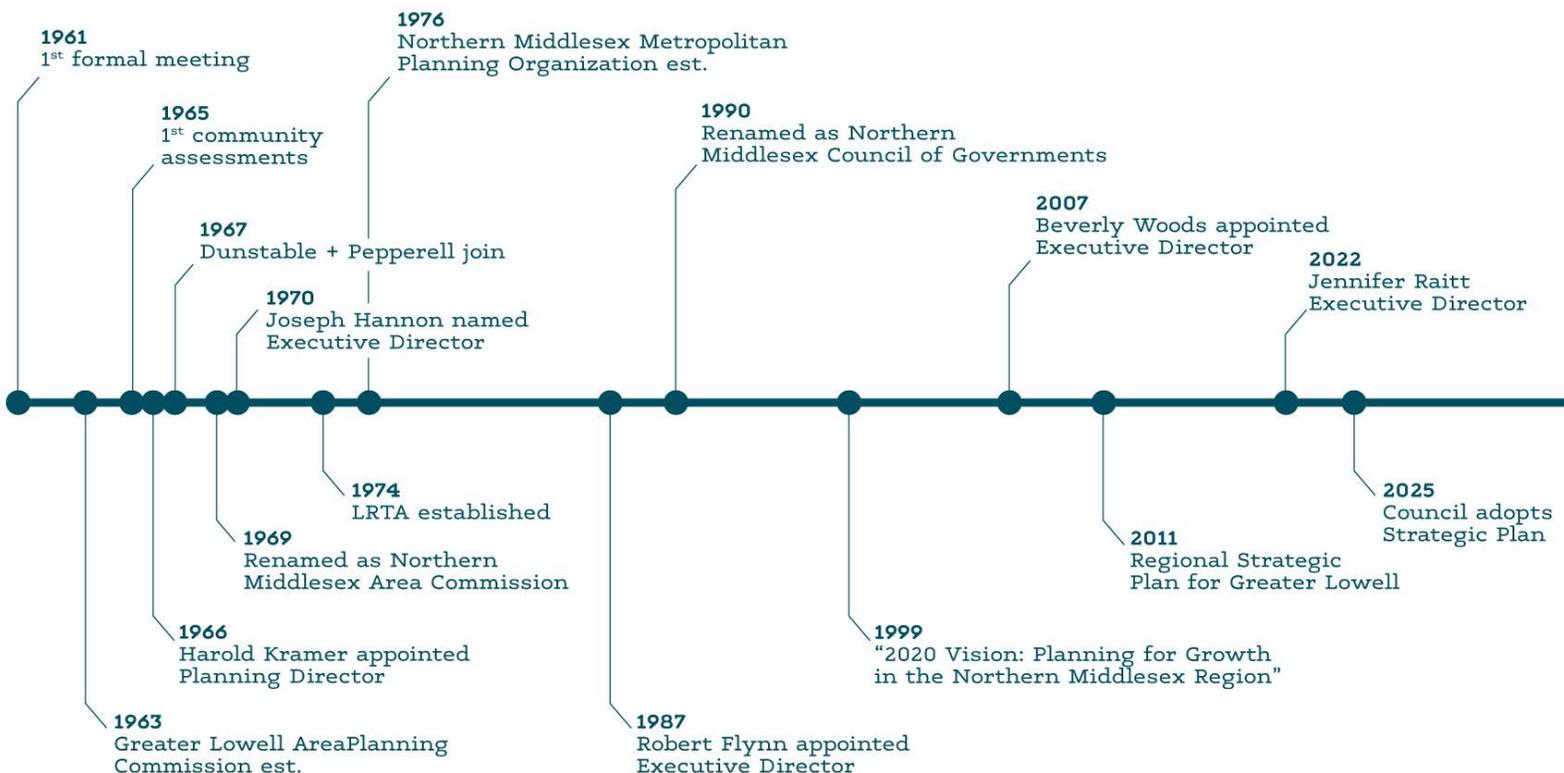
The organization underwent significant changes in 1969, including a name change to the Northern Middlesex Area Commission (NMAC). In 1970, Joseph P. Hannon was hired as Executive Director, and plans to establish the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) were set in motion. By 1972, special legislation through Chapter 357 of the Acts of 1972 modified the NMAC's governing board to include a chief elected official, a Planning Board member, and one alternate.

The establishment of the Lowell Regional Transit Authority in 1974 marked a key milestone in regional transportation planning. Two years later, in 1976, the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) was established to further enhance regional coordination. Legal Charter and Governance

Leadership transitions continued as Robert W. Flynn was promoted to Executive Director in 1987. In 1989, special legislation through Chapter 420 of the Acts of 1989 enabled NMCOG to perform a variety of non-planning functions for its members. The organization underwent another name change in 1990, becoming the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG). A significant forward-looking initiative, "2020 Vision: Planning for Growth in the Northern Middlesex Region," was launched in 1999.

Beverly A. Woods became Executive Director in 2007, leading the development of the 2011 Regional Strategic Plan for Greater Lowell. In 2022, Jennifer M. Raitt was hired as the current Executive Director, continuing the organization's legacy of leadership in regional planning and development.

From its humble beginnings in the early 1960s to its current role as a leader in regional governance, NMCOG has consistently worked to promote growth, planning, and collaboration across the region.



NMCOG TEAM – COUNCIL AND STAFF

Council

Billerica

Dina Favreau, Select Board
Marlies Henderson, Planning Board
Mary McBride, Clerk, Alternate

Dunstable

Jim Wilkie, Assistant Clerk, Select Board
Ron Mikol, Planning Board
Jason Silva, Alternate

Tewksbury

Select Board – Vacant
James Duffy, Planning Board
Alexandra Lowder, Alternate

Chelmsford

Pat Wojtas, NMMPO Representative, Select Board
John Souza, Planning Board
Douglas Bruce, Alternate

Lowell

Wayne Jenness, City Council
Gerard Frechette, Treasurer, Planning Board
Alternate – Vacant

Tyngsborough

Ronald Keohane, Select Board
Kimberly O'Brien, Planning Board
Michael Moran, Alternate

Dracut

Heather Santiago-Hutchings, Select Board
Michael Pestana, Planning Board
Phillippe Thibault, Vice Chair, Alternate

Pepperell

Chuck Walkovich, Assistant Treasurer, Select Board
Joan Ladik, Planning Board
Stephen Themelis, Chair, Alternate

Westford

Chris Barrett, Select Board
Joan Croteau, Planning Board
James Silva, Alternate



Members of the NMCOG Council at the 2024 NMCOG Annual Meeting (L to R: Chuck Walkovich, Jackie Geilfuss, Wayne Jenness, James Silva, Ronald Keohane, Phillippe Thibault, Heather Santiago-Hutchings, Dina Favreau, Gerard Frechette, Kimberly O'Brien, Pat Wojtas, Marlies Henderson, Jenny Raitt, Stephen Themelis, Jim Wilkie)

