

Education Best Practices

Best Practice: Map community's priorities, funding and assessments for children from birth to age eight in order to better align resources and achieve greater impact.

Best Practice: Focus on college and career planning beginning in middle school and continuing through high school in order to ensure that all students have access to the opportunities that provide both experience and help to foster informed decisions about college and career pathways.

Best Practice: Maximize opportunities for students to access specialized vocational education through collaborations between regional vocational technical schools, comprehensive high schools and community colleges.

Best Practice: Understand projected changes in student enrollment and demographics and the impact of those changes on the school district's budget and operations in order to provide a district with the needed information to develop a strategic plan for its future.

Best Practice: Coordinate and communicate key student- and school-level data in real-time in order to inform decision-making and reporting.

Energy and Environment Best Practices

Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy

- Best Practice:** Become a Green Community pursuant to M.G.L. c. 25A §10 to realize the energy & environmental benefits
- Best Practice:** Adopt Zoning for Renewable Energy to reduce GHG emissions and fuel costs
- Best Practice:** Expedite Permitting for Renewable Energy in order to provide clear and predicate approvals
- Best Practice:** Complete an Energy Use Baseline so that the community can set goals and track performance
- Best Practice:** Produce an Energy Use Reduction Plan that lists intended activities and the parties responsible
- Best Practice:** Purchase Fuel-Efficient or Electric Vehicles to increase vehicle efficiency and reduce GHG emissions and fuel costs
- Best Practice:** Encourage or Require Energy Efficient & Sustainable Construction to reduce energy & resource use in homes & businesses
- Best Practice:** Realize or Exceed a Green Community Obligation in order to further reduce emissions & costs
- Best Practice:** Obtain Green Community 2.0 Status in order to establish a municipal GHG reduction target
- Best Practice:** Construct Zero Energy Buildings to eliminate GHG emissions, reduce cost, & enhance resiliency
- Best Practice:** Provide Electric Vehicle Infrastructure to facilitate the purchase & use of electric vehicles
- Best Practice:** Complete a Community Energy Audit & Manage Energy Consumption to use energy effectively and save money
- Best Practice:** Undertake a Behavioral Effort to Reduce Energy Use to educate and inspire people to cut their energy use

Climate Change Mitigation

- Best Practice:** Plan Ahead to mitigate climate change by establishing goals, creating an action plan, assigning responsibility, and tracking progress
- Best Practice:** Use Renewable Energy instead of fossil fuels by generating or purchasing clean power and by zoning for renewable power generation
- Best Practice:** Increase Energy Efficiency in order to reduce power consumption, fuel costs, and GHG emissions
- Best Practice:** Promote Fuel Efficient Transportation to reduce municipal transportation emissions & those from people living/working in the community
- Best Practice:** Encourage Sustainable Development to reduce, through higher density & mixed-use, the number distance of car trips & resulting GHG emissions
- Best Practice:** Protect and Manage Natural Resources to reduce carbon emissions from loss of natural land cover and to encourage carbon sequestration
- Best Practice:** Reduce Municipal Solid Waste and Increase Recycling in order to reduce GHG emissions associated with solid waste disposal

Best Practice: Conserve Water & Increase the Efficiency of Municipal Water/Wastewater Systems as they consume a lot of energy

Climate Change Adaptation & Resilience

Best Practice: Protect Vulnerable Populations to decrease risk to people who are more susceptible to climate change effects & less able to adapt

Best Practice: Inventory Existing Resources & Assess Vulnerabilities to enable the community to prioritize climate change adaptation strategies

Best Practice: Plan for Climate Change Adaptation to assess cost, risk, and potential solutions and produce a plan of action to enhance municipal resiliency

Best Practice: Implement Structural Improvements & Nature Based Approaches to protect buildings and infrastructure

Best Practice: Encourage Sound Land Use that minimizes risk and costs associated with climate change for new development and redevelopment projects

Best Practice: Prepare for Emergencies by completing an Emergency Management Plan or otherwise readying the community for storm events

