



HARVARD Kennedy School
RAPPAPORT INSTITUTE
for Greater Boston

Greater Boston Applied Field Lab

Annual Report

2025–2026 Academic Year

Advancing Experiential Learning, Civic Partnership, and Public Service



Photo 1. Field Lab students with Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll on the State House balcony during the annual Field Trip, April 2026.



HARVARD Kennedy School
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



Greater Boston Applied Field Lab

The 2025-2026 Greater Boston Applied Field Lab

Dear Friends and Supporters,

We are pleased to report on the 21st year of experiential learning at the Greater Boston Applied Field Lab. Following our 20th anniversary celebration in June 2025, our work this year continued to address challenges in state and local government. This report illustrates the breadth and scope of the Field Lab, which spans multiple projects, topics, and communities across the Greater Boston region. We are extraordinarily grateful to have the support of the Rappaport Foundation, the Rappaport Institute, the Taubman Center for State and Local Government, and the Harvard Kennedy School, which has made this work possible.

Our partnership with Boston and regional communities, including Belmont, Brookline, Somerville, Worcester, Fitchburg, Provincetown, and Portland, Maine, provided our students with practical experience. These collaborations deepened their understanding of public service. This report describes how sustained partnerships contribute to student learning and outcomes in the communities we serve.

We thank our project partners for their commitment, guidance, and mentorship, which have been crucial in supporting the academic and professional development of our students. Together, we are fostering a new generation of leaders prepared for local governance.



Photo 2. Field Lab students with Professors Linda Bilmes and Justin de Benedictis-Kessner, and Teaching Fellow Bran Shim presenting findings to Fitchburg Mayor Sam Squailia, Spring 2026.

Greater Boston Applied Field Lab

Executive Summary

During the 2025–2026 academic year, the Greater Boston Applied Field Lab completed 12 projects with ten client partners across eight communities in Massachusetts and Maine. In the fall, Professor Justin de Benedictis-Kessner led DPI-325, focused on decision-making and local governance. In the spring, Professor Linda Bilmes led MLD-412, emphasizing advanced budgeting, financial management, and operations.

Belmont, Fall 2025. Working with Director of Planning and Building Chris Ryan, students gathered and analyzed community feedback on potential commercial redevelopment in the Brighton Street area through focus groups, interviews, and a targeted survey.

Belmont, Spring 2026. Working with Director of Planning and Building Chris Ryan, Planning Division Manager Conor McCormack, and Select Board Chair Matt Taylor, students developed a flexible financial model and interactive dashboard to test how zoning, design, parking, affordability, construction costs, and market conditions affect development feasibility in the Brighton Street Corridor.

Boston. Working with Avantika Mathur, Director of Policy for Waste Reduction, students examined waste containerization and rodent control through a representative citywide survey and interviews with neighborhood leaders. The team assessed resident views on rodent-resistant containers, shared community bins, collection schedules, and enforcement.

Boston Public Schools. Working with Chief of Capital Planning Del Stanislaus, students examined the effects of recent school closures, mergers, and grade reconfigurations on students, families, and school communities. The team analyzed student transition data, conducted focus groups and interviews, benchmarked other large school districts, and developed a qualitative research toolkit for future school transitions.

Brookline. Working with Town Administrator Charles Carey, students supported the Town as it considered a potential Proposition 2½ override. The team conducted a community survey with 738 responses, analyzed state override data, and interviewed peer communities to assess resident priorities, familiarity with overrides, and views on taxes and municipal services.

Fitchburg. Working with Mayor Sam Squailia, students examined the condition and financing of the city's road network. The team built a segment-level pavement management model, compared alternative approaches for prioritizing road investments, examined financing mechanisms, and piloted new approaches to measuring road conditions.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council. Working with Executive Director Lizzi Weyant and Regional Planning Data Analyst Zoe Iacovino (MPA '23), a Field Lab alumna who worked on the Everett redevelopment project, students modeled Proposition 2½ levy limits and examined their effects on municipal revenue capacity and taxpayers. The analysis compared the current system with alternative scenarios across municipalities and community types and reviewed approaches used in other states.

Portland, Maine. Working with Director of Sustainability Troy Moon, students examined waterfront climate resilience through a citywide survey, a participatory community workshop, interviews with community leaders, and comparisons with other cities. The team identified climate risks, community priorities, and assets that could support Portland's future resilience planning.

Provincetown. Working with Harbormaster Pete Whinn, students supported the Town in preparation for the upcoming revision of its Harbor Plan. The team reviewed Chapter 91 licensing records, mapped public waterfront access requirements, interviewed peer communities, and developed an interactive GIS resource, signage materials, and tools for future public engagement.

Somerville, Curbside Composting. Working with Mayor Jake Wilson and Environmental Policy Manager Kate Bossingham, students assessed the fiscal and operational implications of a municipal curbside composting program. The team benchmarked programs in other cities and developed a financial model testing participation rates, vendor costs, disposal savings, and other assumptions.

Somerville, Police and Clinical Co-Response. Working with Mayor Jake Wilson and Project Manager Jon Hillman, students analyzed nine years of dispatch data, mapped 911 and 311 workflows, benchmarked peer programs, and examined illustrative travel times and costs under alternative service arrangements.

Worcester. Working with City Manager Eric Batista, students examined redevelopment options for 611 Main Street, the former Registry of Motor Vehicles site in the Theatre District. The team developed three redevelopment scenarios

combining housing, affordability, and arts and cultural uses. Students compared development costs and financial returns and examined how each scenario could support community priorities and inform a future developer solicitation.

Several of these projects continued relationships developed through earlier Field Lab work. In Belmont, the spring team built directly on the fall project, and a student continued the work through a summer fellowship. The Field Lab also returned to Provincetown following its 2023 housing project and continued its long-standing relationship with Somerville, where students have worked with the City repeatedly since the program's early years. These continuing partnerships allow students to build on prior analysis while providing municipal partners with sustained research and technical support over time.

Summer Fellows

The Field Lab placed five Rappaport Public Finance Summer Fellows this year with client partners in Fitchburg, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, Worcester, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and Belmont.

Publications

The Field Lab's work also contributed to a new HKS Faculty Research Working Paper published in August 2026. [*The Missing Mile: Evaluating the Economic Costs and Benefits of the North South Rail Link and Regional Rail Integration*](#) builds on an earlier 2017 Field Lab study of the North South Rail Link. The new study updates the project's cost analysis and adds an assessment of its economic benefits. Under the Maximum Build scenario with full Regional Rail, the study estimates \$37.6 billion in incremental benefits compared with \$8.0 billion in incremental costs.

Program Development

The Field Lab also launched a [website](#), bringing two decades of projects, partners, and student work together in one place as an initial foundation for expanding the program's engagement. The website enables our client partners to learn about Field Lab engagements and provides prospective students with examples of prior projects. During the coming year, we will seek feedback from alumni and client partners and monitor website usage to guide improvements and support the program's continued development.

Alumni Advisory Board

Building on the success of the 20th anniversary symposium, we have appointed an advisory board of alumni who worked on Field Lab projects during their HKS study and then served as “client partners” (sponsoring projects for student teams when they worked in city governments). These alumni have maintained close ties to the Field Lab program, the Rappaport Institute, the Taubman Center, and HKS, and have agreed to serve on this new board.



Sanjay Seth (MUP/MPA '19) was a dual HKS/GSD student in the Field Lab and worked on a project on coastal flooding in Newburyport for Mayor Donna Holaday in 2018. His team evaluated structural issues and the costs/benefits of preparing the town and nearby municipalities to qualify for subsidized flood insurance for residents from FEMA. After graduation, Sanjay worked as Climate Resilience Program Manager for the City of Boston from 2020 to 2022, managing the Climate Ready Boston team. In that capacity, he sponsored a student Field Lab project related to stormwater fees.

Sanjay was subsequently appointed chief of staff to EPA Regional Administrator David Cash. In that role, he sponsored a second student project on environmental justice and access to federal funding in Chelsea. In the spring and fall semesters of 2024, Sanjay taught an interdisciplinary course on climate change, urban planning, and public policy at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD). Sanjay is now serving as Deputy Commissioner for Climate, Air, and Energy in the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. He has also been elected a Director of the Harvard Alumni Association.



Samantha Silverberg (MPP '12) is a Field Lab alumna who worked on a transportation project as a student. After graduation, she joined the MBTA, where she worked as Senior Director of Capital Program Planning and then Deputy Chief Administrative Officer. In that capacity, she served as our client partner for a student project team that modeled the costs of repairing MBTA station platforms, including issues related to ADA compliance and safety.

Samantha began her federal service as a Presidential Management Fellow at the Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Department of Transportation. She later held senior roles in the Biden administration, rising to senior White House advisor on infrastructure to President Biden, where she helped develop and implement the bipartisan infrastructure law. She later returned to the Taubman Center as a [Visiting Fellow](#) and was appointed Undersecretary of Transportation Policy at MassDOT in February 2026, where she is currently serving. She has also co-written research with Professors Ed Glaeser and Linda Bilmes.



Bran Shim (MC/MPA '24) was a Governor Robert F. Bradford Fellow at HKS, where he served as the Teaching Fellow for the accounting and budgeting courses in addition to the Field Lab, facilitating several student field lab team assignments. Bran is now an Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy at HKS, where he teaches MLD-401M, Financial Analysis of Public and Nonprofit Organizations.

In August 2026, Bran became Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of MassDevelopment, the Commonwealth's development finance agency and land bank. In this role, he serves on the executive team and oversees the agency's financial and accounting functions. Bran previously spent more than a decade at the Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance, where he served in several senior positions,

including Finance Director, Assistant Secretary and State Budget Director, and Senior Advisor. His work included state budgeting and major investments in housing and economic development. In addition to his MPA, Bran is a CFA charterholder and holds an AB in statistics from Harvard College, and a diploma for double bass performance from the Juilliard School Pre-College Division.



Brian R. Iammartino, CFA (MPP '06), has been involved with the Field Lab teaching team for nearly a decade. In addition, Brian taught MLD-401M and has co-taught MLD-411M with Professor Bilmes. His teaching and research focus on public and non-profit financial management, state and local budgeting, and urban policy. Brian has worked closely with dozens of field lab teams on accounting, financial modeling, and infrastructure finance.

Brian has also collaborated with faculty and students on research. Most recently, he was the lead author (with Linda Bilmes and former Field Lab students) of the 2026 HKS Faculty Research Working Paper *The Missing Mile: Evaluating the Economic Costs and Benefits of the North South Rail Link and Regional Rail Integration*.

Brian is also Co-Founder and Managing Partner of btcRE LLC, a commercial real estate investment firm focused on community development. Brian is a CFA charterholder and he graduated *summa cum laude* from the Wharton School.

Together, the Advisory Board team brings complementary expertise in public finance, budgeting, financial management, operations, state and local government, transportation, infrastructure, urban planning, GIS, climate resilience, teaching, experiential learning, and research. This breadth of experience provides a strong foundation for the Field Lab now and in the future.

Project Portfolio

List of Projects (Fall 2025 and Spring 2026, alphabetical order)

City/Agency	Topic	Client Partners
Belmont, MA	Brighton Street Commercial Redevelopment Gathered and analyzed feedback from residents across the town on the potential redevelopment of commercial properties in the Brighton Street area bordering Cambridge.	Patrice Garvin Town Administrator Chris Ryan Director of Planning & Building Elizabeth Dionne Belmont Select Board
Belmont, MA	Development Feasibility Validation Tool Built a flexible pro forma financial model and market analysis to test development assumptions and show how design and policy choices affect feasibility and returns.	Chris Ryan Director of Planning and Building Conor McCormack Planning Division Manager Matt Taylor Chair of Select Board
Boston, MA	Waste Containerization and Rodent Control Investigated policy options to improve waste containerization across Boston's neighborhoods and assessed resident preferences across neighborhood types.	Avantika Mathur Director of Policy, Waste Reduction Luke Hines Special Project Manager
Boston Public Schools, MA	School Closures, Mergers, and Grade Reconfigurations Assessed how students and welcoming schools have been impacted by recent closures, mergers, and grade reconfigurations, and what supports are needed during these transitions.	Delavern Stanislaus Chief of Capital Planning Emanuel Zankerka Director of Data and Strategy

Brookline, MA	Override: A Budget Balancing Act Examined resident priorities, familiarity with overrides, and views on tax and service tradeoffs as the town considers a potential override.	Charles (Chas) Carey Town Administrator Melissa Goff Deputy Town Administrator Tiffany Oliva Assistant Town Administrator for Operations
Fitchburg, MA	Roads Financing, Targeting, and Outcomes Analysis Analyzed financing and prioritization strategies to sustain and improve Fitchburg's road network.	Mayor Sam Squailia Myles Phillips-Wilcox Chief of Staff
Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)	Proposition 2½ Levy Limit Scenarios Modeled alternative Proposition 2½ levy limits and assessed distributional impacts across communities and taxpayers.	Lizzi Weyant Executive Director Zoe Iacovino Regional Planning Data Analyst
Portland, ME	Adapting the Waterfront in Response to Climate Change Examined how Portland can plan for climate adaptation to protect critical assets, support economic activity, and address resident needs.	Danielle West City Manager Troy Moon Director of Sustainability Jessica Grondin Director of Communications
Provincetown, MA	Harboring Solutions: Public Waterfront Access Examined how the town can use its upcoming Harbor Plan revision and local policy tools to strengthen public access under MGL Chapter 91.	Alex Morse Town Manager Pete Whinn Harbormaster Melyssa Nickerson Director of Sustainability and Resilience

Somerville, MA	Curbside Composting: Fiscal Modeling and Benchmarking Benchmarked curbside composting in comparable municipalities and modeled fiscal scenarios to identify breakeven points based on participation and other key assumptions.	Mayor Jake Wilson Kate Bossingham Environmental Policy Manager, Office of Sustainability and Environment
Somerville, MA	Operationalizing Co-Response Mapped dispatch protocols and interagency workflows for 911 and 311 to support the city's police and clinical co-response model.	Mayor Jake Wilson Jon Hillman Project Manager, Public Safety for All
Worcester, MA	611 Main Street Redevelopment: Municipal Impacts and Community Benefits Developed redevelopment scenarios for 611 Main St. and translated key assumptions into projected assessed values to gauge fiscal impacts for the city.	Eric Batista City Manager David Quiroa Community & Government Affairs Manager

Fall 2025 Field Lab

The fall semester Field Lab, led by Professor Justin de Benedictis-Kessner, focused on representation and accountability. Helen Cashman, an alumna of the spring 2024 Field Lab, served as the Course Assistant, providing teaching and analytical support throughout the semester. The fall lab partnered on six projects with Belmont, the City of Boston, Boston Public Schools, Brookline, Provincetown, and Portland, Maine. The challenges ranged from waste containerization and school transitions to property tax overrides, waterfront access, and climate resilience. All teams incorporated public opinion research to examine residents' views on policy options, combining training in survey design, quantitative analysis, focus group facilitation, GIS mapping, and data visualization with applied fieldwork with municipal officials and residents.