Staff

Blake Acton, Regional Transit Planner II

Carlin Andrus, GISP, GIS and Data Program Manager

Michael Asciola, AICP, Senior Planner – Housing and Land Use

Christian D’Emilia, Regional Housing Coordinator

Isabel Emmet, AICP, Regional Land Use Planner II

Apple Gould-Schultz, Transportation Planner I

Christopher Glenn Hayes, AICP, Housing and Economic Development Manager

Kelly Lynema, AICP, Deputy Director

Jennifer Raitt, Executive Director

Amanuel Regassa, Transportation Planner II

Sara Schreiber, Finance and Benefits Manager

Meghan Tenhoff, ENV SP, Principal Planner. Sustainability

Donna Vieweg, Executive Assistant

Michelle Zelenka, Regional Energy Manager



NMCOG Staff at the 2024 NMCOG Annual Meeting (L to R: Michael Asciola, Austen Torres-Davis, Jessica Belanger, Donna Vieweg, Blake Acton, Isabel Emmet, Meghan Tenhoff, Jenny Raitt, Carlin Andrus, Sara Schreiber, Kelly Lynema, Christopher Glenn Hayes; not pictured: Apple Gould-Schultz, Amanuel Regassa, Christian D’Emilia, Michelle Zelenka, all of whom joined NMCOG in 2025)



STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS AND TIMELINE

Beginning in mid-2021, NMCOG underwent a number of executive level and other staff transitions, including the retirement of the executive director and assistant director. In mid-2022, a new executive director was hired and other significant shifts in agency staffing were underway. The new director held NMCOG meetings with key municipal leaders in each community, including members of Select Boards, City Council, and Planning Boards, to assess local and regional priorities and needs. These conversations also helped new NMCOG leaders better understand local expectations of NMCOG and past experiences working with NMCOG.

After this period of transition, NMCOG commenced a major strategic planning initiative in January 2023. This included the development of a Strategic Planning Committee and four major Council retreats over the course of a three-phase planning process. These sessions collectively aimed to position NMCOG as a regional leader in planning, collaboration, and support for its communities. The strategic planning process was concluded in late 2024.

After the initial fact-finding phase, the strategic planning process formally began with data gathering, brainstorming, and conversations that involved Council stakeholders, including past leaders and contributors to the organization. NMCOG hosted a special Council Meeting retreat on a Saturday in January 2023. Key agency staff were also in attendance and assisted with group facilitation and record keeping.

At this meeting, the Council reviewed the agency's history, staffing, projects, and regional priorities (housing, infrastructure, and collaboration). Discussions focused on areas for improvement and areas of success, including the need for better onboarding, member engagement, and communication through newsletters. These meetings focused on the organization's mission and values. Members emphasized terms like equity, transparency, collaboration, and regional initiatives, as well as leadership, inclusivity, and empowering communities. The core values identified were inclusivity, teamwork, financial support, and responsiveness. The following values were emphasized: financial support, cultural sensitivity, and smart growth. Members also expressed their hopes that the strategic plan would be realistic, have actionable goals; improve marketing and outreach efforts; and enhance community collaboration. Concerns were expressed over staff capacity, community buy-in, and effective communication. Following this kick-off, staff began identifying key issues to explore. A Strategic Planning Committee was formed at the February Council Meeting. The Strategic Planning Committee focused on the development of a NMCOG Strategic Plan which would include:

- An organizational mission statement;
- An organizational statement of values; and
- An outline of key priorities, goals, strategies and measures of success for a three-year timeframe.

The Committee worked with the Executive Director to assist with all phases of the plan, including review of agendas and materials for interviews, surveys, retreat, and other engagement as needed. The Committee provided progress updates to the full Council at monthly meetings. The Committee was responsible for finalizing the draft plan and recommending the plan for adoption at a fall 2024 Council meeting. The Committee was composed of four NMCOG Officers, two additional NMCOG Council members, three NMCOG staff, including the Executive Director, one LRTA staff, and one NMMPO member.

The Committee began meeting in February 2023 to discuss the design of the environmental scan and the types of questions that each phase of the planning process should explore.

The following questions were explored during this phase of the planning process:

- What are NMCOG's historic and current organizational conditions?
- How does NMCOG compare with other RPAs?

The work to answer these questions was integrated into the following phase of planning: the Environmental Scan.

Phase two of the planning process centered around an Environmental Scan: a systematic analysis of internal and external factors that may impact NMCOG during the plan's period of performance. This is a typical step in strategic planning, and for the NMCOG strategic planning process, it included a review of other RPAs, a review of NMCOG's current conditions, and drafting and administering a survey to further gauge strategic needs, experiences working with the agency, and opportunities for the agency to explore. The survey was distributed to Council members, staff, agency partners, and other stakeholders. During this phase, Committee members and staff also conducted stakeholder interviews. The Committee reviewed feedback received from the survey and interviews and assisted with the development of a second strategic planning retreat.

At this retreat, the Council employed the "SOAR" framework to identify strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. In the process, the mission and values gained focus on sustainability, resiliency, and equity. Actionable goals were defined such as compliance with state plans, resource leverage, and community education. Future trends that the Council will address include municipal workforce issues, regional collaboration, and advocacy for resources. Discussions concluded with a focus on Strategic Priorities. Specifically, the Council expressed that NMCOG should:

- Provide comprehensive resources on climate, housing, and transportation;
- Lead regional collaboration and secure funding for planning efforts; and
- Sustain organizational health through revenue growth and staff development.

In the second planning phase, the emerging questions to address were:

- What should the direction of the agency be for the next three years?
- What are the new initiatives that are in the pipeline?
- In what ways can NMCOG improve communications (internal and external)?
- How can we improve Council, Town/ City staff, and NMCOG staff collaboration?
- What is the relationship between NMCOG and the NMMPO, and the LRTA, and member municipalities, and the legislative delegation?
- What are the Council members' roles?
- How do we get buy-in from all nine communities on priorities/ initiatives?

Some of these questions were integrated into the Environmental Scan. Others were answered during the Finalization stage.

During this phase, in May 2023, the Executive Director reorganized the agency to help achieve broader organizational goals, expand the agency's leadership team, and increase agency capacity to respond to member community needs. The agency formed two programmatic teams: one in transportation and the other in housing and economic development. A third team with one staff person is focused on GIS and data services.

The third and final phase started with a committee review of the environmental scan, including goals and the structures and staffing of other Councils. Staff reviewed resource availability and ways to leverage additional resources to fund the plan.

During this phase, a third retreat provided Council members the opportunity to weigh in on the agency's mission, values, and priorities, and also to review the organizational bylaws. The following options were discussed: expanding or diversifying membership, clarifying staff roles, adjusting committee structures, and further enhancing community engagement through annual events and social media.

In the third planning phase, the emerging questions to address were:

- What are NMCOG's priorities for the next three years?
- Do we have staff capacity and skillsets, including funding, to advance the priorities?
- What improvements in technology are needed at NMCOG and/ or to assist communities?

These questions were answered through finalization of the plan, conversation with the Committee and at the final retreat, and are integrated into the sections below.

Emerging themes and plan components were shared at a retreat in June 2024 open to the Council and other organizational stakeholders. Following the retreat, the agency began drafting the Strategic Plan and one-year action plan. Staff also began a review of organizational bylaws, including the Council's committee structure and related goals, strategies, and measures of success.

Over the summer of 2024, the Strategic Planning Committee met to review and discuss the final draft plan. The Council discussed the draft Strategic Plan at their November meeting and opened it for public comment through January 2025. At their January meeting, they unanimously approved the Strategic Plan.

EXTERNAL TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Northern Middlesex region is experiencing dynamic shifts in demographics, technology, and economic development that present both challenges and opportunities. As populations grow and diversify, the need for inclusive and equitable services is paramount. Moreover, advancements in technology are transforming public expectations, with people increasingly seeking streamlined, digital interactions with government services. This tech-driven trend offers opportunities for the Council to enhance communication, expand digital accessibility, and implement innovative solutions that support efficient community engagement.