Sustainable Development and Land Protection

Best Practice: Complete a Master or Open Space & Recreation Plan to guide land conservation & development decisions including zoning & land acquisition

Best Practice: Zone for Natural Resource Protection, Transfer of Development Rights, Traditional Neighborhood, or Transit Oriented Development

Best Practice: Adopt a Tree Retention Bylaw to preserve tree cover when a parcel is subdivided or redeveloped

Best Practice: Invest in Land Conservation or Park Creation/Restoration to protect key parcels of land from development & provide recreational opportunities

Best Practice: Enhance Consistency with a Land Use Priority Plan to achieve shared local, regional, and state land conservation & development goals

Water Resource Management

Best Practice: Require Localized Flood Protection Best Practices to manage water movement & protect lives, public safety, infrastructure, & critical assets

Best Practice: Implement Stormwater Management Measures so that land use regulations help promote infiltration, control flooding, and reduce pollution

Best Practice: Manage Water System Assets so that the condition of infrastructure is known & a plan for regular maintenance & rehabilitation is implemented

Best Practice: Complete Water Audits & Mitigate Leaks to reduce distribution system water losses and associated budgetary & environmental impacts

Best Practice: Protect Public Water Sources in order to reduce potential threats to water quality and the public health of system customers

Best Practice: Implement Water Conservation Measures to ensure long-term water resource sustainability, enable growth, & avoid new source development

- Best Practice:** Address Infiltration and Inflow to reduce unintended storm and waste water in the system and the cost of treating it
- Best Practice:** Implement Energy Efficiency Measures and Generate Clean Energy to reduce energy bills and GHG emissions
- Best Practice:** Utilize Advanced Financing Tools such as an enterprise fund, stormwater utility, or water bank to finance water/waste/storm water systems
- Best Practice:** Establish Full Cost Pricing so that users pay the true cost for all aspects of water, sewer, or storm water management & service delivery
- Best Practice:** Institute an Inter-Municipal Agreement in order to realize the economic and technical efficiencies of a regional approach to water infrastructure

Waste Management

- Best Practice:** Enhance Waste Ban Compliance so that recyclable and hazardous materials are diverted from the waste stream and reused or recycled
- Best Practice:** Develop Waste Contracts that are fiscally, environmentally, and otherwise beneficial to the community
- Best Practice:** Reduce Municipal Solid Waste and Increase Recycling by following smart waste practices

Site Cleanup

- Best Practice:** Complete a Brownfields Inventory so that the community is aware of all abandoned & underutilized properties & can develop plan of action
- Best Practice:** Conduct Site Assessments to determine the nature and extent of contamination and develop a plan of action
- Best Practice:** Clean Sites to prevent further releases or the spreading of contaminants and to bring sites back into productive use
- Best Practice:** Offer Tax Incentives to help property owners finance sometimes expensive site assessment and remediation
- Best Practice:** Update Regulations to remove barriers to redevelopment and encourage productive reuse of brownfield sites
- Best Practice:** Track Cleaned Sites with Activity and Use Limitations in order to ensure that future property uses don't endanger public health
- Best Practice:** Engage & Educate Property Owners and the Public to enhance citizen safety and understanding of brownfield issues, resources, and reuse plans

Local Agriculture and Silviculture

- Best Practice:** Adopt a Right to Farm By-law/Ordinance to clearly indicate that agriculture is a local priority and to minimize abutter conflicts
- Best Practice:** Establish an Agricultural Commission to advocate for local farms, administer a right to farm bylaw, & otherwise represent agricultural interests
- Best Practice:** Establish a Farmers Market to provide a venue for local farmers to sell and for residents to purchase locally grown farm products
- Best Practice:** Support Sustainable Forestry to help the forest economy in rural areas, improve forest habitats, and assist in the conservation of forest land

Best Practice: Increase Agricultural Marketing to enhance awareness and patronage of local agricultural businesses