Photo 3. Students with Harbormaster Pete Whinn on the Provincetown waterfront, Fall 2025



Photo 4. Students on a rooftop with client partner Emanuel Zanzerkia overlooking the Boston skyline during a field visit to Boston Public Schools, Fall 2025



Photo 5. Students with Professor Justin de Benedictis-Kessner outside Belmont Town Hall before the final presentation, Fall 2025



Photo 6. Field Lab students with Professor Brian Iammartino and Field Lab Program Director Maja Niksic during a field visit in Worcester, Spring 2026.

Spring 2026 Field Lab

The Greater Boston Applied Field Lab attracts students across Harvard's graduate schools. Since 2019, the Field Lab has been co-listed at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, fulfilling the GSD's field-learning requirement. Together, the Field Lab and the Rappaport Public Finance Summer Fellows program have enabled over 500 students across Harvard to undertake complex technical projects with local municipalities in Greater Boston. These projects address budget, finance, and operations across a wide range of areas, including housing, public works, environmental management, transportation, new technologies, and social equity.

Professor Linda Bilmes led the spring 2026 Field Lab (MLD-412), which accepted 26 students from HKS, HGSE, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and other programs across the University. Several students were pursuing dual

degrees, including business administration at Harvard Business School, Wharton, and MIT Sloan, as well as health policy.

The spring Field Lab undertook six projects with the Town of Belmont, the City of Fitchburg, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the City of Somerville, and the City of Worcester. Students developed a financial model to assess development feasibility in Belmont, compared road financing and investment strategies in Fitchburg, and modeled alternative Proposition 2½ levy limits with MAPC. In Somerville, one team evaluated the costs of curbside composting, while a second examined dispatch procedures and service arrangements for police and clinical co-response. In Worcester, students compared redevelopment scenarios for 611 Main Street, examining financial feasibility, affordable housing, and arts and cultural uses.

Students worked directly with municipal officials and project partners throughout the semester. They combined financial modeling, budget and fiscal analysis, benchmarking, GIS analysis, process mapping, and sensitivity analysis to develop practical tools and findings for each community.

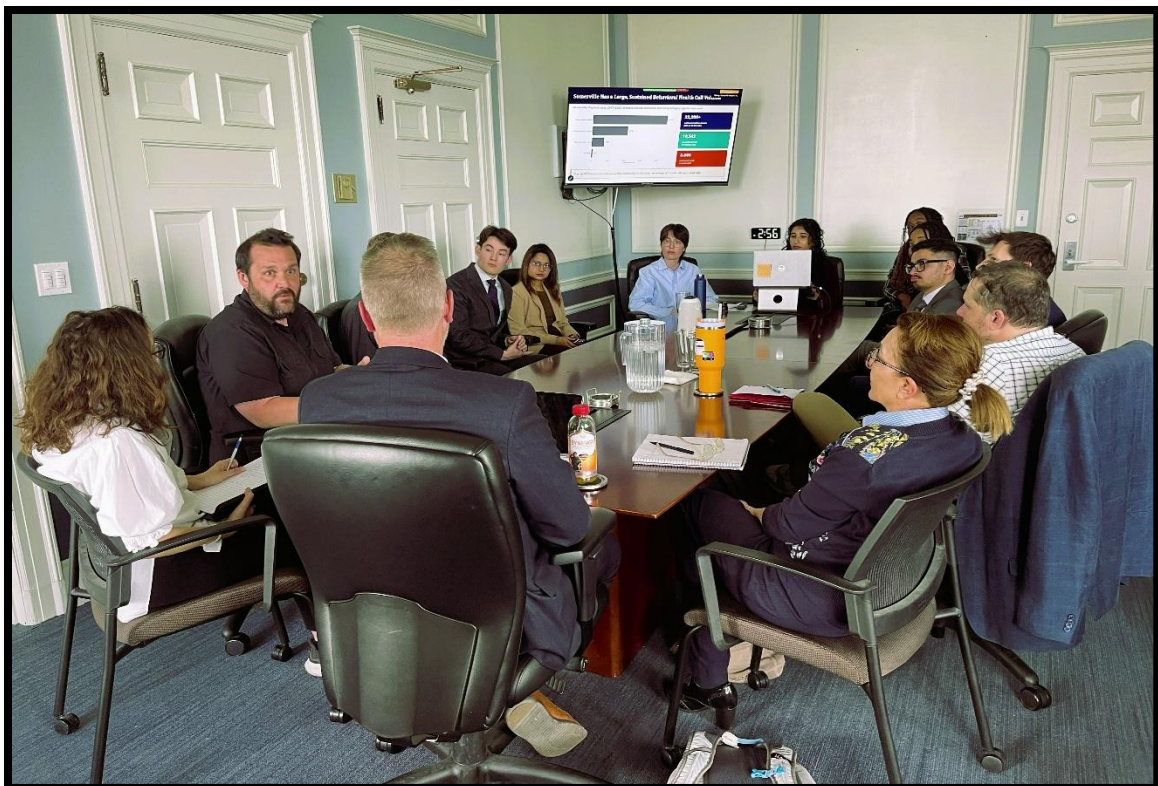


Photo 7. Field Lab students presenting the co-response analysis to Mayor Jake Wilson and Somerville officials, Spring 2026.

2026 MLD-412 Field Lab Teaching Team

Professor Linda Bilmes, former Assistant Secretary and CFO of the U.S. Commerce Department, led the teaching team. Adjunct Professor Brian Iammartino, CFA, assisted her with his accounting expertise and experience in the private real estate development industry. Associate Professor of Public Policy Justin de Benedictis-Kessner (“jdbk”) also assisted.

Our Teaching Fellow, Bran Shim (MC/MPA ’24), returned to support the teaching team. He was joined by Course Assistant Ethan Gacek, a graduating joint HKS/HBS student. Maja Niksic, the Field Lab Program Director, helped to oversee the Field Lab’s coordination and operations, managing all stakeholders and supporting students. As usual, the program benefited enormously from the practical support of the Rappaport Institute and the Taubman Center, as well as the support and enthusiasm of the Rappaport Foundation team.



Photo 8. Field Lab students during a Field Trip session at the Massachusetts State House, Spring 2026

Project Selection

During the summer and fall of 2025, faculty, members of the teaching team, and the Field Lab Program Director reviewed project requests from cities and organizations across the region. They selected and scoped six projects for fall 2025 and six for spring 2026. These projects were chosen based on proven criteria for effective outcomes over the past 21 years:

- Strong engagement from the mayor or senior officials
- Challenging projects requiring analytical rigor related to financial, operational, or public engagement questions
- Defined goals that could be completed within an academic semester
- An engaged project-level partner to work with the students directly
- Capacity to host a summer fellow



Photo 9. Field Lab students with Mayor Sam Squilia during a field visit to Fitchburg City Hall, Spring 2026.



Photo 10. Field Lab students presenting the Proposition 2½ levy limit analysis to MAPC Executive Director Lizzi Weyant with Professors Linda Bilmes and Brian Iammartino and Rappaport Foundation Board member Jim Segel, Spring 2026.

The 2026 Field Trip – Friday, April 10, 2026

On Friday, April 10, we traveled to Beacon Hill for the annual Field Trip. The class spent the morning at the Massachusetts State House, hearing from senior officials whose work intersects with the student projects and spending the day together as a cohort. Teaching Fellow Bran Shim helped organize the visit with our partners at the State House.

Students entered the State House through the General Hooker Entrance on Beacon Street. By 9:15 am, the class had gathered beneath the murals in Nurses Hall on the second floor to begin the tour. Later that morning, Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll joined the group for a photograph on the State House balcony.



Photo 11. Students in Nurses Hall at the Massachusetts State House, April 10, 2026.

State House Tour

The day began with a tour of the State House led by Chris Czepiel, Budget Director for the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. Chris oversees the development of the Senate version of the Commonwealth's annual budget. He showed students the rooms where the budget is debated and negotiated, and he described how spending, amendments, and fiscal policy move through the legislature. For students working on municipal budgeting and finance, seeing the state budget process from the inside connected directly to the questions in their own projects.

State Land for Homes Initiative

Following the tour, the class gathered in the press room for a discussion with Maggie Brown, Deputy Director of the Office of Real Estate at the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM). Maggie presented the State Land for Homes initiative, a program under which DCAMM works with the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to make hundreds of acres of surplus state property available for housing development. Students discussed how the Commonwealth works with municipalities,

developers, and community members to move public land into housing production. The topic relates to housing and land-use questions in several of this year's client projects.



Photo 12. Students during the State House tour, April 10, 2026.

Community One Stop for Growth

Next, Juan Vega, Assistant Secretary for Communities and Programs at the Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED), discussed the Community One Stop for Growth, the streamlined application portal and collaborative grant review process that he helped develop. The program has distributed more than 1,500 awards totaling over \$744 million to support the housing and economic development goals of communities across Massachusetts. Juan has 35 years of civic experience, including service as Chelsea City Council President and 17 years leading the nonprofit Centro Latino. He described how the state works with the cities and towns the Field Lab serves.



Photo 13. Students in the press room at the State House, April 10, 2026.

Lunch with Undersecretary Samantha Silverberg

Following our conversations at the State House, the class walked next door to Carrie Nation Restaurant & Cocktail Club at 11 Beacon Street for lunch. Students were joined by Samantha Silverberg, an HKS alumna (MPP) and Undersecretary of Transportation Policy at MassDOT. Samantha previously served as President Biden's policy advisor on transportation and infrastructure, helping oversee the deployment of more than \$600 billion under the bipartisan infrastructure law. Before that, she held senior roles at the MBTA. She discussed her experience at the MBTA, the White House, and in state government and answered students' questions about transportation policy and public management.

By 12:30 pm, the class headed back to HKS. We are grateful to Chris Czepiel, Maggie Brown, Juan Vega, and Samantha Silverberg for their time, and to Bran Shim and Maja Niksic for organizing the day at the State House.



Photo 14. Professor Linda Bilmes with Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll in the State House, April 10, 2026.

Course Instruction

The foundation for MLD-412 student learning remains the Field Lab pedagogy developed over the last two decades. The core skill set includes teaching financial, budgetary, economic, and geospatial (GIS) analysis. Professor Bilmes teaches a series of classes on fiscal decentralization and municipal budgeting theory and practice from the perspective of local, state, and federal governments in the U.S. and other countries. Brian Iammartino teaches students about building effective financial spreadsheets that tell a story and government financial reporting. Justin de Benedictis-Kessner taught the class on what shapes local decision-making and affects cities. This year's GIS component was developed in collaboration with Harvard's Center for Geographic Analysis, with project-focused guidance from MC/MPA students Komal Goel and Kumar Abhishek, who helped teams apply the tools to the specific needs of their semester projects.

The core exercises of the course remain the Foss Park and Parkrose financial analysis models, which build each student's ability to construct a financial model. These exercises give students practice with realistic financial scenarios, and the Parkrose capital budgeting project also serves as a team-building effort. Professor Bilmes and the rest of the teaching team worked via Zoom and in person in the evenings and over weekends to support teams as they built financial spreadsheets and analyzed the questions posed by these cases.

Outside guests were also invited to contribute expertise relevant to particular project areas. Professor Ed Glaeser, the Fred and Eleanor Glimp Professor of Economics at Harvard University, worked directly with the Fitchburg team on its analysis of road maintenance and resurfacing strategies. The project is closely aligned with his research on infrastructure inequality, including the economic and distributional costs of deteriorating roads and the extent to which municipal repaving decisions are directed toward the roads most in need of repair.



Photo 15. Residents and students working over printed neighborhood maps during a community workshop in Portland, Fall 2025.

Field Lab Community

2025-2026 Student Teams: Project Highlights

The teams worked throughout the year, including multiple site visits, weekly check-in meetings with each city partner, interim presentations, and technical revisions. As always, the students used a mixed-methods approach depending on the analytic requirements of each project. Methods included qualitative interviews, data collection and analysis, surveys and focus groups, financial modeling, geospatial analysis, budget analysis, benchmarking, process mapping, and sensitivity analysis.

Project deliverables included financial models, transmittal memos documenting methodology, geospatial maps, data analyses, survey and interview findings, and final presentations.

Project Findings and Presentations

The students presented their research findings to senior officials in December 2025 and May 2026. Brief project descriptions and key findings are summarized below.

Town of Belmont – Brighton Street Commercial Redevelopment (DPI-325, Fall 2025)

Background: Belmont is addressing projected structural deficits and a tax base that is primarily residential. A 2022 report identified commercial development as one option for strengthening municipal revenues. Following its work on rezoning the town center, the town turned its attention to the Brighton Street area bordering Cambridge. A previous resident survey received a high response rate, but some groups were underrepresented, and the results had not yet been fully analyzed. The town asked students to gather and analyze feedback from residents across Belmont on potential redevelopment in the corridor.

Main Question: How can Belmont incorporate feedback from residents across the community as it considers commercial redevelopment in the Brighton Street area?



Photo 16. Field Lab students with Belmont town officials Chris Ryan (left), Patrice Garvin, and Matt Taylor, Fall 2025.

Key Findings:

- The team engaged more than 100 Belmont residents through four focus groups, interviews, and a targeted survey of Hill Estates residents.
- The team also interviewed 14 developers and property owners and consulted stakeholders from Cambridge and Watertown.
- Dining, family-friendly experiences, grocery options, and health services were the amenities participants most often wanted along the corridor.
- These preferences were consistent across precincts and among Hill Estates participants.
- Participants preferred an active commercial area with attractive design and familiar materials, and some were open to modest increases in building height depending on the design.
- Traffic and congestion, pedestrian and cyclist safety, and housing affordability were the concerns participants raised most frequently.

- Developers and property owners emphasized the value of a clear vision plan addressing transit, zoning, and related implementation questions.
- Stakeholders emphasized transparent and iterative engagement through a combination of in-person and digital channels.
- The team developed a spatial map of the amenities within a 15-minute drive and walk radius of the Brighton Street Corridor, and built it into a public, interactive dashboard for the town’s future use.