The current rise in state and federal funding for infrastructure, housing, and environmental sustainability also opens doors for the Council to expand its role as a regional facilitator and advocate, and to assist with implementation of key priorities. While the next federal and future state administrations may have new funding priorities, NMCOG can continue to spearhead and advance regional initiatives and pursue funding towards implementation. NMCOG can also support its member communities in securing grants, managing complex projects, and navigating regulatory requirements. Additionally, partnerships with public and private stakeholders can create synergies that further strengthen the region's ability to address pressing challenges, such as housing affordability, transportation connectivity, and climate resilience.

Environmental and Economic Trends

The Northern Middlesex region faces significant environmental pressures, including increased frequency of extreme weather events and rising sea levels, both of which threaten local infrastructure and natural resources. Environmental resiliency is increasingly essential, not only for compliance with state mandates but also to protect the region's quality of life. By prioritizing green infrastructure and resilience planning, the Council can position itself as a leader in environmental stewardship. Additionally, there is a growing demand for sustainable transportation options, from expanded public transit to pedestrian- and bike-friendly infrastructure, which presents an opportunity for the Council to advocate for and lead these transformative projects.

Economically, the broader metropolitan region is experiencing growth in real estate, finance, and transportation/ warehousing. The NMCOG region experienced growth in education and health, leisure and hospitality, public administration, and advanced manufacturing. Sectors such as information technology and renewable energy can offer pathways for sustainable economic development. The Council can leverage these trends by continuing to foster workforce development initiatives, supporting local businesses, and advocating for policies that promote regional competitiveness. The evolving economic landscape also highlights the need for a strong housing market to attract and retain a diverse workforce. The Council can work with municipalities to identify areas for housing development, streamline permitting processes, and support policies that help our communities grow.

Internal Trends and Opportunities

Internally, NMCOG is well-positioned to build on its strengths as a regional leader and trusted partner. Recent investments in staff development and technology have enhanced the Council's capacity to deliver high-quality services, foster collaboration, and respond to emerging needs. Moving forward, the Council, including the Board and staff, has the opportunity to enhance its internal operations further by adopting data-driven approaches, improving knowledge management, and expanding cross-departmental initiatives that support more integrated and holistic solutions.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to strengthen the Council's engagement with member communities. By implementing a more structured and proactive approach to communication, the Council can better anticipate and respond to the needs of its members. This approach could include regular surveys, feedback mechanisms, and advisory committees that offer valuable insights into community priorities. Moreover, the Council can seek to diversify funding sources by exploring new revenue streams, such as public-private partnerships and grant opportunities, which will support sustained growth and resilience in the face of changing economic conditions.

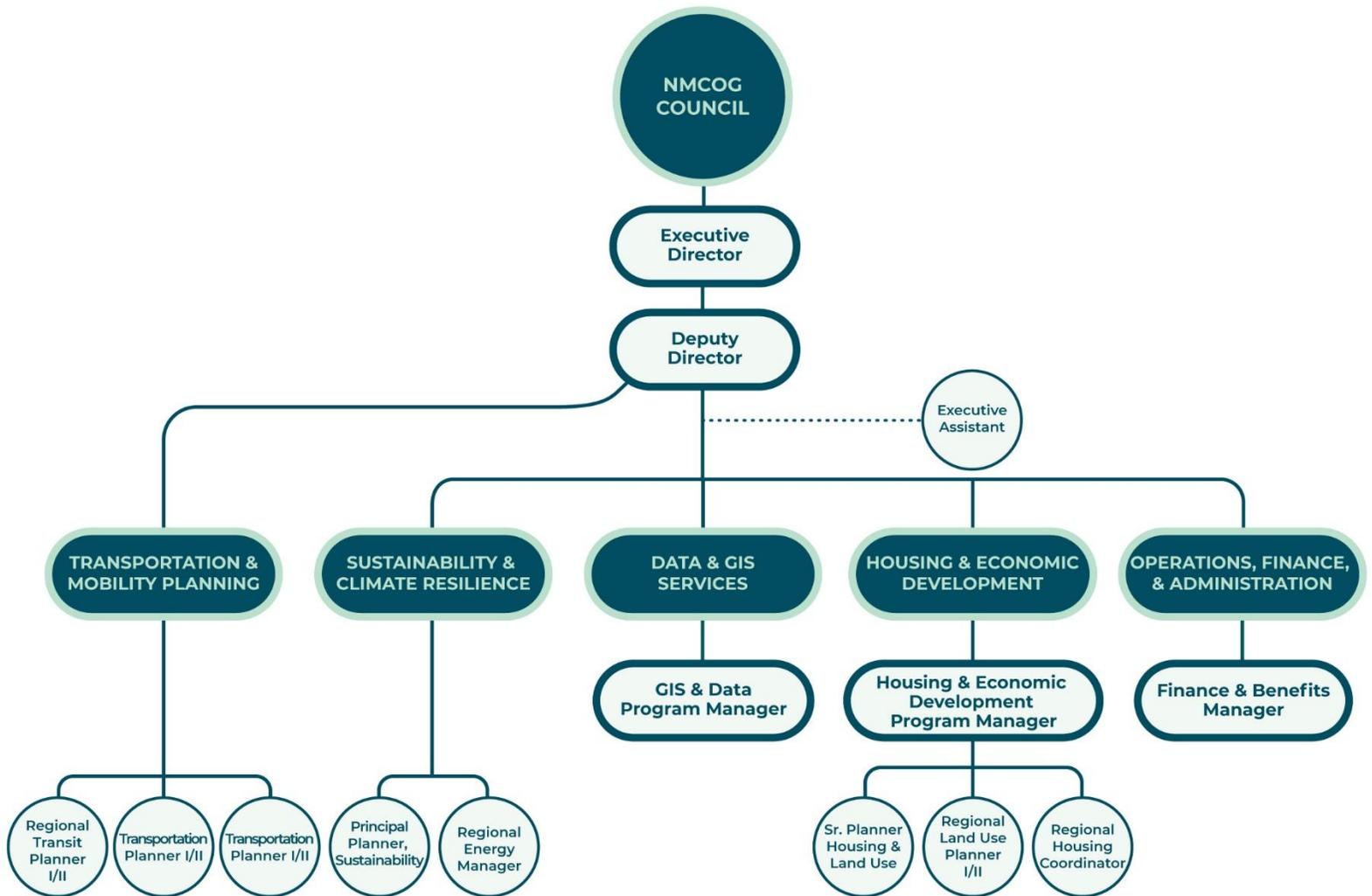
NMCOG CURRENT CONDITIONS

Organizational Structure

In May 2023, the Executive Director reorganized the agency into two programmatic teams: one in transportation and the other in housing and economic development. A third team with one staff person is focused on GIS and data services. A fourth team is led by the Executive Director, which works on sustainability and climate resilience. In addition to the Executive Director, there are two operations, finance, and administration staff: an Executive Assistance and a Finance and Benefits Manager.

This brings a total of four programmatic teams:

- Transportation and Mobility Planning (1 manager and 3 program staff)
- Housing and Economic Development (1 manager and 3 program staff)
- GIS and Data Services (1 manager)
- Sustainability and Climate Resilience (2 program staff)



Relationship between NMCOG and the NMMPO, the LRTA, Member Municipalities, and the Legislative Delegation

NMCOG plays a pivotal role in coordinating efforts among the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO), the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA), member municipalities, and the legislative delegation. NMCOG serves as the staff for the NMMPO, which is responsible for regional transportation planning, ensuring that projects align with federal and state transportation goals. The agency also works closely with the LRTA to address transit and paratransit needs across the region, advocating for improved public transportation services that are accessible and efficient. With member municipalities, NMCOG is a convener and facilitator, supporting local projects and ensuring a unified approach to regional priorities. In addition, NMCOG collaborates with the legislative delegation to advocate for policies and funding that support regional and community initiatives, aligning efforts across all levels of government to maximize impact.