Best Practice: Support Aquaculture to help local businesses that cultivate aquatic plants or animals

Best Practice: Promote Urban Agriculture in order to increase access to fresh produce and encourage community revitalization

Best Practice: Protect Farm and Commercial Forest Land permanently through zoning and land acquisition

Best Practice: Source Locally Grown or Produced Foods for Local Schools to provide healthier and better tasting meals and to benefit local farmers

Best Practice: Support Local Horticulture and Floriculture to benefit local businesses & enhance the largest agricultural industry in Massachusetts

Best Practice: Plant Trees in order to reduce energy use, fuel costs, GHG emissions & stormwater runoff & increase property values

Financial Management Best Practices

Best Practice: Establish a Budget document that details all revenues and expenditures, provides a narrative describing priorities and challenges, and offers clear and transparent communication of financial policies to residents and businesses.

Best Practice: Develop, document and implement Financial Policies and Practices including reserve levels, capital financing, and use of Free Cash. Such policies should identify the responsible parties and procedural steps necessary to carrying out the directed strategy or action.

Best Practice: Develop and utilize a Long-range Planning/Forecasting Model that assesses both short-term and long-term financial implications of current and proposed policies, programs and assumptions over a multi-year period.

Best Practice: Prepare a Capital Improvement Plan that reflects a community's needs, is reviewed and updated annually, and fits within a financing plan that reflects the community's ability to pay.

Best Practice: Review and evaluate Financial Management Structure to ensure that the structure and reporting relationships of the community's finance offices support accountability and a cohesive financial team process.

Best Practice: Utilize Financial Trend Monitoring, modeled after the ICMA's Financial Trend Monitoring System (FTMS).

Housing and Economic Development Best Practices

Preparing for Success

Best Practice: Create an Economic Development Plan that engages diverse stakeholders, leverages local and regional economic strengths and assets, encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, and/or promotes workforce development planning and implementation.

Best Practice: Align Land Use Regulations, especially zoning, capital investments, and other municipal actions with Housing Development, Economic Development, Master, Land Use Priority or other plans for future growth. Promote development and reuse of previously developed sites.

Best Practice: Create and Distribute an Economic Development Guide/Manual to not only promote development goals and priorities, but also specifically and clearly outlines the community's policies and procedures related to zoning and permitting.

Best Practice: Create Opportunities for Engaging Diverse Stakeholders in economic development efforts, such as to assist with identification of priority development projects, improve local permitting processes, and proactively address obstacles to housing/job creation.

Best Practice: Create Cross-Sector Partnerships to help carry out community-driven responses to community-defined issues and opportunities for economic development.

Best Practice: Create a District Management Entity that engages public/private stakeholders to develop and support downtown revitalization efforts.

Best Practice: Adopt as-of-Right Zoning and/or Streamlined Permitting to promote development in priority districts.

Best Practice: Adopt Zoning for Mixed-Use Development, including Transit Oriented Development, where appropriate.

Best Practice: Adopt Chapter 40R Smart Growth zoning to facilitate the creation of dense residential or mixed-use smart growth zoning districts, including a high percentage of affordable housing units, to be located near transit stations, in areas of concentrated development such as existing city and town centers, and in other highly suitable locations.

Competitiveness

Best Practice: Engage in an Economic Development Self-Assessment exercise to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas of opportunity.

Best Practice: Establish and Utilize Performance Data to evaluate the competitiveness of the community, conduct year to year comparisons, and measure performance against comparable communities.

Best Practice: Create a Public Dashboard to benchmark, monitor, and communicate to the public regarding various housing and economic development performance measures.

Housing

Best Practice: Create a Housing Production Plan (HPP) that accounts for changing demographics, including young families, changing workforce, and an aging population.

Best Practice: Amend Zoning By-Laws to allow for increased density and housing opportunities in a manner that is consistent with neighborhood character.

Best Practice: Develop Sector Strategies and Plans in collaboration with various providers and stakeholders to address homelessness for specific high need population groups, such as homeless youth, veterans, and/or families.