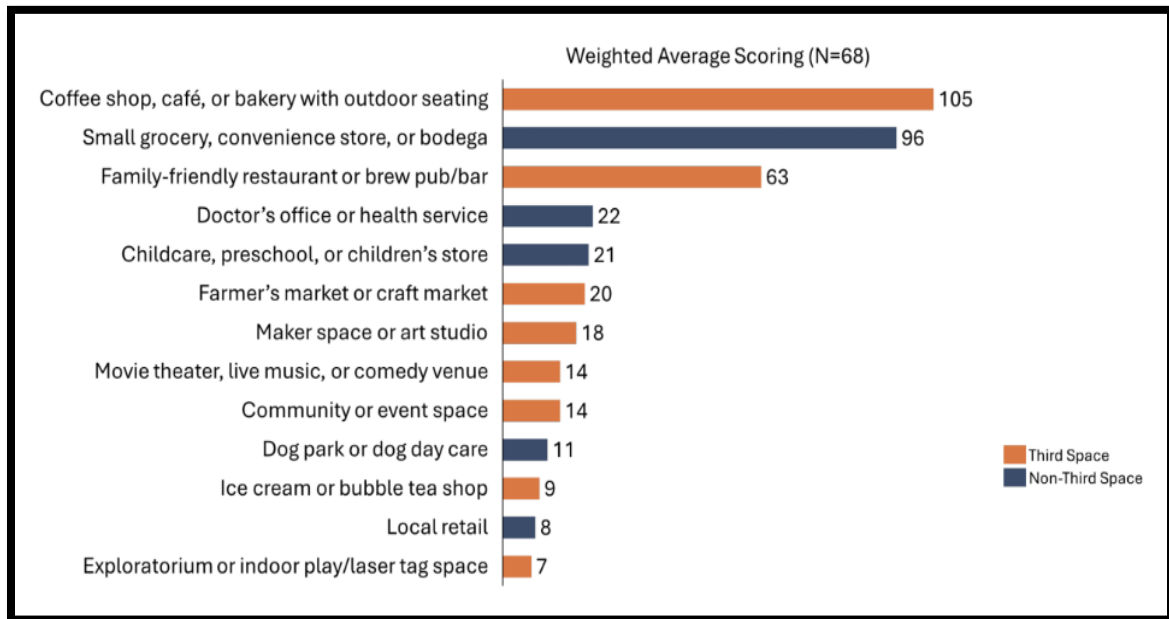


Photo 17. Amenities most often named by residents in the Belmont focus groups, weighted average scoring



Photo 18. Focus group boards from the Belmont sessions, showing the most desired amenities and the vision collage

City of Boston – Waste Containerization and Rodent Control (DPI-325, Fall 2025)

Background: Boston residents have raised concerns about the city’s rat population. In 2024, the city launched the Boston Rodent Action Plan, a multi-agency effort to reduce rodent activity. The expert consultant engaged to diagnose the problem identified improved waste containerization as one potential measure. Many neighborhoods use durable plastic bins for curbside collection, while others use bags that rodents can access. The city asked students to examine policy options to improve containerization, especially in neighborhoods without containerized curbside collection.

Main Question: How can Boston improve waste containerization across its neighborhoods to reduce rodent activity while accounting for resident preferences and neighborhood conditions?



Photo 19. Field Lab students and Faculty with Boston Chief of Operations Dion Irish, Fall 2025.

Key Findings:

- The team conducted a representative citywide survey and qualitative interviews with neighborhood leaders in priority districts, examining four policy levers: individual rodent-resistant bins, shared community bins, set-out and pickup timing, and enforcement.
- Respondents supported rodent-resistant containers across neighborhood types, while differences in density and built form suggested that implementation may need to vary by neighborhood.
- In dense downtown areas where space for individual bins is limited, 70% of downtown residents supported shared community bins on their block if the bins reduced rodent activity.
- Willingness to pay differed by neighborhood. 73% of non-downtown and 63% of downtown residents were willing to spend at least some money on a bin, while 37% of downtown residents wanted a bin only if it was provided free.

- Residents were open to same-day set-out and pickup, particularly in downtown neighborhoods, and some expressed interest in nighttime collection.
- Residents generally supported consistent enforcement of containerization and set-out rules, particularly for landlords and larger properties.
- Survey and interview findings varied by neighborhood and emphasized education, clear expectations, and enforcement alongside infrastructure changes.

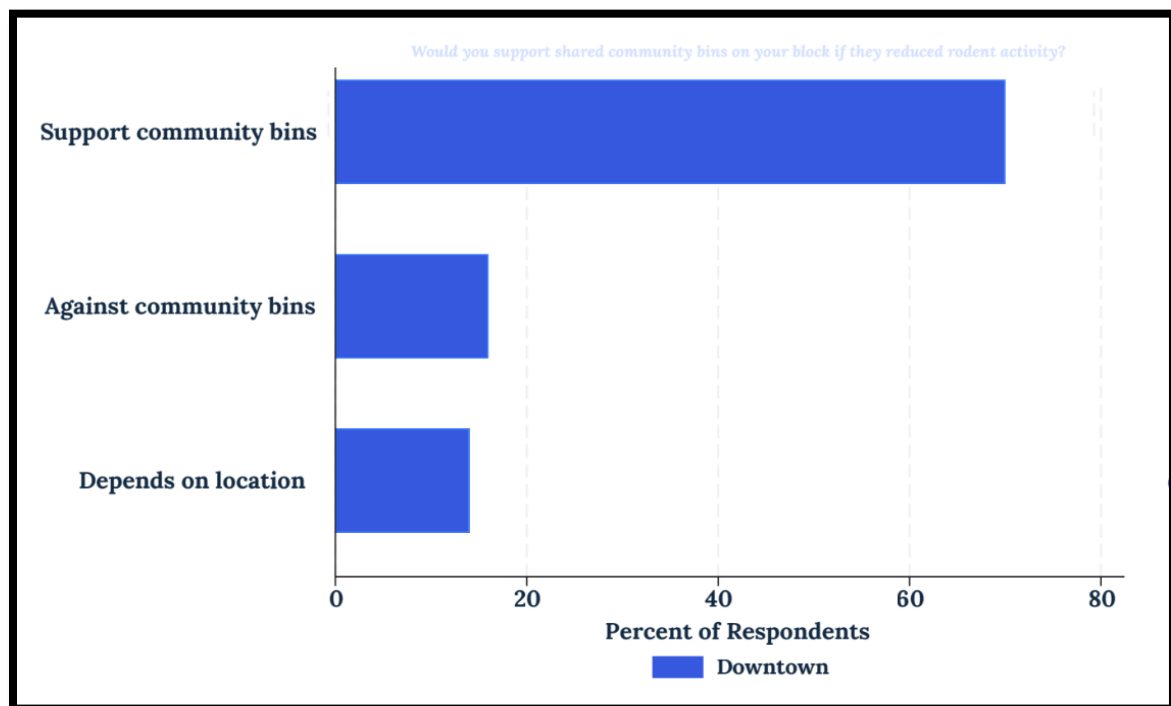


Photo 20. Resident support for shared community bins in downtown Boston neighborhoods

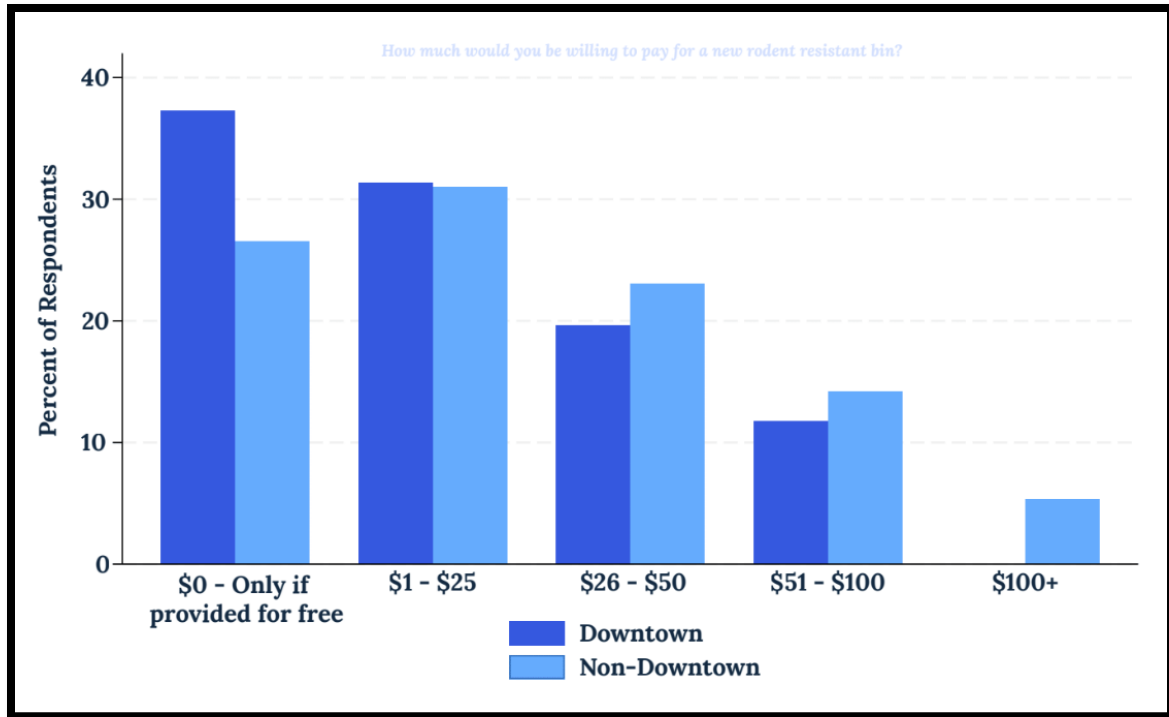


Photo 21. Resident willingness to pay for a rodent-resistant bin, downtown and other neighborhoods

Boston Public Schools – Ongoing Impacts of School Closures, Mergers, and Grade Reconfigurations (DPI-325, Fall 2025)

Background: Boston Public Schools is implementing a Long-Term Facilities Plan that guides decisions on renovations, construction, school mergers, closures, and grade reconfigurations. These changes affect students, families, teachers, staff, school leaders, and the communities associated with individual schools. The district asked students to collect qualitative feedback on recent transitions and to develop methods for understanding their effects on school communities.

Main Question: How can BPS improve the transition process for students, families, and staff affected by school closures, mergers, and grade reconfigurations?



Photo 22. Field Lab students with BPS Chief of Capital Planning Del Stanislaus after the final presentation, Fall 2025.

Key Findings:

- The team benchmarked four districts that had been through closures: New York City, Philadelphia, Denver, and Chicago. It then built and piloted a qualitative research toolkit of focus groups for students and parents and interviews for teachers, staff, and school leaders.
- The transitions analyzed affected 1,215 students through mergers, 451 through grade reconfigurations, and 421 through closures.
- More than 90% of affected students remained within BPS.
- In the first week after transition, attendance was 0.2 percentage points above the district average for mergers, 1.2 points above for grade reconfigurations, and 1.4 points below for closures.
- Focus group participants described strong attachment to their school communities and emotional distress associated with closures.

- Participants frequently described communication as abrupt, informal, or unclear, and reported difficulty obtaining explanations for closure decisions.
- Parents identified transportation, bullying, and language access as concerns when selecting a new school and asked for earlier and clearer communication.
- The toolkit also included survey questions for possible use in existing district surveys and a diary study design to capture student experience over time.

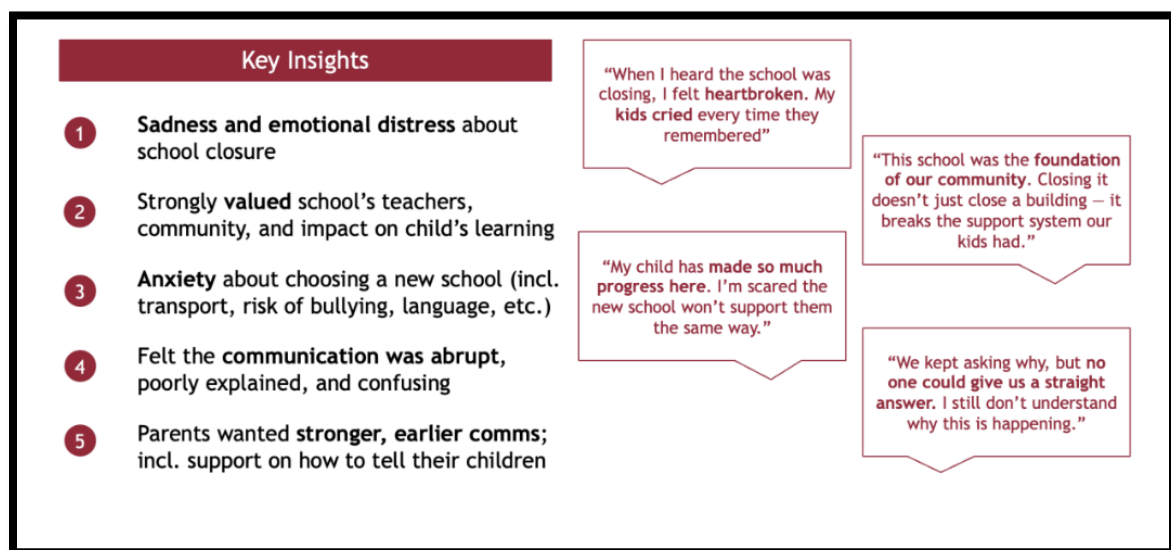


Photo 23. Themes from the Boston Public Schools focus groups, with quotations from parents

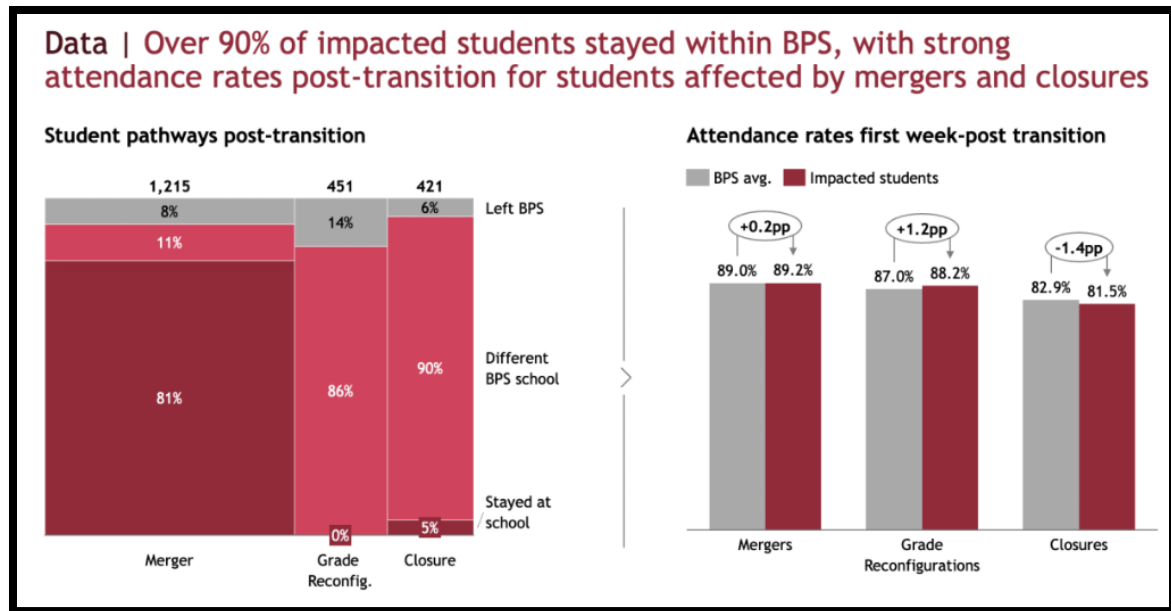


Photo 24. Student pathways and attendance in the first week after transition, Boston Public Schools

Town of Brookline – A Budget Balancing Act (DPI-325, Fall 2025)

Background: Brookline is projecting budget deficits associated with rising service costs, unfunded mandates, and debt service. Under Proposition 2½, annual property tax levy growth is generally limited to 2.5% plus new growth. Voters may approve an override to increase the levy beyond that limit on a permanent basis. As the town considered whether to place an override on the May 2026 ballot, it asked students to examine resident priorities, familiarity with overrides, communication practices, and the structure and timing of override questions.