Council Members' Roles

Council members serve as representatives of their respective communities, providing input on NMCOG's strategic direction and serving as advocates for regional collaboration. They play a crucial role in helping identify local needs and priorities, ensuring NMCOG's initiatives align with each

municipality's interests. Council members also liaise between NMCOG and their local governments, facilitating communication and collaboration on shared projects. By actively engaging in NMCOG's planning and decision-making processes, Council members help to strengthen the agency's impact and promote regional solutions that benefit all member communities.

NMCOG IN COMPARISON TO OTHER REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCIES

The structure of regional planning agencies (RPAs) in Massachusetts reveals several key elements that allow for comparison with NMCOG. By focusing on staffing, council structure, program areas, and services, NMCOG can assess its position and consider enhancements based on practices observed in other agencies. See Table 1 for a summary of four comparable RPAs in terms of size and scope.

Staffing across regional planning agencies varies significantly. For example, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BPRC) has 39 full-time and eight part-time employees, while Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) employs 62 staff. The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) each have around 43 employees. NMCOG has much lower staffing levels and may want to consider expanding the team or introducing part-time staffing or internship roles to increase capacity without significantly raising costs. This could help NMCOG manage growing demands or new program areas.

Most agencies have a council structure where local officials or appointed delegates represent each community. For instance, PVPC allows two delegates per community, while FRCOG is represented by one select board member or a designated representative from each municipality. BPRC provides one member per community, and CMRPC uses a system based on population size, with smaller communities receiving fewer delegates. NMCOG might review its council structure to ensure balanced representation, potentially offering multiple delegates for larger municipalities. Additionally, adopting a structure based on population size, like CMRPC, could be a way to ensure equitable decision-making power.

Regional planning agencies generally focus on land use, zoning, housing, transportation, economic development, GIS and data collection, regionalization and municipal services, and environmental planning. Some agencies, like FRCOG, have expanded into climate resilience and advocacy, while BPRC also emphasizes public health. MAPC has the most expansive agenda and practice areas, including divisions dedicated to arts and culture, clean energy, public health, and municipal collaboration.

NMCOG could expand its program areas to align with emerging priorities like climate resilience and public health. While NMCOG employs one full-time staff member for climate resiliency and sustainability efforts, this level of staffing does not appear to meet the region's demands. A new regional energy manager will serve two of the nine municipalities and two municipalities outside of the NMCOG region due to the structure of the regional initiative and agreement of the communities working together. FRCOG's focus on climate resilience could serve as a model, especially in light of increasing environmental concerns and the growing need for regional adaptation strategies.

Each agency develops long-term regional plans that address growth, housing, transportation, and sustainability. BPRC's "Sustainable Berkshires" (adopted in 2014) and CMRPC's "Imagine 2050" are examples of forward-looking plans that guide development for decades. NMCOG's regional plan is outdated and lacks a long-term vision for sustainability, housing, and technological trends, and it

may be time to update it. Aligning with plans like CMRPC's "Imagine 2050" could help NMCOG better prepare for future challenges.

Many agencies provide additional services beyond planning, such as town accounting programs or temporary planner services for smaller communities. For instance, FRCOG offers a town accounting program, while CMRPC provides temporary administrative and planning support. NMCOG could enhance its services to municipalities by offering additional support such as temporary planning or administrative services, technical assistance for grant writing, or data analysis like GIS services. This would increase its relevance, particularly for smaller towns with limited resources.

Many agencies have specialized committees that handle specific program areas. BPRC and CMRPC, for example, have executive and nominating committees, as well as transportation and development committees. NMCOG could consider establishing more subcommittees to address specific regional concerns like transportation, housing, or economic development. This would allow for more focused planning efforts and greater participation from community representatives with relevant expertise.

NMCOG operates similarly to other regional planning agencies in Massachusetts but could consider expanding its role by increasing staffing levels, diversifying its program areas, enhancing services to municipalities, and taking a leadership role in statewide advocacy on issues like climate resilience and public health. These steps would help NMCOG stay relevant and address the evolving needs of its member communities.

Table 1: NMCOG Compared to other selected Regional Planning Agencies in Massachusetts; Source: Website data, 2024.

RPA	STAFFING	STRUCTURE	UNIQUE FOCUS AREAS	REGIONAL PLANS	ADDITIONAL SERVICES	SPECIAL COMMITTEES
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission	39 FT, 8 PT	32 communities, 1 representative per community	Public health	Sustainable Berkshires adopted in 2014		Executive Nominating Transportation Development
Franklin Regional Council of Governments	62	26 communities, 1 Select Board member or designated representative per community	Climate Resilience Advocacy		Town Accounting Program	
Martha's Vineyard Commission	14	One county with seven towns. 21 Commissioners elected by Vineyarders or appointed by elected officials, of whom 17 are eligible to vote on regulatory matters.	Protecting Special Districts, Making Development Projects Better, Conducting Important Research, Preparing Plans to Guide the Future, Facilitating Implementation	Martha's Vineyard Island Plan, adopted in 2009		Executive Committee Land Use Planning Committee Planning and Economic Development Committee Finance Committee Compliance Committee Ad Hoc Committees

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission	20	22 communities, 1 representative per community, plus 1 alternate		Montachusett Regional Strategic Framework Plan, adopted 2011	Nominating Committee and Executive Committee
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SURVEY SUMMARIES

Staff Survey

A staff survey was conducted between June 15 and June 22, 2023, with responses primarily received via email, totaling nine submissions. Staff members highlighted several positive aspects of NMCOG, including a diverse range of employee skills and talents, strong leadership, and a culture open to change and innovation. The organization is seen as having a good organizational culture, with values that promote equity and integrity. Despite the positive feedback, there are notable areas for improvement. Staff expressed a need for better IT resources and training, more clarity in project management, and additional support for HR-related needs. There were also requests for an independent feedback mechanism for staff to voice their opinions without fear of retribution.

When asked about the future of NMCOG, staff expressed hopes for an expanded team of experts, increased community engagement, and a stronger sense of cohesion among member communities. They emphasized the importance of maintaining the organization's mission and building trust both within the organization and with the communities it serves. Staff expectations include feeling valued and supported and having opportunities for professional growth. While many reported that their experiences are generally meeting these expectations, some noted challenges due to being new and adjusting to the organizational culture and processes.

Overall, the survey results indicate that while NMCOG has a solid foundation with engaged staff and effective leadership, critical areas require attention to enhance organizational effectiveness and employee satisfaction. Addressing these issues will be vital for the agency's growth and ability to serve the community effectively in the coming years.

External Stakeholder Survey

Based on multiple interviews, external stakeholder feedback on NMCOG is positive. Stakeholders appreciate the services and expertise NMCOG provides to its member communities.

Some key themes emerged. Stakeholders noted continued strong funding is essential for NMCOG to retain qualified staff and provide quality services. Lack of funding could hamper NMCOG's ability to function. Stakeholders would like NMCOG to have the resources to expand services, such as grant writing assistance and climate change expertise.

NMCOG generally meets expectations by providing valuable technical assistance, planning support, and regional coordination. The new leadership under the Executive Director is seen as positive, bringing more proactive and collaborative approaches. Stakeholders would like to see NMCOG further strengthen its role as a regional convener, facilitator, and subject matter expert on key issues.