Best Practice: Complete an Assessment of Fair Housing Report, including strategic goals in alignment with HUD's new rules to affirmatively further fair housing. Using HUD data, local data and knowledge, a significant community participation process, and the assessment tool provided by HUD, the community will prepare, complete, and submit its AFH to HUD.

Urban Renewal Planning

Best Practice: Determine need and appropriateness of establishing an Urban Renewal Entity in accordance with MGL chapter 121B. If prepared to proceed, develop action plan and timeline for the creation of the urban renewal entity.

Best Practice: Prepare an Urban Renewal Plan Application in accordance with MGL chapter 121B in partnership with the urban renewal entity.

Human Resources Best Practices

Best Practice: Cost-Out Collective Bargaining proposals so that the impact of the total package is known. This provides the municipality with a clear understanding of both short-term and long-term budgetary impacts.

Best Practice: Develop a Workplace Safety program so that the risk of on-the-job injuries is minimized.

Best Practice: Develop a formal Wage and Classification Plan that details, at a minimum, job descriptions, employee grades, and salary ranges, thereby providing the municipality with a tool to make pay decisions that are reasonable in comparison to similar work being carried out in all areas of city/town government.

Best Practice: Develop Employee Policies and Procedures for things such as discrimination, sexual harassment, information technology use, drug and alcohol, use of social media, and town-owned vehicles.

Best Practice: Manage employee benefit costs such as health insurance, dental insurance, unemployment insurance, and worker's compensation/111F; includes eligibility review and evaluation of insurance choices.

Best Practice: Prepare a Succession Plan to help address the pending wave of retirements that will challenge a municipality's ability to maintain service levels.

Best Practice: Explore Centralized Human Resources/Personnel Operations to improve service delivery and build efficiencies.

Information Technology Best Practices

Strategic Planning

Best Practice: Develop a Long-Term IT Financial Strategy to include capital and operating expenses.

Best Practice: Develop a Municipal IT Consolidation Strategy that maximizes technology investments across schools, public safety and municipal buildings.

Best Practice: Develop a Regional Shared IT Services Program that leads to productive partnerships across multiple communities and/or school districts to maximize regional technology investments.

Best Practice: Develop a Comprehensive IT Strategy focused on better aligning technology investment with short and long-term organizational priorities.

Best Practice: Implement a Cyber Security Training Program that ensures staff is aware of, know how to prevent and know how to respond to cyber security threats.

Transparency & Data Standards

Best Practice: Develop an Open Data Policy or Ordinance that increases transparency and makes electronic data available in a machine-readable format.

Best Practice: Deploy an Open Checkbook and/or Open Budget Solution that is easily consumed by the public and promotes transparency.

Best Practice: Implement Address and Parcel Data Standards that lead to better quality mapping, facilitate the deployment of NextGen911, create a foundation for system integration and open opportunities for collaboration with peer communities and state government.

Best Practice: Deploy Municipal Data Standards that lead to municipal system integration leading to performance management capabilities.

Best Practice: Deploy a Regional Data Sharing Program that promotes better communication, collaboration or benchmarking with other communities.

Best Practice: Deploy a Public Information Request Solution that improves the public request intake and tracking process.

Business Continuity

Best Practice: Perform an IT Assessment that results in a written evaluation and recommendations, including a review of organizational structure and staffing.

Best Practice: Implement an Offsite Backup Solution that results in municipal data being stored safely offsite, and includes relevant policies and procedures to ensure effective ongoing backup.

Best Practice: Implement a Solution to Digitize Paper Records that results in operational efficiencies and improved responsiveness to the public.

Best Practice: Develop Resiliency, Recovery and Contingency Plans that are aligned with community realities and position the community to effectively manage unforeseen events.

Best Practice: Perform a Cyber Security Assessment to analyze whether there is risk of unauthorized access, implement or improve policies and procedures appropriate for the technology environment and identify steps to remediate any problems identified.