Main Question: What factors are relevant for the town of Brookline to consider as it evaluates whether to place a Proposition 2½ override on the May 2026 ballot?



Photo 25. Field Lab students with Brookline Town Administrator Charles (Chas) Carey, Fall 2025.

Key Findings:

- The community survey received 738 responses. Of the 1,103 residents enrolled in the survey panel, 688 responded, about 62%, and 50 additional residents joined and completed the survey after it opened.
- The team supplemented the survey with interviews in peer communities and analysis of the Massachusetts Division of Local Services override dataset.
- Residents showed greater support for raising taxes to maintain or increase services than for keeping taxes below the override level and reducing services.
- Among residents who were not first shown background information on overrides, 53% had voted in an override, and another 15% knew about overrides but had not voted in one.
- About one-third of renters and more than half of residents under 35 were unfamiliar with overrides.

- Residents under 35 were more likely to support tax increases to maintain or increase services, despite being less familiar with how the override system works.
- Roads, parks, and economic development were the service priorities most frequently selected across the demographic groups analyzed.
- Residents frequently identified the town website as a source of information.
- The analysis did not identify clear evidence that ballot structure was a major factor in voter preferences.

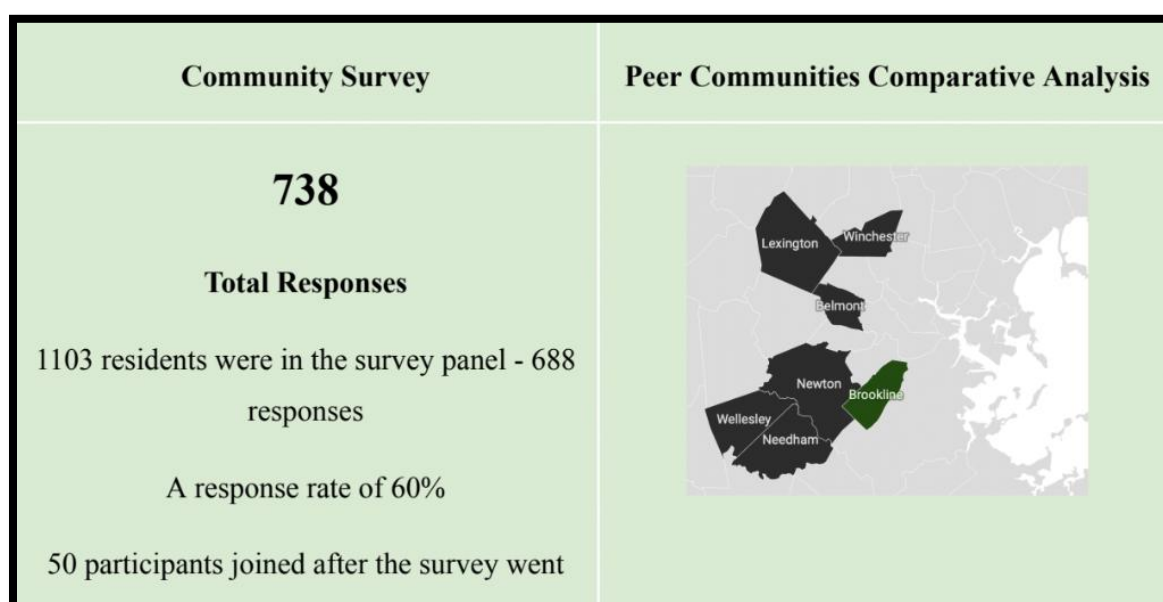


Photo 26. Brookline community survey response counts and the peer communities used for comparison

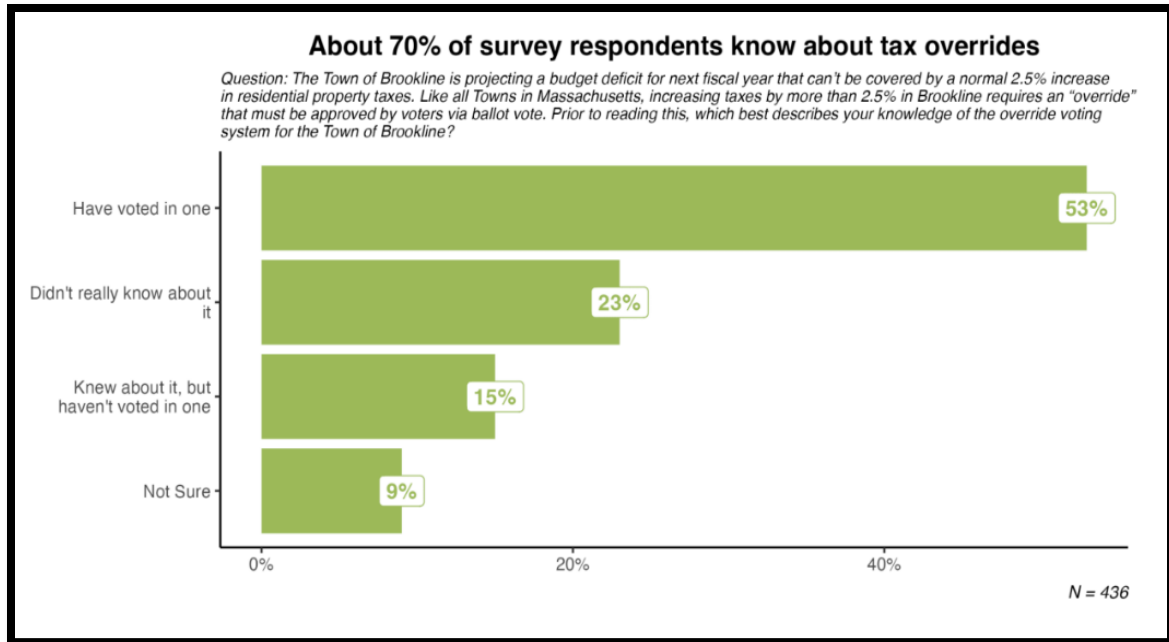


Photo 27. Survey showing Brookline residents' familiarity with tax overrides

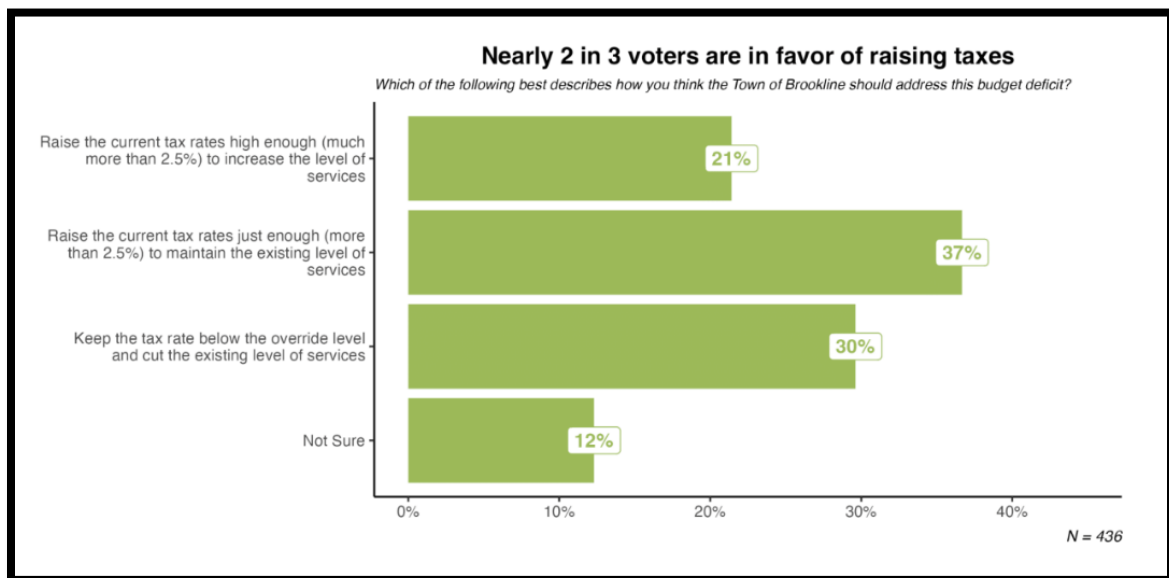


Photo 28. Brookline resident preferences for addressing the projected budget deficit

City of Portland, Maine – Adapting the Waterfront in Response to Climate Change (DPI-325, Fall 2025)

Background: Portland is planning for climate adaptation and community resilience as it prepares for projected sea-level rise. In 2020, Portland and South Portland adopted the joint climate action plan One Climate Future. The city has since advanced flood modeling, coastal building requirements, and risk assessment for city-owned assets. The city asked students to gather survey data and qualitative feedback from waterfront businesses, community leaders, and Bayside residents to support resilience planning and future engagement.

Main Question: How can Portland plan for climate adaptation in ways that protect critical assets, support economic activity, and address resident needs?



Photo 29. Students and faculty with Portland Mayor Mark Dion and Director of Sustainability Troy Moon, Fall 2025.

Key Findings:

- The team combined a citywide survey of 212 residents with a participatory workshop in Bayside, community leader interviews, and interviews with resilience staff in Boston, Providence, and Portland, Oregon.
- 61% of survey respondents were very concerned about climate change.

- Flooding from sea-level rise was the leading concern at 48%, with hotter summer heat close behind at 47%.
- Asked which risk the city is least prepared for, 39% named flooding, the highest share among the risks listed.
- Citywide participants emphasized power outages, sewer backups, and water entering their homes, while Bayside participants emphasized business closures, service disruptions, and access to flood insurance.
- For some workshop participants, day-to-day priorities were top of mind, including immediate concerns such as heat, tree cover, ice, meals, employment, and shelter.
- Workshop participants mapped libraries, schools, and shelters as reliable assets, and Lincoln Park and Congress Park as possible open-air shelters. They identified the vacant central blocks, now targeted for new housing, as particularly vulnerable to flooding.
- Peer interviews identified Boston's five-step resilience planning process as a useful comparison for Portland.

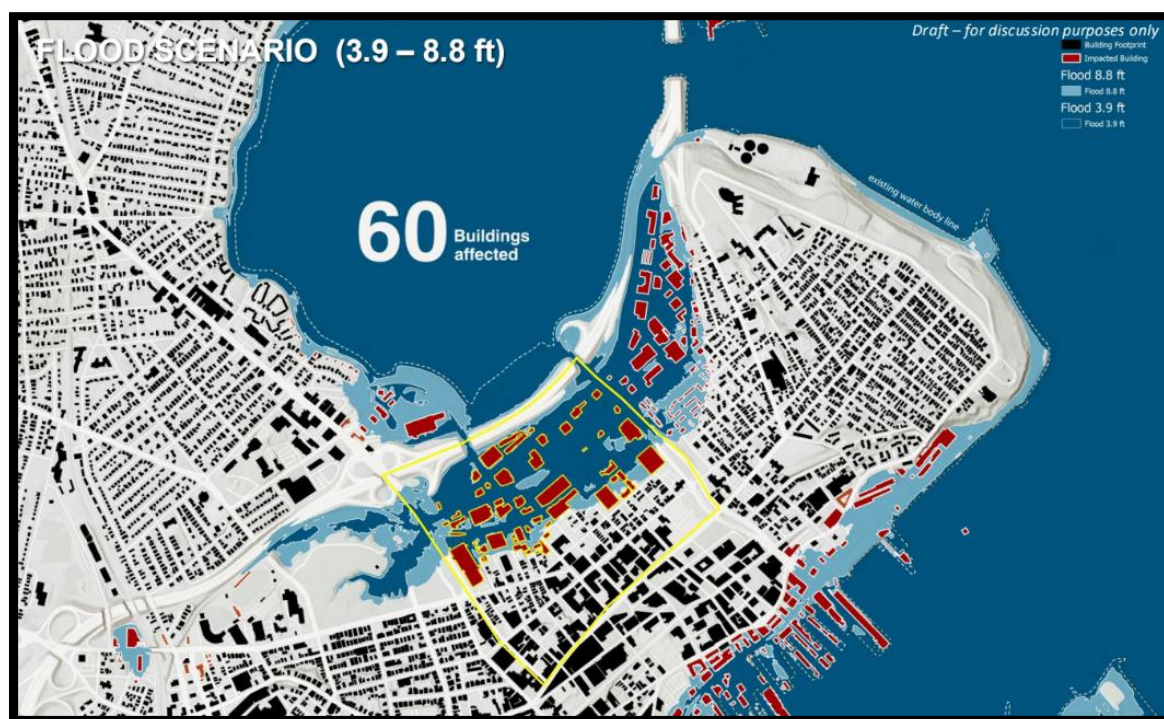


Photo 30. Flood scenario for Portland showing buildings affected between 3.9 and 8.8 feet

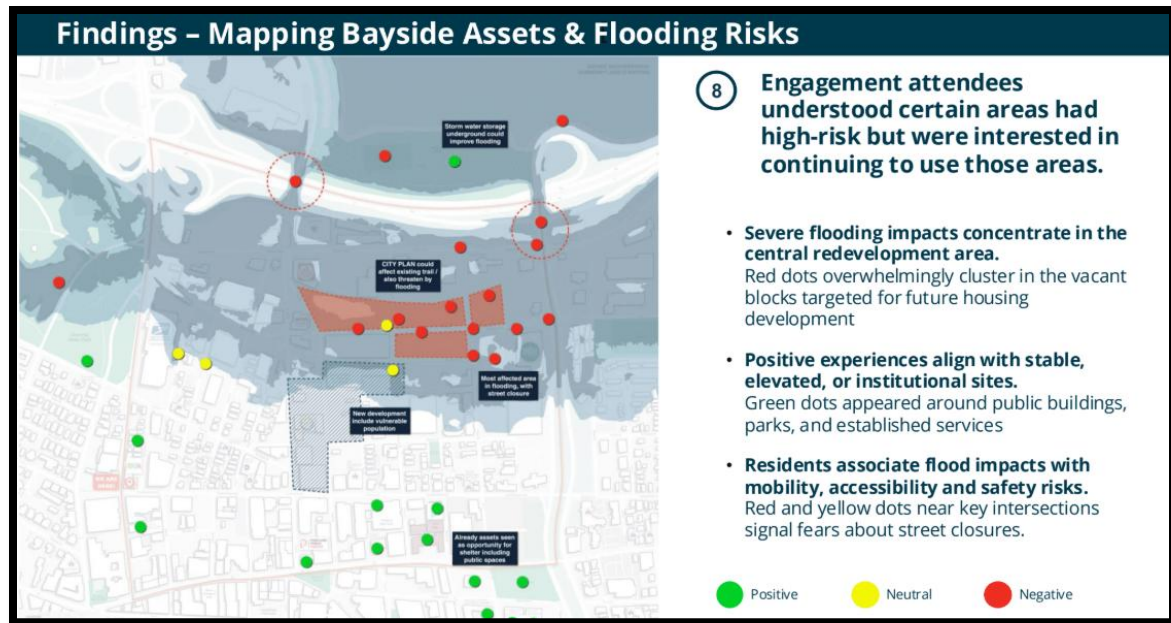


Photo 31. Mapping of Bayside assets and flooding risks from the Portland engagement sessions



Photo 32. Residents taking part in the participatory community workshop in Portland, Fall 2025

Town of Provincetown – Harboring Solutions: Public Waterfront Access (DPI-325, Fall 2025)

Background: Provincetown Harbor supports transportation, commercial, residential, and recreational uses. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 91 regulates the use of tidelands and can require licensed waterfront properties to provide public access or other amenities. With the 2018 Harbor Plan scheduled for review in 2028, the town asked students to examine licensing records, public-access obligations, communication with property owners, and tools that could support the plan revision.