Stakeholders also commented on NMCOG's organizational capacity, finding that NMCOG has a strong organizational structure and talented staff. Though some concerns were raised about staff

workload and retention in the past, the organizational culture is described as professional, responsive, and adaptable to changing needs.

Stakeholders would like to see NMCOG become a stronger regional voice and resource, expanding services, deepening expertise, and fostering greater collaboration between member communities. Key priorities for the future include addressing housing affordability, improving public transportation, and planning for climate change impacts.

Overall, NMCOG is viewed as a valuable asset to its member communities, and stakeholders are optimistic about its future potential with the right resources and organizational focus.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

During the strategic planning retreats, four additional questions were explored that looked beyond NMCOG's existing operations and into the desired future of the agency. This visioning process led directly into the creation of the missions and priorities described in the next section.

What should the direction of the agency be for the next three years?

Over the next three years, NMCOG's direction should focus on becoming a more proactive and responsive regional leader, leveraging data-driven insights to anticipate and address emerging challenges. With an emphasis on sustainability, inclusivity, and economic vitality, the agency can prioritize initiatives that promote resilience and improve quality of life for residents across its member communities. Key objectives include fostering partnerships, advocating for funding to support housing and infrastructure, and ensuring regional competitiveness by addressing workforce needs. By reinforcing these priorities, NMCOG can enhance its impact and align its strategic goals with both local and state priorities.

In what ways can NMCOG improve communications (internal and external)?

To enhance both internal and external communications, NMCOG can adopt a more streamlined approach to information sharing and engagement. Internally, the use of collaboration tools and regular cross-departmental meetings can foster a more unified organizational culture. Externally, NMCOG can improve communication with member communities and stakeholders by adopting a robust digital strategy, which includes more frequent newsletters, a social media presence, and a user-friendly website with resources and updates. Establishing regular feedback loops with stakeholders, including public surveys, town hall meetings, and direct outreach to media partners, can also strengthen community engagement and ensure that NMCOG is responsive to the needs and priorities of its members.

How can we improve NMCOG Council, Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO), Northern Middlesex Stormwater Collaborative (NMSC), Town/City staff, and NMCOG staff collaboration?

To improve collaboration, the agency can develop a structured approach that includes increased opportunities to engage, as well as clear channels for communication and feedback. Currently, the Council holds monthly Council meetings in a hybrid format, monthly meetings with municipal managers and administrators (chief executive officers), monthly meetings with the NMMPO, quarterly NMSC meetings, and regular meetings with planning and community development staff. A new structure might include the NMCOG Annual Meeting in the fall and a spring event to engage all stakeholders to provide updates on ongoing regional initiatives, challenges, solutions, and new opportunities. Additionally, NMCOG could provide training

sessions and resources to ensure all parties are informed about regional planning tools, funding opportunities, and best practices. By building a more collaborative and knowledge-sharing environment, NMCOG can help its members work more effectively towards common goals.

How do we get buy-in from all nine communities on priorities and initiatives?

To secure buy-in from all nine communities, NMCOG can focus on building a transparent and inclusive process for setting priorities and developing initiatives. This can be achieved by engaging community stakeholders early in the planning process, ensuring that each community's unique needs and concerns are heard and considered. NMCOG can also provide clear, data-driven analyses demonstrating the benefits of proposed initiatives for each community. Establishing regular opportunities for feedback and dialogue, such as town halls, focus groups, and advisory committees, can also foster a sense of ownership and commitment among all nine communities. Additionally, celebrating and showcasing successes through regular updates and case studies can help maintain momentum and highlight the positive impacts of regional collaboration.





STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND KEY OBJECTIVES

As we advance our mission, the NMCOG team is dedicated to guiding our member communities toward success by offering comprehensive resources and expert consultation across a range of critical planning areas, including climate resiliency, housing, economic development, and transportation. We ensure that our communities stay aligned with state plans and priorities, while leveraging public and private partnerships to drive meaningful outcomes. As thought leaders, we keep our communities informed and prepared for emerging trends and opportunities.

We also take a leading role in regional collaboration, advocacy, and engagement. By securing state and federal resources, fostering partnerships, and promoting educational initiatives, we enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of planning efforts. Our commitment to partnering with private entities further strengthens our regional planning initiatives and drives innovation.

We prioritize fiscal responsibility, diversify revenue sources, and strengthen relationships with our Council members to sustain and grow the agency. We are committed to recruiting and retaining top talent, and we invest in staff development to ensure our team is equipped to meet future challenges.

Finally, we support inter-regional collaboration by exploring new subcommittees and workgroups within statewide organizations, and by actively participating in regional planning sessions at conferences. These efforts enhance our ability to address complex, cross-regional planning challenges and ensure that our member communities benefit from shared knowledge and strategies. Through these strategic priorities, our agency is positioned to lead and support our communities in achieving sustainable growth and success.

This section expands upon the three strategic priorities, including a vision of success for each action step related to that priority.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: MOBILIZE AND ACCELERATE LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLAN ATTAINMENT AND GOALS

Local Technical Assistance: Partnering and Collaborating with Our Communities

Our organization is committed to guiding and advising our member communities on the most effective approaches and solutions across a range of critical planning areas. We recognize that the complexity of modern planning requires a comprehensive and integrated approach, which is why our efforts are focused on providing the highest level of support and resources to ensure our communities thrive.

Provide One-Stop Resources and Consultation

We are dedicated to serving as a central hub for our communities, offering one-stop resources and expert consultation on issues related to climate resiliency, housing, economic development, and transportation. By consolidating our expertise and making it readily accessible, we empower local governments and stakeholders to make informed decisions that align with their unique needs and challenges.

Ensure Core Compliance with State Plans and Priorities

A key aspect of our guidance is ensuring that our communities achieve and maintain core compliance with state plans and priorities. We understand the importance of aligning local actions with broader state goals, and we work diligently to provide the necessary tools, insights, and support to help our members navigate regulatory requirements and fulfill their obligations.

Implement Local and Regional Plans to Build Trust in Planning Processes

We translate local visions into tangible improvements to benefit our communities and communicate the value of participation in planning processes. Plans are developed with community input and specify community-informed goals for climate resiliency, economic growth, environmental sustainability, housing, and transportation. After plan development,

effective implementation ensures these goals are realized in ways that enhance quality of life, address pressing challenges, and foster resilience. Implementation builds public trust in the planning process, showing that the time and resources invested in creating plans lead to real, measurable progress for the region.

Leverage Partnerships for Success

Success in planning is often a collaborative effort, and we are committed to leveraging a wide network of local, regional, and state public and private partnerships. By fostering these connections, we can pool resources, share knowledge, and drive initiatives that yield meaningful and sustainable outcomes for our communities.

Serve as Thought Leaders and Encourage Future Preparedness

As thought leaders in the planning field, we are proactive in keeping our communities informed and prepared for emerging trends and opportunities. Our role extends beyond guidance; we aim to inspire innovation, encourage best practices, and ensure that our member communities are always ahead of the curve in responding to new challenges and seizing potential opportunities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: LEAD REGIONAL COLLABORATION, ADVOCACY, AND ENGAGEMENT

Regional Convening and Collaboration: Supporting Vibrant Communities

Economically strong communities increase the region's vitality. Our commitment to regional collaboration, advocacy, and engagement is at the heart of our mission to strengthen the planning and development efforts of our member communities. By fostering a spirit of cooperation and staying attuned to best practices, trends, and emerging opportunities, we aim to create a cohesive and effective regional planning environment that benefits all.

