PLANNING FOR PLANS?

BACKGROUND

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council serves as the regional planning agency for the 101 cities and towns surrounding Boston's metrofuture. It is the Greater Boston Region's 30-year plan, which is updated every 10 years. In preparation for the upcoming plan update, a Local Plans Subcommittee was selected to gather information about municipality goals. I helped with a research effort to collect data about the types of plans each municipality has available.

Comprehensive, or Master, Plans surround community-wide projects while other types like Housing Production or Resiliency Plans inform more specific endeavors. Researching the region showed that 59 out of 101 cities and towns do not have a comprehensive plan. This number surprised me, and I started to think about how a comprehensive plan might impact municipalities.

MAPC REGIONAL CONTEXT

I used four main sources of data to analyze changes throughout the MAPC region between 2006-2016:

- Non Comprehensive Plan Municipalities:
- Comprehensive Plan Municipalities:
- Negative Result Non Comp Plan
- Positive Result Comp Plan
- Negative Result Non Comp Plan Municipalities
- Positive Result Comp Plan Municipalities
- No Comprehensive Plan
- All Positive Results
- One Negative Result
- Two Negative Results

METHODS

I used American Factfinder to isolate household data for the 101 County Subdivisions across Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Middlesex, Plymouth, and Worcester counties. To look at variation, I used the American Community Survey's 2011 and 2016 5-year estimates and 2011. To give a better idea of how land use has changed between the presence of comprehensive planning and community quality. Results could inform whether comprehensive planning is a worthy investment for municipalities or if cities should use their resources elsewhere due to negative results. The found results are not significant enough to determine whether or not comprehensive planning is the sole reason for improved municipality status, but there are some statistics to discuss.

The goal of evaluating how these 101 municipalities have changed across 5 years was to find correlations between the presence of comprehensive planning and community quality. Results could inform whether comprehensive planning is a worthy investment for municipalities or if cities should use their resources elsewhere due to negative results. The found results are not significant enough to determine whether or not comprehensive planning is the sole reason for improved municipality status, but there are some statistics to discuss.

The Proportional Results chart is useful in visualizing how results fall between cities with and without comprehensive plans. Over 50% of negative results fall within municipalities that lack a comprehensive plan, yet, in general, positive results exceed negative ones in all three categories of analysis. Additionally, when looking at percentages, averages for cities with and without comprehensive plans are only slightly different.

Non Comprehensive Plan Municipalities:
28% Negative | 72% Positive

Comprehensive Plan Municipalities:
26% Negative | 74% Positive

RESULTS

For the MAPC Regional Analysis map (center), I calculated the number of times a municipality received in a negative or low result between Household Income Change, Household Income Change, and Composite Utility Score. This resulted in a score between 0-3 which I used to create the Analysis Map. While these measures do not completely line up, their aggregation can be used to coarsely analyze how municipalities are impacted from comprehensive planning.

Negative Result Non Comp Plan
Positive Result Comp Plan

Sources

MapGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information), Commonwealth of Massachusetts EOTSS
Metropolitan Area Planning Council Data Hub - Network Utility Scores & Community Types
U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates 2011 & 2016
Multi-Resolution Land Characteristics Consortium; National Land Cover Dataset 2006 & 2011

Many thanks to Josh Fiala from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and Barbara Parmenter from Tufts University’s Department of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy for their continued support and assistance with this project.

This is a combined project of interest for MAPC’s Land Use Department and UEP’s Intro to GIS Course.

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