Main Question: How can Provincetown use its upcoming Harbor Plan revision and local policy tools to strengthen public access under Chapter 91?



Photo 33. Students and Faculty with Provincetown Town Manager Alex Morse and Harbormaster Pete Whinn, Fall 2025.

Key Findings:

- About 100 of the roughly 400 waterfront parcels in Provincetown are licensed under Chapter 91.
- Licensing records are inconsistent across sources. The team identified 138 licenses across the MassDEP License Viewer and the town website, but only 84 appear in both.
- Of the 138 licenses, 82 require one or more public amenities. These 82 are held by 67 owners, and the most common requirements are paths to the water, beach walks, and signage.
- Four amenity-bearing licenses expire before the 2028 Harbor Plan update, and 55 expire within ten years.
- The team delivered a Waterfront Access Strategy Toolkit, including a published interactive GIS tool mapping licenses and public access points, a waterfront access branding library, signage templates, and a public reporting form.
- The team designed a phased survey of waterfront property owners to establish a baseline of owner understanding before the plan revision.
- Peer interviews emphasized phased implementation and partnerships with local organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce and conservation groups.

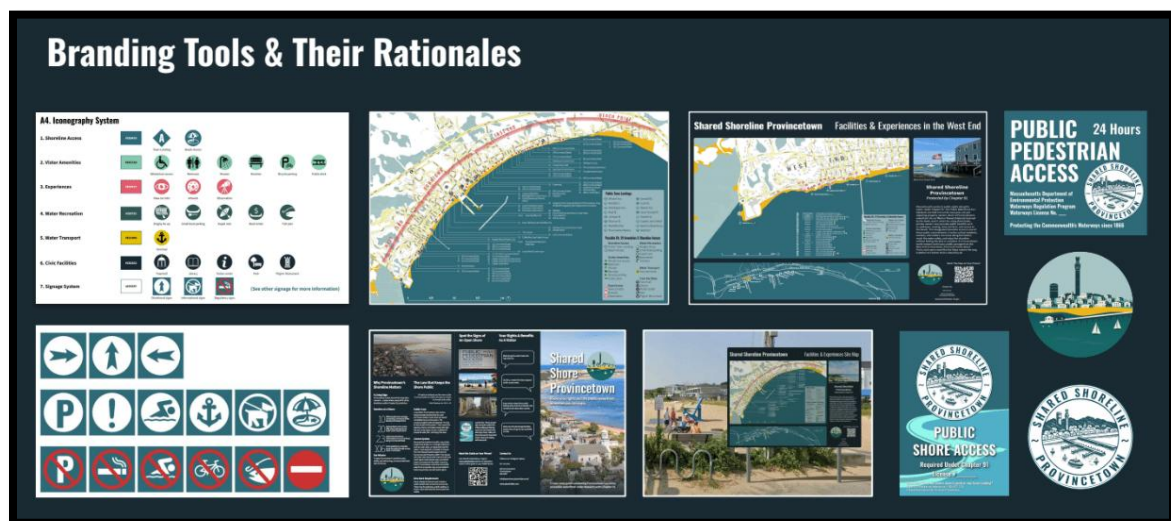


Photo 34. Signage and branding tools proposed for public shore access in Provincetown

Mapping Provincetown: Improving Amenities Through Community Reporting

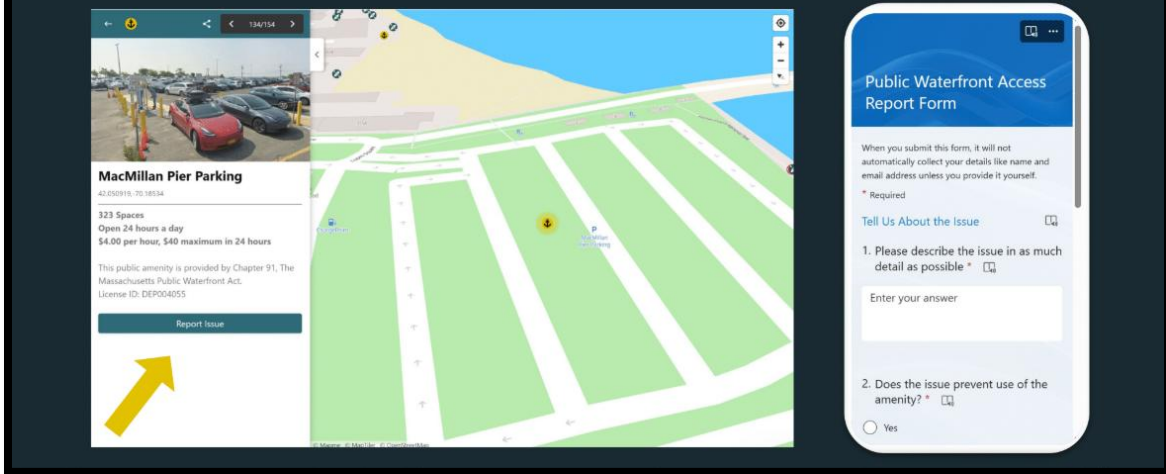


Photo 35. Public waterfront access map and community reporting form developed for Provincetown

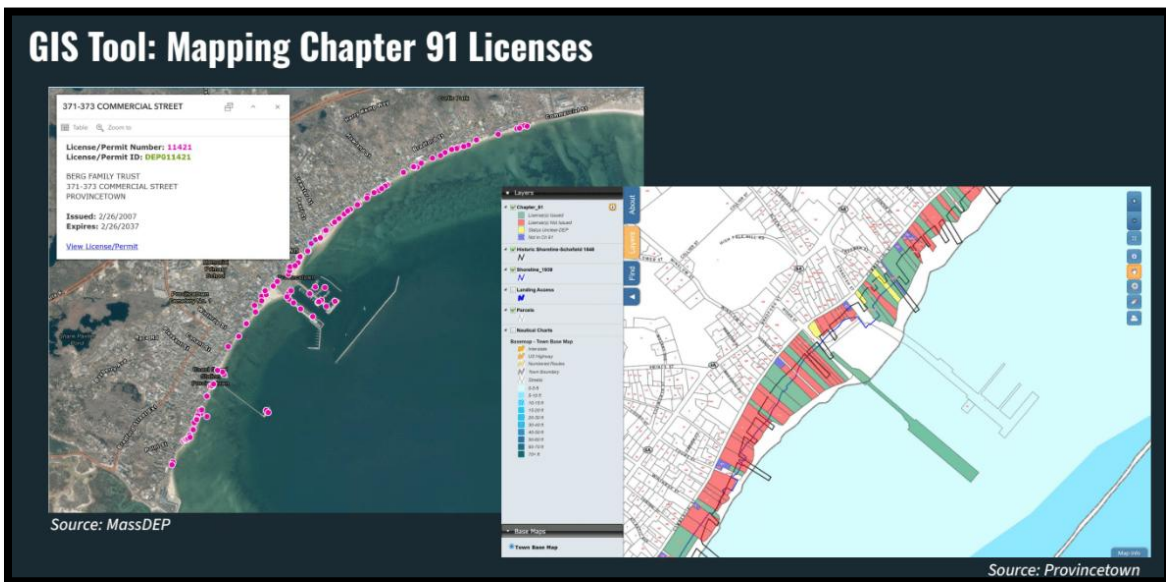


Photo 36. GIS tool mapping Chapter 91 licenses along the Provincetown shoreline

Town of Belmont – Development Feasibility Validation Tool (MLD-412, Spring 2026)

Background: The town of Belmont is considering how the Brighton Street Corridor can support future commercial, mixed-use, and residential development while remaining financially feasible for private developers and beneficial for the community. The corridor includes several large or underutilized parcels, proximity to Cambridge and Alewife, and access to the future Community Path. Feasibility is affected by construction costs, financing costs, parking requirements, zoning limits, operating assumptions, and market rents. Building on the previous semester's work on the corridor, the town asked students to develop a financial feasibility model that tests how zoning, design, parking, and affordability assumptions affect project viability.

Main Question: How do zoning, design, parking, affordability, and market assumptions affect development feasibility, and how can the town communicate those results clearly?



Photo 37. Field Lab students with Professors Linda Bilmes and Brian Iammartino presenting to Belmont officials, Spring 2026.

Key Findings:

- The team built the Belmont Economic Feasibility Model, a flexible Excel-based financial model that allows the town to test how zoning, design, parking, affordability, and market assumptions affect feasibility across three test sites in the Brighton Street Corridor, measured through Internal Rate of Return (IRR) and Return on Cost (ROC).
- Assumptions were grounded in a three-part methodology: interviews with seven developers active in the Greater Boston market, top-down analysis of peer municipalities' economic feasibility studies, and bottom-up market analysis using CoStar data.
- Developer interviews and the market analysis converged on a target IRR of approximately 17.5% and a target ROC of approximately 6.5%.
- Developer interviews frequently identified permitting predictability as a constraint. Under the model's assumptions, reducing preconstruction time by five months increased projected returns across the three test sites, indicating that permitting timelines are one factor the town can examine.
- The team created an interactive, web-based dashboard companion to the model, designed to help residents, developers, and town officials review the feasibility results.

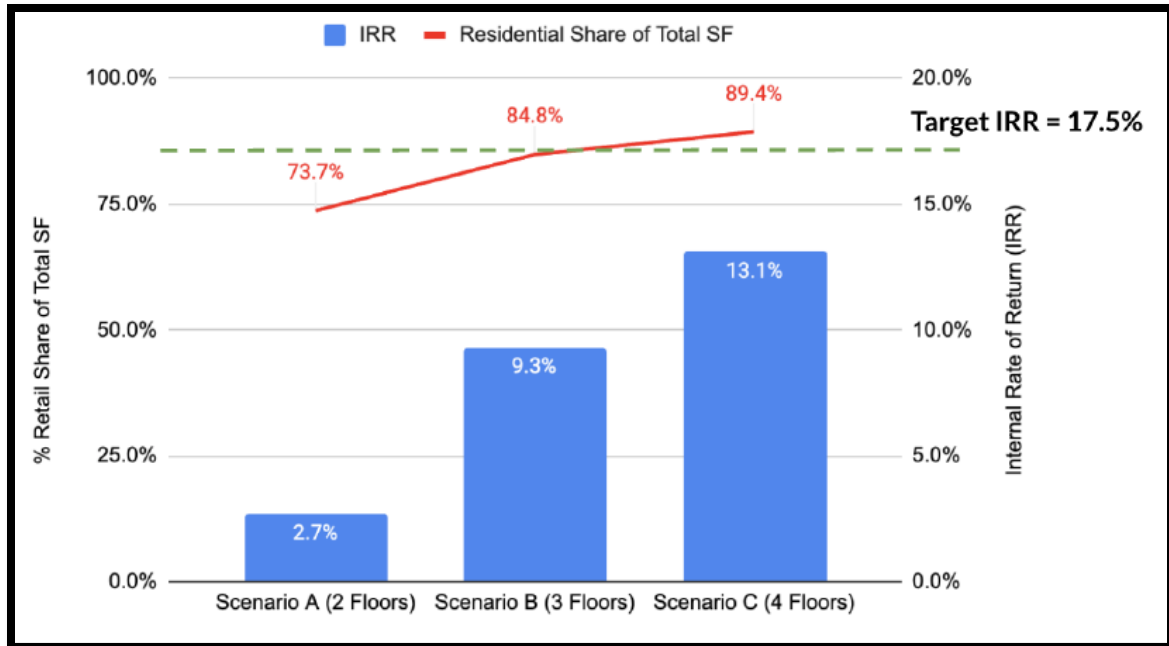


Photo 38. Internal rate of return and residential share of total square footage under three Belmont scenarios, against a target return of 17.5%

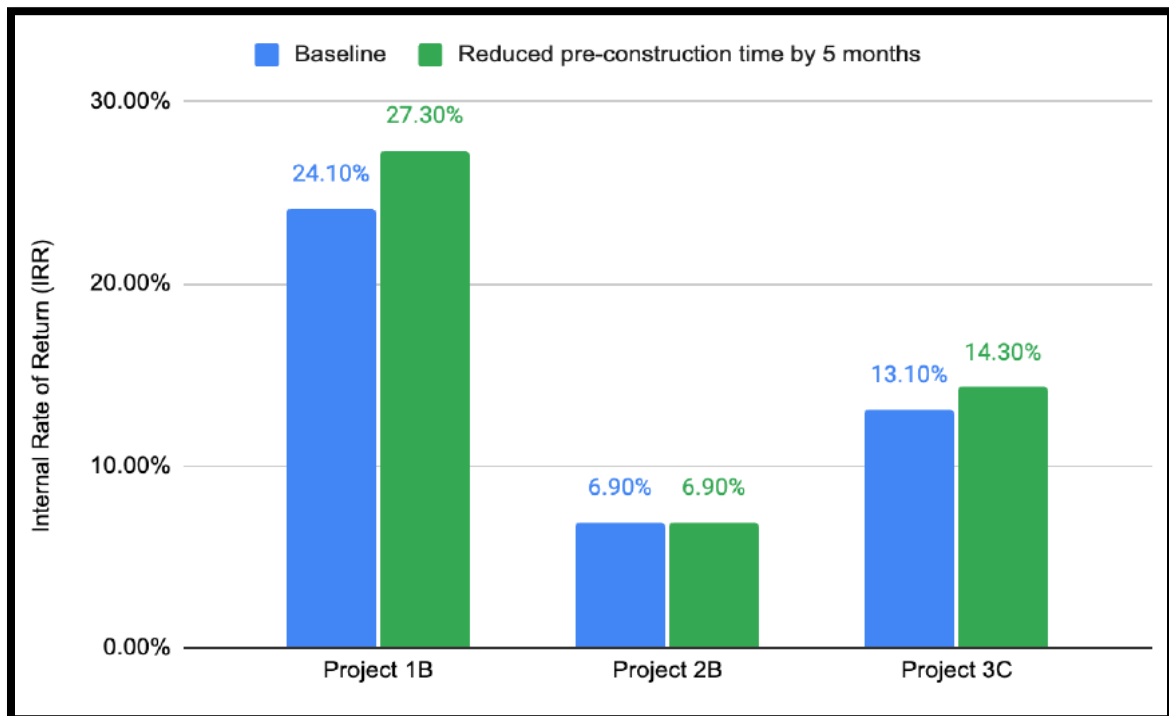


Photo 39. Effect on the internal rate of return of reducing preconstruction time by five months, three Belmont test projects

City of Fitchburg – Financing, Targeting, and Outcomes Analysis for Fitchburg’s Roads Strategy (MLD-412, Spring 2026)

Background: Fitchburg maintains approximately 182 miles of public roads. More than 54% of road segments are in poor condition, and the estimated infrastructure debt is \$138 million, while the city spends approximately \$2 million annually on road-related work. Fitchburg expects about \$1.7 million in Chapter 90 state funding each year, while repaving a single mile of road costs between \$500,000 and \$1.5 million. The city asked students to examine potential funding sources and approaches for prioritizing existing resources.