Secure State and Federal Resources

One of our primary goals is to identify, pursue, and secure state and federal resources that support local and regional planning activities. We understand that access to funding and resources is crucial for the successful implementation of planning initiatives. By actively seeking out these opportunities, we ensure that our communities have the financial backing needed to advance their planning goals.

Promote Collaboration and Efficiency

We believe collaboration is key to achieving greater effectiveness and efficiency in regional planning. Our organization encourages collaboration among local governments, agencies, and stakeholders. We facilitate partnerships to amplify the collective impact of regional planning efforts. We also uphold democratic principles by creating inclusive platforms for civic engagement, advocating for public forums, and ensuring transparency in decision-making processes. These efforts empower people to shape the future of their communities, amplifying their voices and addressing their needs. We furthermore support and prioritize collaboration with state programs and initiatives – when our region is aligned with state goals, we can tap into broader resources, expertise, and funding opportunities that can amplify local efforts, maximize impact, and ensure that local priorities are part of a coordinated strategy that strengthens the

state's overall economic and social fabric. By bringing diverse voices to the table, we can address challenges holistically and develop more robust and sustainable solutions.

Educate, Raise Awareness, and Advocate

Educating and fostering a comprehensive understanding of community and regional planning is a cornerstone of NMCOG's mission. We actively work with member communities to provide the tools and knowledge to navigate planning challenges and make informed decisions to help municipalities plan engaging community events, fostering social connections and cultural vibrancy within their communities. These educational efforts build a shared vision for the future and lay the groundwork for effective advocacy and engagement. In this spirit, NMCOG may collaborate with member communities to explore incorporating public art into planning initiatives. Supporting efforts like murals, sculptures, and art-focused events could enhance cultural expression and strengthen community identity, contributing to vibrant and connected communities. When appropriate, work with member communities on advocacy goals and communicate those goals to the legislative delegation in the region.

Partner with Private Entities

We recognize the value of partnering with private entities, including businesses and nonprofit organizations and other allied organizations, to enhance our planning efforts. These partnerships bring additional expertise, resources, and perspectives that can significantly enrich the planning process. By seeking out opportunities to collaborate with the private sector, we aim to create mutually beneficial relationships that drive innovation and support the long-term success of our communities.

Through these strategic initiatives, we are committed to leading regional collaboration, advocacy, and engagement in a way that is mindful of best practices and aligned with the needs and aspirations of our member communities. Together, we can build a more resilient, prosperous, and connected region.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: ENSURE THE ONGOING HEALTH AND GROWTH OF THE AGENCY

Internal Excellence: Resources and Funding Opportunities

The long-term health and growth of our agency are vital to our ability to serve our member communities effectively. By focusing on fiscal responsibility, revenue diversification, relationship building, and staff development, we are committed to sustaining and enhancing our capacity to fulfill our mission.

Be Fiscally Responsible

Our agency is dedicated to operating with the highest standards of fiscal responsibility. We understand that careful stewardship of our financial resources is essential to maintaining the trust of our stakeholders and ensuring the continued viability of our operations. By prioritizing efficient budgeting, prudent spending, and transparent financial management, we safeguard the agency's ability to serve our communities now and in the future.

Diversify and Expand Revenue

To support the agency's growth and resilience, we are actively working to develop and expand revenue generation from local, state, and federal sources. In addition, we are exploring

alternative revenue models that can provide new streams of income, reduce dependency on traditional funding sources, and enhance our financial stability. This strategic focus on revenue diversification ensures that we have the resources needed to innovate, grow, and respond to emerging challenges.

Strengthen Relationships and Develop Training Opportunities

Cultivating and strengthening relationships with our Council members is a key priority. By formalizing training opportunities, we ensure that our Council is well-informed, engaged, and empowered to contribute effectively to the agency's success. These efforts help build a cohesive leadership team aligned with our strategic goals and committed to advancing our mission.

Recruit, Retain, and Develop Staff

Our agency's success is built on the talent and dedication of our staff. We are focused on recruiting and retaining high-quality professionals who share our vision and values. To support their ongoing development, we are formalizing staff development opportunities, ensuring that our team can access the training, resources, and growth pathways needed to excel in their roles. By investing in our staff, we are not only enhancing their capabilities but also ensuring that our agency remains a dynamic and effective organization. In addition to onboarding and internal training, we encourage staff to participate in and share their work at conferences, trainings, and workshops as part of their professional development, promotion of the agency, and contribution to the planning profession.

Support and Enhance Inter-Regional Collaboration and Opportunities

We recognize the value of specialized collaboration as a member of the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies, Transportation Managers' Group for MPO Coordinators, and other multi-regional and statewide organizations and their multiple subcommittees and working groups. NMCOG's participation will aim to work together with other agencies to tackle specific planning issues, share best practices, and develop innovative solutions. These collaborative efforts will enhance the overall effectiveness of regional planning across the state.

By focusing on these strategies and objectives, NMCOG can effectively achieve its mission and strategic priorities, enhancing its role as a key player in regional planning and development.





NMCOG'S WORK IN PROGRESS & THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC ACTIONS

NMCOG developed or is in the process of developing major regional plans covering several planning sectors.

- Overall:
 - [2011 Strategic Plan](#)
- Transportation:
 - [Envision 2050](#) (the Long-Range Transportation Plan),
 - [Greater Lowell Vision Zero Plan](#)

- [Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#) (in progress)
- Housing:
 - [At Home in Greater Lowell](#) (in progress)
- Economic Development:
 - [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\)](#) (2025-2029 CEDS in progress)
 - [Digital Equity Plan](#) (in progress)
- Climate Resilience and Adaptation:
 - Regional Stormwater and Watershed Study (in progress)

These plans align with key state-level initiatives, including Team Massachusetts: Leading Future Generations (2023 Massachusetts Economic Development Plan), the 2024 Northeast Regional Workforce Plan, Beyond Mobility (the MassDOT 2050 Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan), and the Statewide Housing Plan (to be completed in 2025).

In alignment with the Strategic Priorities outlined above, the following efforts are underway or will be advanced in key areas of the agency:

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY PLANNING

Implement Greater Lowell Vision Zero:

- Apply for SS4A funding for implementation grants
- Support communities in applying for construction grants
- Conduct annual Road Safety Audits under Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
- Complete Regional Safety Toolkit with template policies and localized recommendations

Develop Region-Wide Vision for Active Mobility

- Complete Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, with regionwide network plan and prioritized segments for implementation
- Support communities in applying for Complete Streets, MassTrails, and other MassDOT grant programs to fund infrastructure improvements
- Program additional studies in upcoming UPWPs to further implement the plan
- Develop template policies in collaboration with our communities to advance the plan

Advance Resilient and Sustainable Transportation Improvements across the Region

- Update transportation evaluation criteria to align with Envision 2050 and Greater Lowell Vision Zero
- Engage with municipal staff to support advancements of climate resilient and multimodal transportation projects to upcoming Transportation Improvement Programs
- Advocate with legislative delegation for additional funding for design and construction of projects that advance regional resiliency, safety, and multimodal goals
- Improve coordination and communications internally and externally with Massachusetts Department of Transportation Highway Division District 3 and District 4

Ensure High-Quality Transit and Paratransit Access Across the Region

- Coordinate with the Lowell Regional Transit Authority, MBTA, and other public transportation and transit providers on development of long-range regional transit plans
- Improve rider amenities and access to transit across LRTA and MBTA system in the region
- Review and study proposed LRTA improvements and plans against long-range regional transit goals, including housing, economic development, and climate resiliency
- Identify private transportation providers to coordinate opportunities and access, including working with Transportation Management Associations and other providers

Sustain Continuous, Comprehensive, and Cooperative Transportation Process

- Begin development of next Long-Range Transportation Plan
- Execute and advance the next Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among, MassDOT, LRTA, and NMCOG
- Execute and advance the next MOU with adjacent regional planning agencies and transit authorities in the Urbanized Area.