Citizen Engagement

Best Practice: Create a Social Media Strategy to actively engage the public in local events and government processes via social media platforms.

Best Practice: Create a Website Strategy to promote user friendliness and intuitive navigation.

Best Practice: Deploy and Engage the Public around a New Technology Process or Initiative to raise public awareness and promote the new process or initiative.

Public Accessibility Best Practice

Best Practice: Undertake an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation and Develop a Transition Plan to comply with Federal civil rights laws that require public buildings to be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Public Safety Best Practices

Best Practice: Conduct Active Shooter Preparedness and Response Training in collaboration with the Massachusetts State Police Tactical Operations (STOP) Team, onsite with local law enforcement.

Best Practice: Establish an Emergency Preparedness Plan in partnership with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to develop and enhance a community's disaster and emergency response capabilities.

Best Practice: Establish Hazardous Material Response Protocols in conjunction with Regional Hazardous Materials Response Teams under the Department of Fire Services, to enable cities and towns to protect their citizens, the environment, and property during incidents involving a release or potential release of hazardous materials.

Best Practice: Hold In-service Training Programs for Municipal Police to better prepare local police officers and first responders for incidents involving domestic violence, mental health disorders, and substance abuse.

Best Practice: Convene an opioid task force, consisting of key stakeholders, to identify, implement, coordinate and improve strategies around the prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery of substance use disorders.

Best Practice: Adopt Standardized Tools for Domestic Violence Cases by partnering law enforcement with local domestic violence organizations to adopt a best practice policy on training and implementation of standardized, evidence informed danger and strangulation tools. Municipalities are encouraged to apply individually or as a collective.

Regionalization/Shared Services

Best Practice: Regionalize services and share resources among municipalities for efficient and effective service delivery to residents and taxpayers in this era of shrinking budgets, loss of seasoned employees to retirement, and increased need for service improvements.

Transportation / Public Works Best Practices

Citizen Safety

Best Practice: Develop a Safe and Mobile Older Drivers plan for the aging of the population by proactively addressing older driver issues, including education for older road users, infrastructure improvements, and transportation options.

Best Practice: Enhance citizen safety by establishing community-based programs to increase pedestrian, automobile and motorcycle safety. The community will demonstrate participation in the Commonwealth's Office of Public Safety and Security's trainings and conferences as well as the dissemination of public safety information to citizens.

Best Practice: Ensure Safe Infrastructure so as to provide a safer environment for all users and modes by implementing traffic engineering enhancements. The municipality will demonstrate regular and routine improvements on locally-funded roads, such as cutting back vegetation at intersections where it is known to interfere with sight distance, clearing brush that obscures traffic signage, renewing or installing pavement markings, conducting nighttime surveys to check visibility and retro reflectivity, implementing traffic calming measures at known high crash locations.

Active Transportation

Best Practice: Implement the Complete Streets Program by becoming certified through MassDOT and demonstrate the regular and routine inclusion of complete streets design elements and infrastructure on locally-funded roads.

Best Practice: Utilize Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) fundamentals to create zoning around transit centers that maximizes bike, pedestrian, and transit use and which allows for lower levels of required parking and mixed use to put needed amenities near population centers.

Best Practice: Develop a Safe Routes to School program that also includes student education on pedestrian safety.

Training

Best Practice: Participate in the Bay State Roads, which provides on-going training and helps municipalities share ideas and information with other communities about state of the art planning, design, and operational information for city and town public works managers.

Asset and Infrastructure Management

Best Practice: Inventory and Geo-Code all public works assets so that a database of every public works asset is created, geocoded and condition rated, which is used to inform capital planning, as well as emergency repair.

Best Practice: Develop a Pavement Condition Index that rates street condition for the municipality.

Best Practice: Develop a Multi-Year Vehicle Maintenance and Replacement Plan for their municipal vehicle fleet.

Best Practice: Develop a Bridge / Culvert Preventative Maintenance plan to help prolong the life of these critical transportation assets.