Main Question: How can Fitchburg prioritize available resources to improve road conditions and outcomes for residents?



Photo 40. Field Lab students with Fitchburg Mayor Sam Squailia, Chief of Staff Myles Phillips-Wilcox, Professors Linda Bilmes and Justin de Benedictis-Kessner, and Teaching Fellow Bran Shim, Spring 2026.

Key Findings:

- The team built a segment-level pavement management model using Fitchburg’s pavement inventory, recent paving plans, historical cost data, and a pavement-deterioration curve.

- The model compared three strategies: worst-first repairs, a 50% worst-first and 50% preservation blend, and a driver-minded strategy dividing funds among worst-first repairs, preservation, and higher-traffic corridors.
- The team calculated distance-weighted and usage-weighted measures of the Pavement Condition Index (PCI), a standard rating of pavement quality, to supplement systemwide averages and reflect how different parts of the network are used.
- At approximately \$4 million annually, all three modeled strategies improved the projected PCI measures.
- Under the driver-minded strategy, usage-weighted PCI rose from 65.5 to 71.0.
- State and federal grants have supported past projects but vary from year to year and are not a predictable, recurring revenue source.
- The team documented debt exclusion, I-Cubed, District Improvement Financing, and Chapter 23L as mechanisms for larger project-specific investments.
- Approximately 40 of 620 Massachusetts debt exclusion proposals from FY2022 through FY2026, or 6.5%, were tied to road-related work.
- The team piloted accelerometer-based roughness data as a complement to PCI, and reviewed intersection redesign and road diets as safety measures that can be analyzed alongside pavement investments.

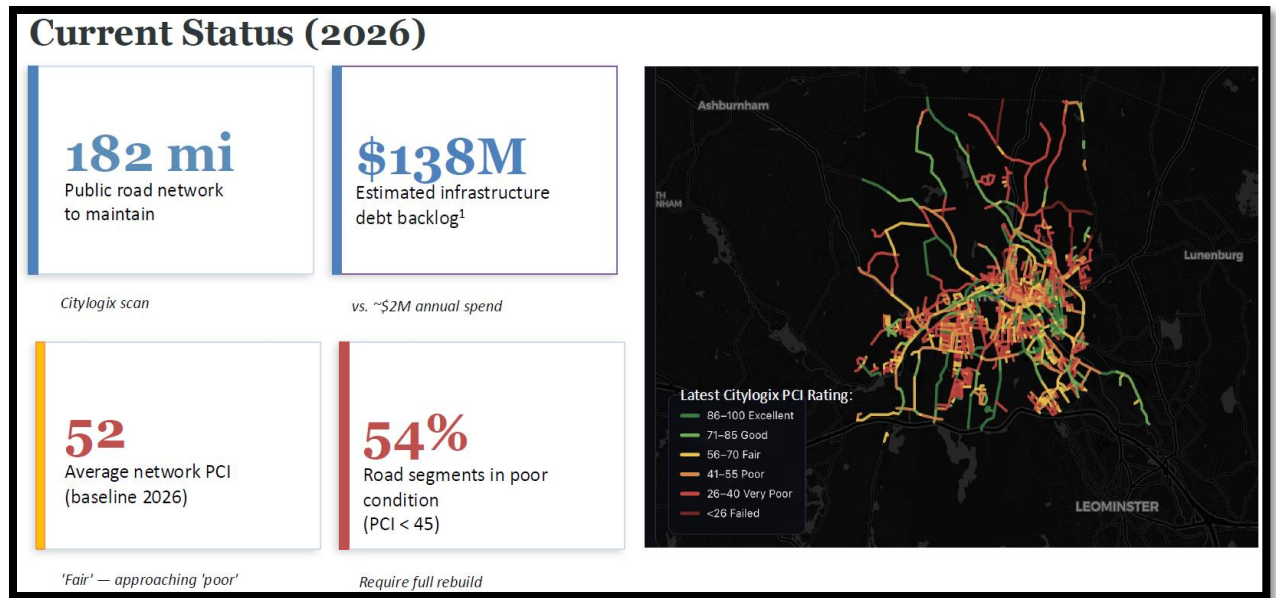


Photo 41. Condition of the Fitchburg road network in 2026, with the estimated backlog and pavement condition ratings by segment

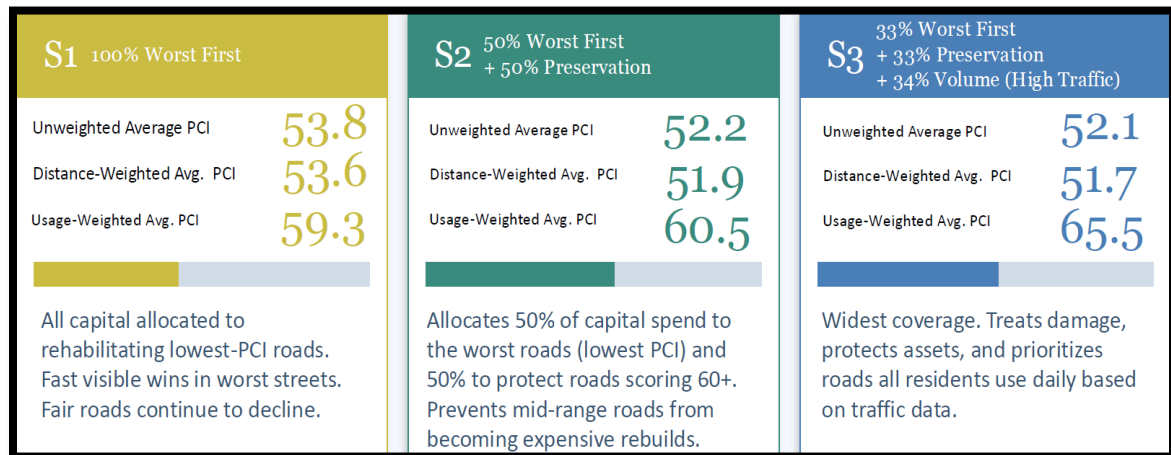


Photo 42. Pavement condition outcomes under three investment strategies for Fitchburg

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) – Forecasting Municipal Revenue and Taxpayer Impacts of Proposition 2½ Changes (MLD-412, Spring 2026)

Background: Proposition 2½ generally limits annual property tax levy growth in Massachusetts municipalities to 2.5%, with additional capacity for new development and voter-approved overrides or exclusions. However, the impacts of this policy and any potential reforms differ across municipalities because they differ in their tax bases, service needs, development patterns, and fiscal capacity. Students modeled alternative levy limit scenarios and assessed their effects across community types and taxpayer profiles. The project was led on the MAPC side by Regional Planning Data Analyst Zoe Iacovino (MPA '23), a Field Lab alumna who worked on the Everett redevelopment project in 2023.

Main Question: What is the projected revenue impact across different community types and taxpayer profiles under alternative levy limit scenarios?



Photo 43. Field Lab students with MAPC Executive Director Lizzi Weyant after the final presentation, Spring 2026.

Key Findings:

- Using data from FY2003 through FY2025, the team compared the current 2.5% rule with a 3% growth factor and an inflation-indexed scenario,

applying backtesting and sensitivity analysis across municipalities and MAPC community types.

- In the aggregate backtest, the inflation-indexed scenario would have added \$4.2 billion in levy capacity by FY2025, compared with \$2.1 billion under the 3% scenario and \$815 million added through overrides under the current system.
- Among the 159 municipalities with no passed overrides, median excess levy capacity would have increased from 1.4% under current rules to 11% under the 3% scenario and 20.6% under the inflation-indexed scenario. Of these municipalities, 102 had excess levy capacity below 5% under current rules.
- Among the 192 municipalities that passed at least one override, 57% would have accumulated more levy capacity under the 3% scenario and 85% under the inflation-indexed scenario.
- In the year-by-year backtest, the 3% scenario provided sufficient additional capacity to cover 48% of historical overrides, compared with 40% under the inflation-indexed scenario, because inflation ran below 3% in some years.
- Taxpayer capacity varied across community types. Renter household income averaged approximately 60% of owner household income in Rural Towns, 55% in the Inner Core, 46% in Developing Suburbs, and 44% in both Regional Urban Centers and Maturing Suburbs.
- Among the seven peer states with property tax restrictions, the team identified examples of more offsetting features, such as higher levy growth limits, additional local revenue options, higher levy baselines, and exclusions for certain municipal costs.

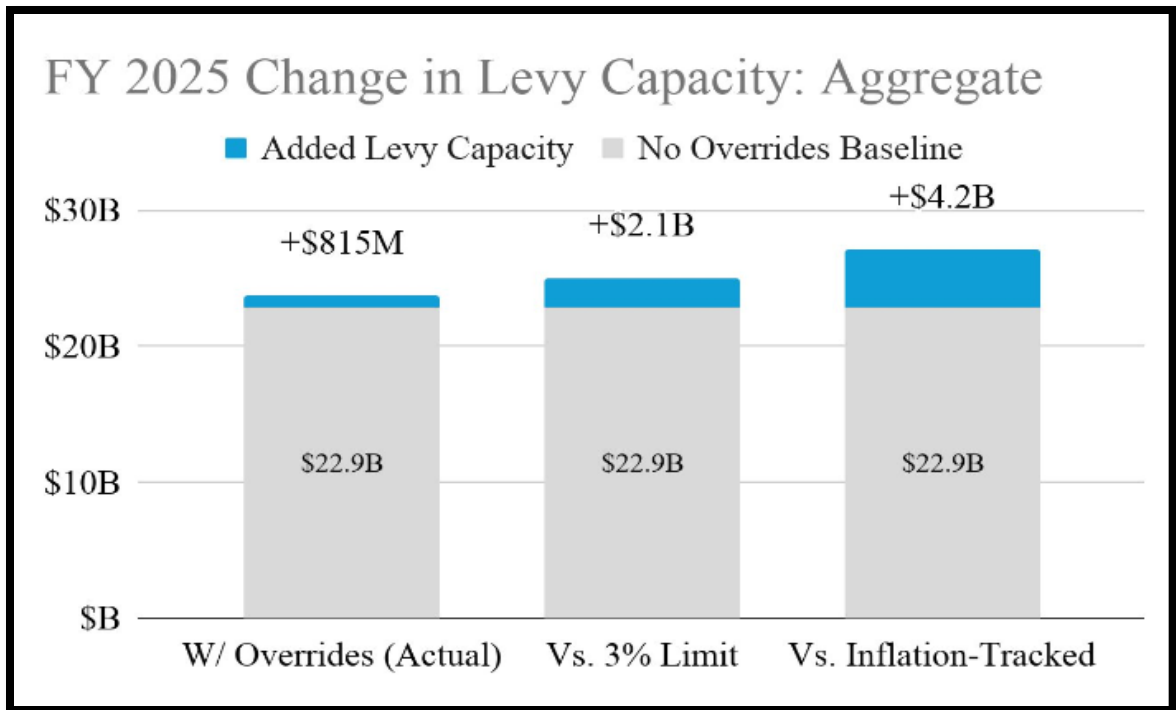


Photo 44. Change in aggregate levy capacity in FY2025 under the status quo, a 3% limit, and an inflation-tracked limit

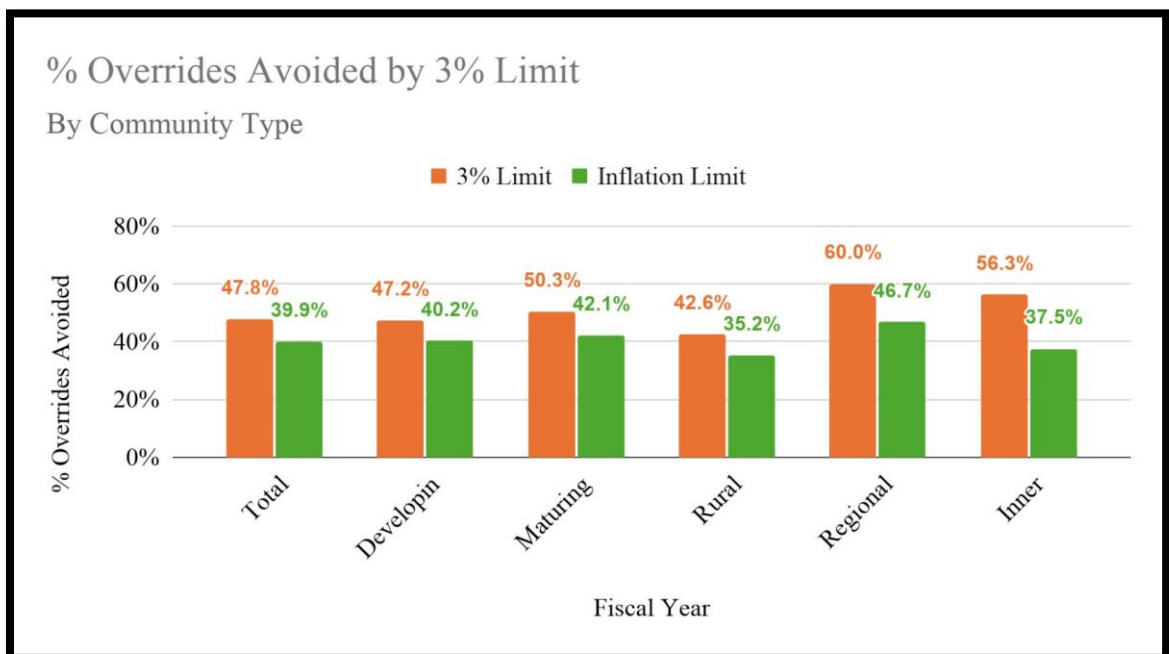


Photo 45. Share of historical override years covered by additional levy capacity under a 3% limit and an inflation-indexed limit, by community type

Most Selected Peer States Have More Fiscal Flexibility			
Massachusetts Few alternative tools for local revenue. One of the oldest tax caps means that property values compound from 1980 levy baseline.	Oregon Local gas and payroll tax options. Transportation utility fees.	New Jersey Exclusions for pensions, health insurance, capital/debt service. Unused cap room may be banked for future.	Illinois Broader local taxing authority for most municipalities.
Michigan Local income tax, local government overrides	New York Exclusions for capital spending, PILOTs, fast rising pensions. Cap override by elected body.	California Local sales tax, special infrastructure taxes and parcel taxes.	Rhode Island Exclusions for debt, emergencies, loss of other revenue.