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Complete and Implement At Home in Greater Lowell - Regional Housing Strategy

- The Comprehensive Needs Assessment portion of the strategy is complete, including six goals focused on addressing affordability and supporting smart growth principles.
- Review At Home in Greater Lowell goals and strategies with participating communities, finalize, and formally adopt these goals and strategies
- Advance Phase 2 of At Home in Greater Lowell, which includes a regional storytelling public education program, toolkit development, scenario planning, regional forums, and discussion about key housing topics such as homelessness
- Prioritize technical assistance that clearly advances At Home in Greater Lowell or local Housing Production Plans

Complete Current and Develop and Implement Next Greater Lowell Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for 2025-2030

The Greater Lowell Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy will expire in May 2025. The agency is already planning its update that will have a period of performance through May 2030. Early focuses include the need for housing to recruit and retain workforce, Lowell Innovation Network Corridor, and strengthening connections between diverse populations and major employers. Incorporation of regional digital equity priorities will be considered as part of the CEDS development and implementation. Additionally, by serving as a member of various boards and committees serving the region, the agency plays a role in workforce development through partnerships with educational institutions and industry leaders, helping to create a skilled and future-ready workforce that meets the demands of local businesses.

- Close out current CEDS and track and report on successful outcomes and areas of opportunity/ barriers to opportunity
- Complete Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for 2025-2030
- Strengthen the CEDS Committee through targeted recruitment of private sector representatives and people of diverse backgrounds

- Continue to advocate for Economic Development District (EDD) Designation of the Greater Lowell region and develop a workplan to utilize EDD funding
- Prioritize technical assistance that clearly advances the current CEDS

Develop and Sustain Regionwide support for Lowell Innovation Network Corridor

- Integrate LINC, infrastructure, and housing development into the CEDS
- Develop a regular meeting with LINC stakeholders and regional economic development entities
- Seek funding for additional study and design of wastewater and transportation infrastructure, and housing development

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Support Green Communities Program

- Maintain support services for municipalities in the Green Communities program
- Focus on implantation and action of initiatives beyond regular reporting
- Provide direct technical assistance to communities seeking deeper levels of support to achieve energy efficiencies, amend zoning, advance capital projects, and to prioritize municipal actions to adapt to climate change

Support Northern Middlesex Stormwater Collaborative

- Execute and advance updated Memorandum of Understanding
- Complete watershed study Phase I and apply for funding for Phase II
- Support member communities with MS4 compliance
- Continue to provide educational materials and raise awareness about stormwater issues and management

Provide Assistance with Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) 2.0

- Grow expertise in the state's MVP 2.0 program and processes
- Support municipalities in advancing MVP designations from MVP 1.0 to MVP 2.0 to improve regional resilience and adaptation to climate change

Develop Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan

- Procure funding for the development of a region-wide Hazard Mitigation Plan to protect local economies and communities from climate-related risks
- Assist municipalities in adopting zoning changes to promote flood-resilient infrastructure and sustainable development practices in flood-prone areas

Achieve Net Zero Carbon Emissions

- Pilot a regional energy manager program with the Towns of Dunstable, Pepperell, Littleton, and Townsend, advancing existing and developing new clean energy and climate resiliency plans to address key issues in renewable energy planning, building energy infrastructure, and climate resiliency
- Identify resources to sustain and expand regional program
- Continue engagement and participation in the development of the Greater Boston Climate Action Plan, including the Priority Climate Action Plan, Comprehensive Climate Action Plan,

and implementation activities with other regional planning agencies in Eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire

Provide Brownfields Technical Support

NMCOG has applied for an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfield Assessment Grant to establish a four-year Brownfield Technical Assistance Program, focused on revitalizing underutilized and contaminated sites across the region.

- Pursue funding to establish and maintain this program, advancing regional priorities of environmental health, economic development, and reinvestment.
- Conduct site assessments, site planning, and community visioning to ensure redevelopment is consistent with regional needs, particularly the needs of those most directly harmed by contaminated sites

GIS AND DATA SERVICES

Develop and Maintain Data Dashboard

- Utilize existing and new data and make it publicly available and easy to access and analyze
- Implement a system to track and support local compliance with state plans and priorities
- Make data available and accessible to communities across all NMCOG practice areas.

Provide NMCOG Staff and Member Community Trainings

- Identify and advance opportunities to ensure NMCOG and member communities receive training and instruction to understand available GIS and data

PRIORITIZE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Select municipal projects and initiatives that advance the following: Envision 2050, the Greater Lowell Vision Zero Plan, the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, At Home in Greater Lowell, 2025-2029 CEDS, local Housing Production Plans, local Open Space and Recreation Plans, local Climate Action/ Net Zero, and/or recommendations or actions from other locally adopted plans.

REGIONAL COORDINATION AND SERVICES

Support Municipal Initiatives

- Provide resources and/or consult in development of communitywide master plans
- Initiate local and regional emergency preparedness planning

Update NMCOG Regional Plan

- Incorporate key regional initiatives including At Home in Greater Lowell, Envision 2050, Greater Lowell Vision Zero, and the CEDS 2025-2030 to align strategies across planning disciplines
- Integrate cross-cutting values of climate resilience, clean energy systems, democratic governance, and transparency

Support Northern Middlesex CEO Meetings for Town/ City Managers and Administrators

- Staff and provide resources to CEOs in the Northern Middlesex region

- Identify opportunities for advocacy, regionalization and shared services, review and development of regional policy and initiatives

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Develop Regional Communications and Engagement Strategy

- Using the Public Participation Plan update as a starting point, expand communications and engagement strategies to include improved relationships with local and regional media, advocacy groups of all types, and legislative delegation
- Transition to an improved website platform to improve online presence and increase clarity around NMCOG projects, initiatives, and opportunities to engage
- Complete agency rebranding project, including new logo, style guide, and shared language around NMCOG mission and values
- Develop and lead sessions at conferences to showcase NMCOG's expertise and foster cross-regional dialogue

Diversify and Sustain Agency Funding

- Identify and pursue funding opportunities from state and federal sources
- Explore alternative revenue models such as public-private partnerships or sponsorships
- Seek partnerships with businesses and nonprofit organizations to support and sustain regional initiatives

Invest in Professional Development, Recruitment, and Retention Plan

- Invest in recruitment and retention strategies to attract top talent
- Offer professional development opportunities, including training, mentorship, and career advancement programs

Onboard and Maintain Strong Relationships and Participation from Council Members

- Develop and update materials and process for onboarding new Council members
- Develop formal training programs to enhance Council members' effectiveness
- Meet with Council members to understand their needs
- Update NMCOG Organizational Bylaws
- Provide regular engagement opportunities to Council members for participation in NMCOG local and regional planning processes and other initiatives
- Provide Annual Reports to each community's elected officials and for the agency





INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

To evaluate whether NMCOG is taking actions to implement the strategic plan and whether those actions are having the intended impact—advancing NMCOG’s mission—the output and outcome measures laid out below have been identified. The following measures track whether we are doing what we said we would do (e.g., developing a regional data dashboard, pursuing regional partnerships) and measure our progress in advancing our missions (e.g., stronger municipal finances, enhanced quality of life for people in the region).

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: MOBILIZE AND ACCELERATE LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLAN ATTAINMENT AND GOALS

One-Stop Resources and Consultation

- **Creation of Data Dashboard and Resource Hub:** Track the creation and utilization of a data dashboard and resource hub, then development of those resources through measurement of the number of resources added and data annually updated.
- **Feedback on One-Stop Resources:** Gather feedback from member communities on the accessibility and usefulness of NMCOG's consolidated resources.
- **Community Utilization of Services:** Track the number of member communities actively using NMCOG's one-stop resources and consultation services.
- **Communication Effectiveness:** Conduct regular feedback surveys to assess the clarity, relevance, and frequency of internal and external communications.
- **Engagement Metrics:** Monitor website traffic, newsletter open and click-through rates, and social media engagement, including likes, shares, and comments, to gauge public interest and engagement.
- **Communication Effectiveness:** Conduct regular feedback surveys to assess the clarity, relevance, and frequency of internal and external communications.
- **Response Times:** Track response times for external inquiries and requests for information to assess the agency's responsiveness and accessibility.

Core Compliance with State Plans and Priorities

- **Plan Adoption Rate:** Track the rate at which member communities adopt new or updated plans with NMCOG's guidance in areas such as housing, economic development, and climate resiliency.
- **Reduction in Compliance Gaps:** Measure the reduction in the number of communities struggling with regulatory compliance.
- **Compliance Rate with State Plans:** Measure the percentage of communities achieving compliance and non-compliance with state planning priorities, supported by NMCOG's guidance.

Implement Local and Regional Plans

- **Number of Projects:** Provide technical assistance to member communities to develop and implement plans.
- **Educate General Public:** Support municipalities and community-based partners in understanding plan goals and strategies and showcase successful implementation and outcomes.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Measure participation rates in public workshops, meetings, and feedback sessions related to new initiatives, reflecting community interest and buy-in.
- **Successful Project Outcomes:** Track the number of planning projects completed on time and meet predefined success criteria (e.g., targets for climate resiliency or transportation enhancements) with NMCOG's assistance. The goal could be to increase the completion rate by a specific percentage each year.

- **Performance Against Goals:** Define specific outcomes for each initiative, such as housing units created or carbon emissions reduced, and measure progress against these goals.

Leverage Partnerships for Success

- **Number of Collaborative Projects:** Measure the number of cross-community projects initiated and completed each year.
- **Cross-functional Projects:** Measure the number of projects completed with active involvement from multiple stakeholders, reflecting increased collaboration across departments and communities.
- **Increase in Partnerships:** Track the number of partnerships formed with private entities, non-profits, and other organizations to support member community projects.
- **Funds Applied for and Secured for Member Communities:** Track the total state and federal funds NMCOCG applies for and secures for planning and development initiatives in member communities.
- **Community Satisfaction with NMCOCG's Role:** Conduct annual surveys with member communities to evaluate satisfaction with NMCOCG's collaboration efforts.

Serve as Thought Leaders and Encourage Future Preparedness

- **Number of Forums:** Identify opportunities to share knowledge, information, outcomes, and research analyses that have an impact on local communities and the region.
- **Thought Leadership Engagement:** Assess the number of communities and external partners engaging with NMCOCG's publications, webinars, and thought leadership initiatives. Metrics could include attendance numbers, report downloads, and social media engagement.
- **Engagement in Educational Initiatives:** Monitor attendance and participation in NMCOCG's educational workshops and webinars on regional planning topics.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: LEAD REGIONAL COLLABORATION, ADVOCACY, AND ENGAGEMENT

Secure State and Federal Resources

- **Funds Applied for and Secured for Member Communities:** Track the total state and federal funds NMCOCG applies for and secures for planning and development initiatives in member communities.
- **Funding Secured for Member Communities:** Track the total amount of state and federal funding secured on behalf of member communities for collaborative initiatives.
- **Funding Secured:** Measure the amount of state and federal funding secured for regional projects, comparing it to baseline figures from previous years.

Promote Collaboration and Efficiency

- **Regional Collaboration Projects:** Measure the number of regional initiatives that involve multiple member communities and external partners. Track engagement on projects, level of participation by each community, and outcomes and implementation of regional initiatives.

- **Regional Forums:** Measure the number of regional forums that include multiple member communities and external partners. This includes major summits and topic-specific regional meetings.
- **Feedback from Stakeholders:** Regularly gather feedback from Council members, town/city staff, and NMCOG staff on the effectiveness of collaboration efforts and areas for improvement.

Educate, Raise Awareness, and Advocate

- **Build Capacity:** Facilitate partnerships and opportunities to engage with member communities to expand the visibility and understanding of key issues at the local and regional level.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Track the participation of member communities, Council members, and external partners in NMCOG's advocacy efforts. Success could include an annual increase in attendance at events, meetings, and workshops.
- **Shared and Collaborative Projects and Initiatives:** Identify pathways to collaborate on regional projects and initiatives with the private sector and other key stakeholders.
- **Meeting Attendance and Participation:** Track attendance and active participation in joint meetings, roundtables, and workshops to ensure collaborative involvement from all parties.
- **Legislative Support:** Measure the number of legislative actions or funding allocations secured with support from the delegation, reflecting the strength of these relationships.
- **Advocacy Impact:** Measure the extent to which Council members' advocacy efforts contribute to project success, policy adoption, or funding achievements within their municipalities and the region.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: ENSURE THE ONGOING HEALTH AND GROWTH OF THE AGENCY

Be Fiscally Responsible

- **Financial Audits and Policies:** Track internal audit compliance and develop, maintain, and implement fiscal policies and controls.
- **Stakeholder Trust and Support:** Conduct periodic stakeholder surveys to evaluate satisfaction with NMCOG's fiscal management.

Diversify and Expand Revenue

- **Diversified Revenue Streams:** Track the diversification of funding sources and the percentage of the agency's budget coming from non-traditional sources (e.g., grants, partnerships).
- **Stabilization of Resources:** Ensure that a percentage of each annual operating budget includes revenues from member communities, state grants, federal grants, and private entities, including foundation support.

Strengthen Relationships and Develop Training Opportunities

- **Training Participation:** Track participation rates in Council and staff training sessions. Increasing participation year-over-year would indicate greater commitment to development.
- **Council Member Participation:** Track attendance and engagement of Council members in NMCOG meetings and activities.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Measure participation rates in workshops, meetings, and feedback sessions related to new initiatives, reflecting community interest and buy-in.
- **Participation in Planning Processes:** Monitor the level of participation from each community in planning sessions, focus groups, and feedback mechanisms for major initiatives.
- **Policy Impact:** Assess the number of NMCOG-supported policies or initiatives that are adopted at the local or state level, indicating a successful influence on regional planning and local and state policy development.
- **Project Success Across Communities:** Evaluate the distribution and impact of NMCOG's projects across all nine communities, ensuring that benefits are shared equitably.
- **Community Endorsement:** Gauge public support for regional projects through surveys and public comments, reflecting successful communication and alignment with community priorities.

Recruit, Retain, and Develop Staff

- **Satisfaction Surveys and Assessments:** Track employee engagement and satisfaction annually as part of the development of the Annual Work Plan. Assess employee skills and opportunities for professional development.
- **Staff Retention and Development:** Measure staff retention rates and track the number of professional development opportunities provided. Success could be defined as maintaining a retention rate above a specific percentage and increasing professional development participation annually.