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Photo 46. Local revenue options and tax cap exclusions in selected peer states

City of Somerville – Fiscal Modeling and Benchmarking Analysis for Curbside Composting (MLD-412, Spring 2026)

Background: Somerville is considering curbside composting to divert organic waste and reduce trash volume. Composting offers environmental benefits, including lower landfill methane emissions and compost for municipal landscaping and community gardens. The city asked students to benchmark curbside composting in comparable municipalities and to build a fiscal model for Somerville showing costs across a range of participation rates and breakeven scenarios.

Main Question: What is the net cost of expanding curbside composting in Somerville, and what do comparable municipalities show about its fiscal feasibility?



Photo 47. The curbside composting team with Somerville Mayor Jake Wilson, Spring 2026.

Key Findings:

- The team interviewed officials in Brookline, Cambridge, Medford, Jersey City, and New York City, along with the provider Garbage to Garden.
- Peer municipalities generally treated composting as an environmental and waste-diversion measure rather than a source of municipal savings.
- The team built a financial model on Somerville DPW data covering 26,250 eligible households, testing participation rates of 30% to 50% against tipping fees of approximately \$100 per ton and vendor fees benchmarked to the City of Boston's initial pricing.
- Across the scenarios tested, collection and processing costs exceeded avoided disposal costs, and none reached breakeven at current tipping rates.
- Higher participation increased waste diversion but did not eliminate the modeled funding gap.

- Interviewees found limited evidence linking composting to reduced rodent activity but emphasized secure container design, locking lids, and responsive maintenance.
- The team mapped operational models and their tradeoffs for cost, participation, convenience, and equity.

DRAFT

HIGHER PARTICIPATION, LOWER PER HOUSEHOLD COST LEAD TO SAME RESULT

Savings						
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Households Served by Municipal Trash/Recycling Program	0.0%	26,250	26,250	26,250	26,250	26,250
x Assumed Participation Rate	50%		55%	60%	65%	70%
Households Utilizing Curbside Composting		13,125	14,438	15,750	17,063	18,375
x Average Tons of Compost per Household	0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Est. Tons of Municipal Solid Waste Diverted		6,563	7,219	7,875	8,531	9,188
x Tipping Fees per Ton	2.0%	\$94.86	\$96.76	\$98.69	\$100.67	\$102.68
Potential Costs Avoided / Savings		\$622,519	\$698,466	\$777,202	\$858,808	\$943,368

Incremental Costs						
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Vendor Monthly Fees per Household		\$10.99	\$10.49	\$10.49	\$9.99	\$9.99
Annual Vendor Fees		132	126	126	120	120
x Households Utilizing Curbside Composting		13125.00	14437.50	15750.00	17062.50	18375.00
Est. Ongoing Vendor Costs		\$1,730,925	\$1,817,393	\$1,982,610	\$2,045,453	\$2,202,795
Number of New Households Utilizing Curbside Composting		13,125	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313
x Cost per New Household	\$32		\$32	\$32	\$32	\$32
Est. One-Time Costs		\$420,000	\$42,000	\$42,000	\$42,000	\$42,000
Printing / Mailing Costs	\$30,000		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
+ DPW Staff Costs	\$0		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Est. Other Direct City Costs	\$30,000		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Potential Total Costs Incurred		\$2,180,925	\$1,859,393	\$2,024,610	\$2,087,453	\$2,244,795
Net Costs (Savings)		\$1,558,406	\$1,160,926	\$1,247,408	\$1,228,644	\$1,301,427

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Photo 48. Modeled disposal savings, program costs, and net municipal costs under alternative participation scenarios for curbside composting in Somerville

City of Somerville – Process Mapping for Police and Clinical Co-Response (MLD-412, Spring 2026)

Background: Somerville recorded more than 36,000 behavioral health and welfare-related 911 calls from 2017 to 2026, an average of approximately eleven per day. During the spring project, Somerville was preparing a co-response pilot pairing sworn officers with civilian mental health clinicians, following the work of the city's Public Safety for All Task Force. The city asked students to evaluate the design and implementation of that pilot and to assess future crisis response pathways, including how dispatchers should route eligible calls, how the 311 system might connect to those pathways, and what governance arrangements could support regional coordination.

Main Question: How can Somerville structure dispatch protocols and coordination to integrate co-response with existing 911 and 311 workflows?



Photo 49. The co-response team with Somerville Mayor Jake Wilson, Spring 2026.

Key Findings:

- The team drew on nine years of Somerville computer-aided dispatch data, GIS drive time mapping along the Cambridge and Somerville border, more than ten interviews with dispatch, police, clinical, and peer program staff, and benchmarking of programs in Columbus, Durham, Cambridge, and Chapel Hill.
- The process map identified three conditions that determine whether an eligible call receives co-response: dispatcher identification, clinician availability, and officer activation.
- Welfare checks account for 66% of Somerville's behavioral health calls and 61% of Cambridge CARE's responses.
- Benchmarking of Cambridge CARE showed that the share of eligible calls routed to the program increased after protocol changes and dispatcher training.
- Using ten sample call locations along the Cambridge-Somerville border, the model estimated that a shared-services arrangement would reduce average drive time to the 1114 Broadway hub from 9.53 to 6.20 minutes under standard traffic and from 11.69 to 7.44 minutes during rush hour.
- The modeled advantage depended on the location of the response base and was limited when Somerville's base was placed near Cambridge CARE.
- The team outlined early logging of routing decisions, monthly review of dispatch data, and structured debriefs between officers and clinicians as implementation considerations for the pilot.
- The team set out four future response pathways, including expansion of the Somerville pilot and regional coordination with Cambridge CARE, with estimated incremental annual costs for each option beyond the pilot.

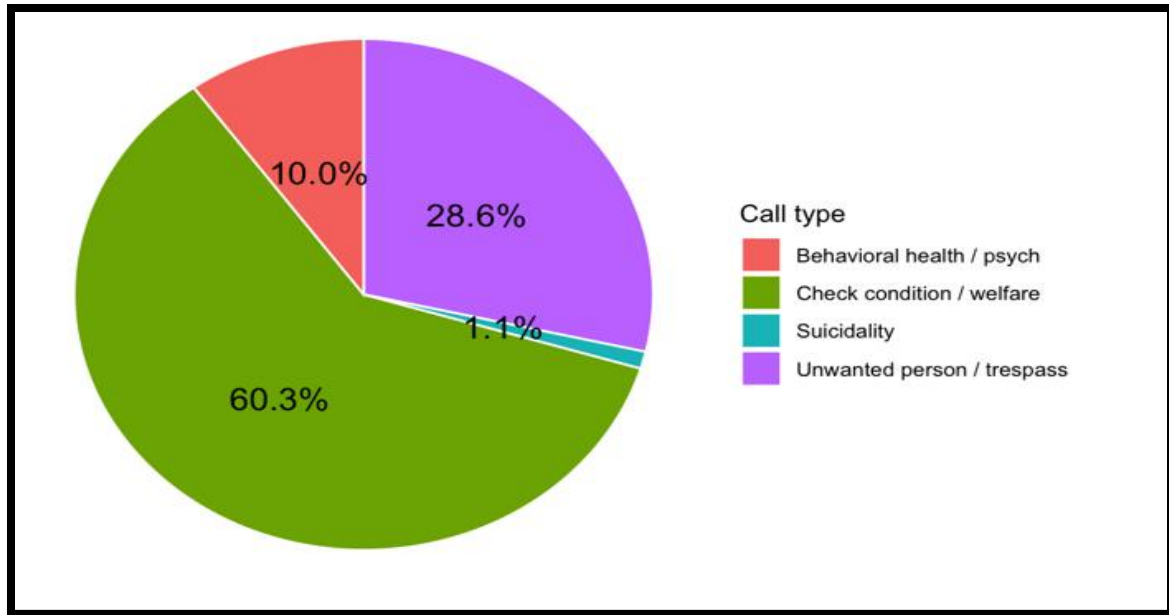


Photo 50. Somerville behavioral health and welfare calls by type

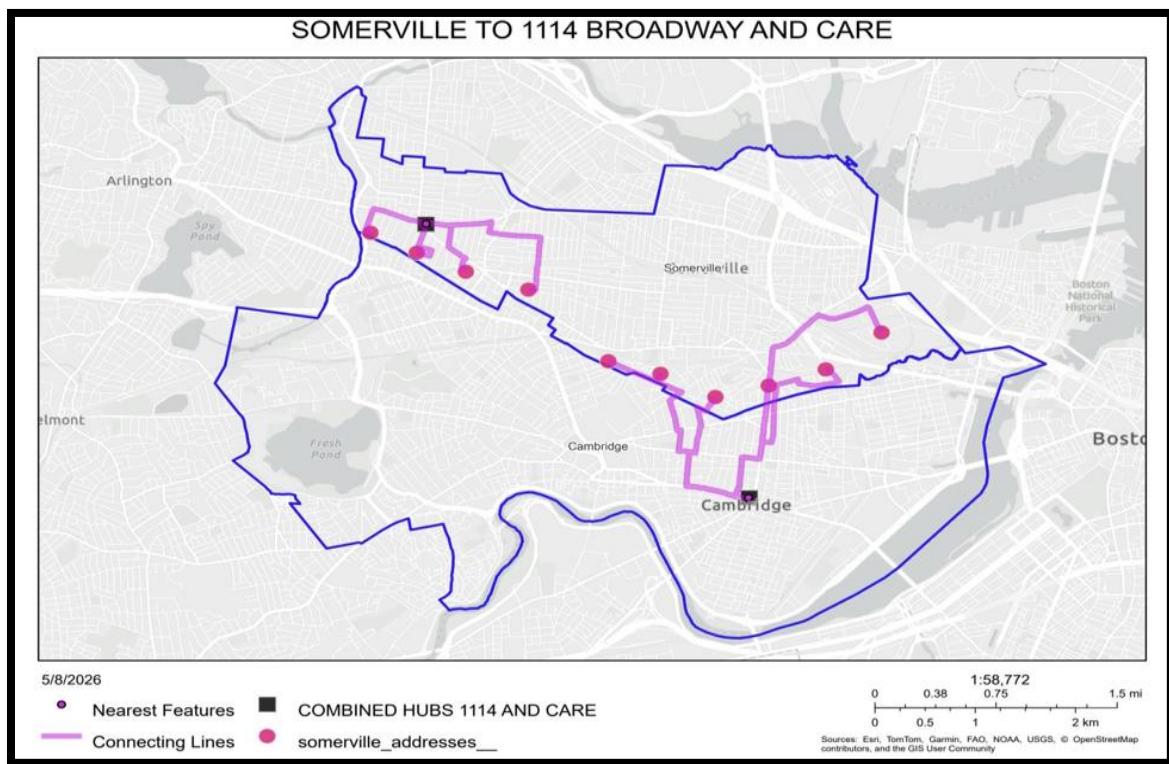


Photo 51. Illustrative GIS analysis mapping dispatch routes under a hypothetical shared-services model

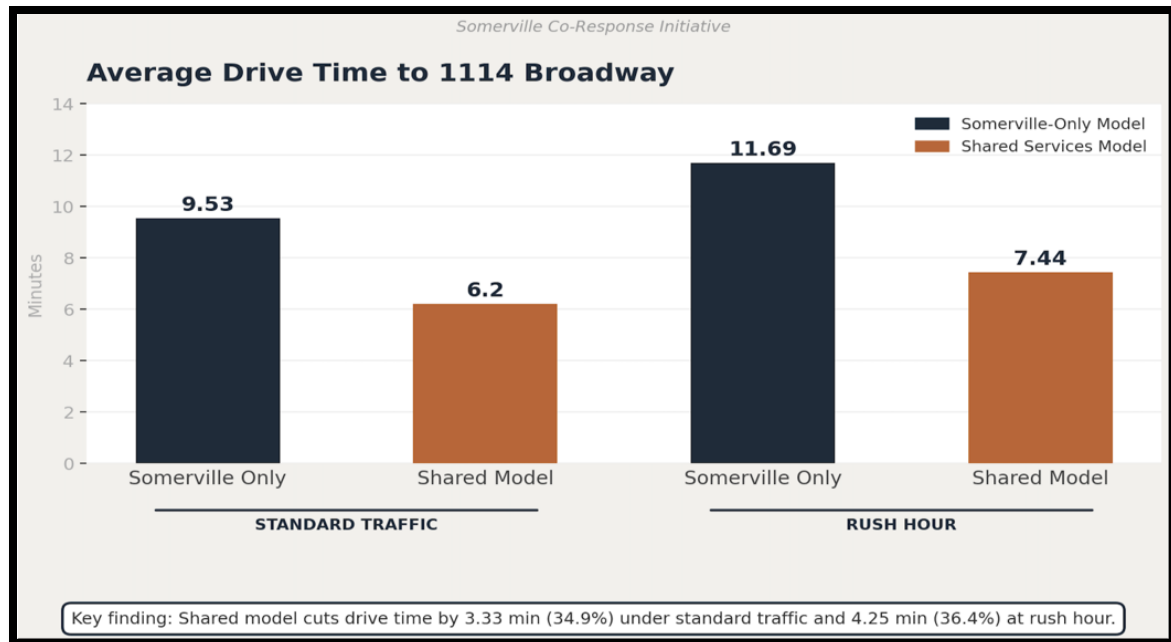


Photo 52. Average drive time to 1114 Broadway under a Somerville-only model and a shared services model

City of Worcester – Municipal Impacts and Community Benefits of 611 Main Street Redevelopment (MLD-412, Spring 2026)

Background: The city of Worcester is preparing an RFP and community engagement process for the redevelopment of the former Registry of Motor Vehicles site at 611 Main Street in the downtown Theatre District. The city is considering how redevelopment of the site could incorporate housing, arts and cultural uses, active ground-floor space, and community priorities while remaining financially feasible. The city asked students to develop and document illustrative redevelopment scenarios and translate their assumptions into estimated assessed values and municipal property tax revenues.

Main Question: How can redevelopment of 611 Main Street combine housing, affordability, and arts and cultural uses while remaining financially feasible?



Photo 53. Field Lab students with Worcester City Manager Eric Batista, Professors Linda Bilmes and Brian Iammartino, and Teaching Fellow Bran Shim, Spring 2026.

Key Findings:

- The team modeled a nine-story building of about 143 residential units in three scenarios, each with a different civic anchor: a facade-scale mural with a ground-floor cultural retail cluster, a publicly accessible rooftop greenspace with an artist live and work community, or a public sculpture and plaza fronting the Theatre District.
- The three scenarios set affordability at 21, 143, and 85 income-restricted units, with total development costs of \$59.38 million, \$61.24 million, and \$60.32 million.
- Modeled internal rates of return were 16.0% for the mural scenario, 4.5% for the fully affordable rooftop scenario, and 14.1% for the sculpture and plaza scenario.

- The GIS walkshed analysis identified nearby income-restricted housing with affordability restrictions scheduled to expire within five to fifteen years and compared those potential losses with the restricted units modeled in each scenario.
- Stakeholder interviews emphasized active ground floor uses, affordable creative space, a recognizable civic identity, and affordability levels responsive to concerns about displacement.

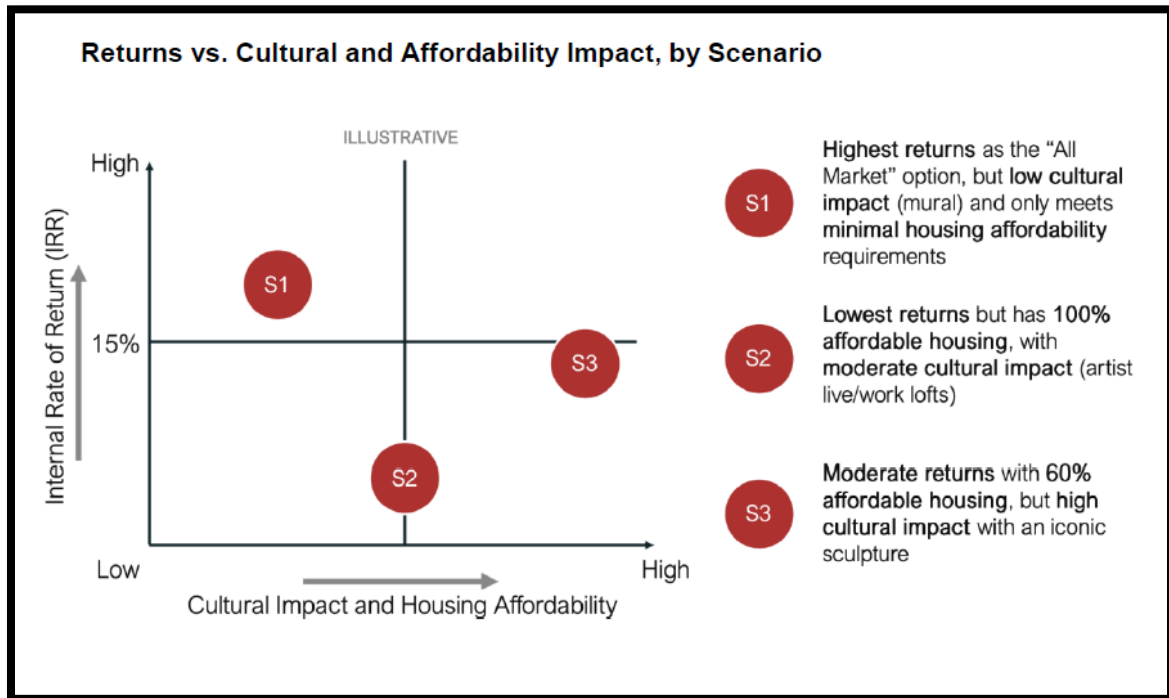


Photo 54. Returns compared with cultural and affordability impact for the three 611 Main Street scenarios

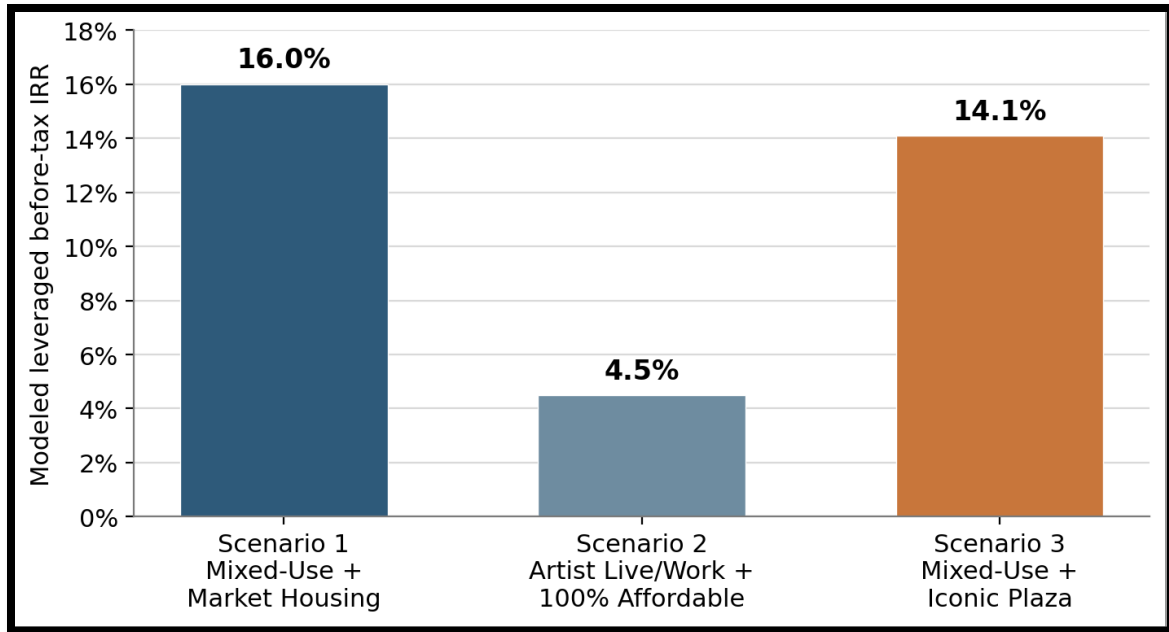


Photo 55. Worcester 611 Main Street modeled IRR by scenario

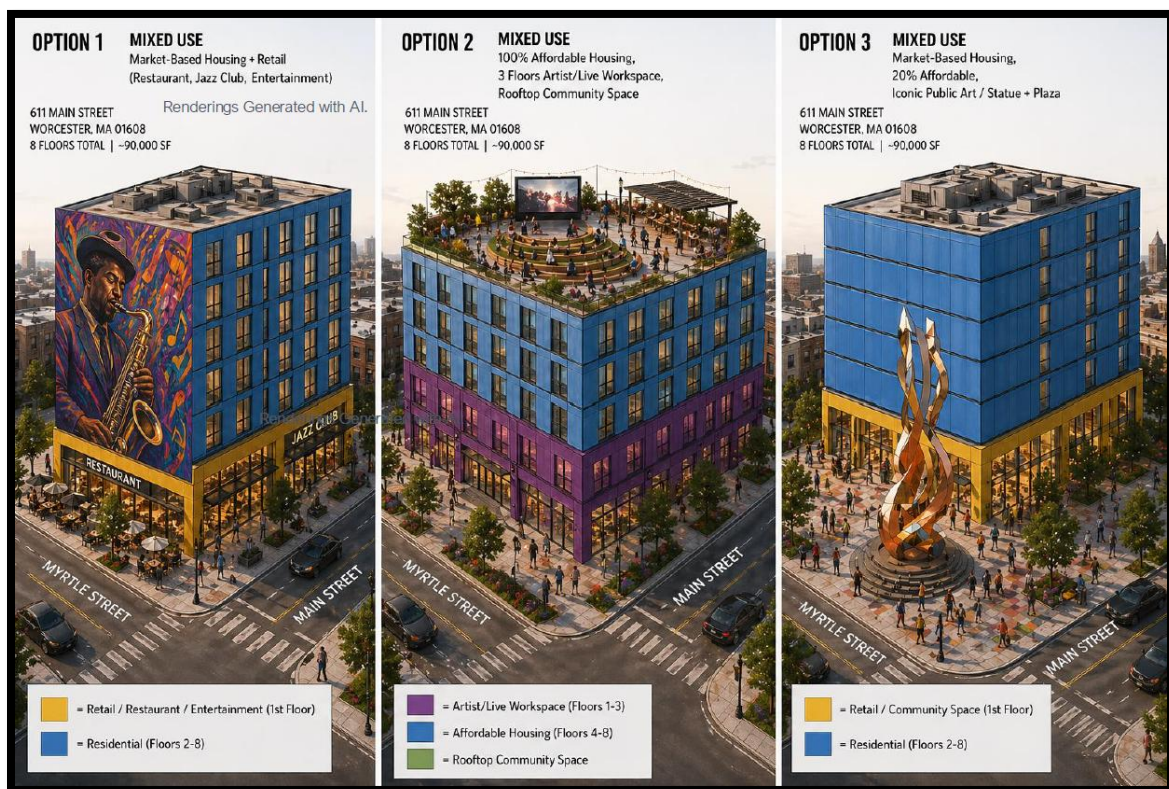


Photo 56. The three mixed-use options modeled for 611 Main Street in Worcester

Field Lab Communications

The Field Lab continued to grow its public presence this year through the Field Lab website, the program's [LinkedIn page](#), and the Field Lab Project Library, which documents two decades of student projects for partners, prospective students, and researchers.

Field Lab Media Coverage

September 16, 2026: Max Larkin, "[Linda Bilmes is doing the math](#)," *Harvard Gazette*.

August 15, 2026: Travis Andersen, "[Kennedy School researchers tout benefits of proposed North South Rail Link](#)," *The Boston Globe*.

August 10, 2026: Mary Byrne, "[New Tool Allows Residents a New Perspective on Zoning](#)," *The Belmont Voice*.

June 15, 2026: Mary Byrne, "[Study: Permitting a Constraint in Belmont](#)," *The Belmont Voice*.

May 14, 2026: Lisa Hughes, "[Harvard Kennedy School student on mission to improve road safety after brothers killed in crash](#)," CBS Boston.

March 24, 2026: Mary Byrne, "[Public Invited to Brighton Street Workshop](#)," *The Belmont Voice*.

February 2, 2026: Mary Byrne, "[Brighton Corridor Conversations Pick Up](#)," *The Belmont Voice*.

December 12, 2025: Mary Byrne, "[Harvard Presents Brighton Street Overlay Findings](#)," *The Belmont Voice*.

November 26, 2025: Mary Byrne, "[Harvard Group to Present Findings on Brighton Street Corridor](#)," *The Belmont Voice*.

Publications

In August 2026, the Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series published [*The Missing Mile: Evaluating the Economic Costs and Benefits of the North South Rail Link and Regional Rail Integration*](#), authored by Field Lab faculty Linda Bilmes and Brian Iammartino and Field Lab alumni Gloria Korpas, Jebb Ricketts, Amanda Stiebris, Michael Whelan, and Peter Willenborg. The paper grew directly out of the spring 2024 Field Lab project with Congressman Seth Moulton and his staff, which examined the economic impact of constructing the North South Rail Link compared with expanding South Station, and built on the 2017 Field Lab working paper, [*Connecting the Northeast: A Cost Estimate for the North-South Rail Link*](#), by Laura White, Jean-Louis Rochet, Pete Mathias, Kate O’Gorman, and Professor Linda Bilmes. The new study updates the cost analysis and substantially expands the assessment of the project’s economic benefits. Under the Maximum Build scenario with full Regional Rail, the study estimates \$37.6 billion in incremental benefits compared with \$8.0 billion in incremental costs.

The five alumni co-authors have since pursued careers in government and the private sector or continued their education. Peter Willenborg is a Fellow on the Children and Families team at the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab, working with the Maryland Governor’s Office. Amanda Stiebris is Senior Advisor to the Chief Financial Officer at the New York City Housing Authority. Gloria Korpas completed an economic development fellowship with Miami-Dade County and now works at the MBTA as Deputy Director of Lean Analytics. Jebb Ricketts is a Principal Account Manager at Google, and Michael Whelan is studying law at the University of Michigan.

The Missing Mile: Evaluating the Economic Costs and Benefits of the North South Rail Link and Regional Rail Integration

Faculty Research Working Paper Series

Brian R. Iammartino
Harvard Kennedy School

Linda J. Bilmes
Harvard Kennedy School

Gloria Korpas
Miami-Dade Office of Innovation and Economic
Development

Jebb Ricketts
Google

Amanda Stiebris
New York City Housing Authority

Michael Whelan
University of Michigan

Peter Willenborg
Harvard Kennedy School

August 2026
RWP26-008

Photo 57. Cover of *The Missing Mile: Evaluating the Economic Costs and Benefits of the North South Rail Link and Regional Rail Integration*, HKS Faculty Research Working Paper RWP26-008, August 2026

Field Lab Website

In January 2026, we set up the first-ever Field Lab website, fieldlabs.hks.harvard.edu, to serve as a central public resource for the program's history, courses, projects, participants, reports, publications, and news. It will provide a foundation for strengthening communication with prospective client partners, students, and alumni as the program continues to develop.

The site gives prospective project partners information about how Field Lab engagements work and examples of prior projects. The For Client Partners section outlines the characteristics of a strong Field Lab project and the steps involved in developing and carrying out an engagement. Cities and agencies can submit a collaboration request through the site.

The website includes the Projects Library, a publicly viewable archive of a number of projects undertaken over the past twenty years. (Confidential data, photos, and materials are not published.) Projects can be browsed by city, agency, course, policy area, and academic year. The library documents the Field Lab's partnerships with local governments and public agencies over time.

The site also supports the Field Lab alumni community. The Our Community section features faculty, staff, alumni, and Rappaport Public Finance Summer Fellows. The alumni section provides ways for graduates to stay connected through the [Field Lab LinkedIn group](#) and HKS alumni resources and events, and to remain involved with the program.

The website was designed and built by Program Director Maja Niksic, with support from the Harvard University Web Publishing (HWP) team, especially Kate Bradoff, Product Owner for Harvard Sites, and Mark Bourne, IT Solutions Manager with HKS Information Technology. Maja led the site's content strategy and development, including its information architecture, page design, copywriting and editing, selection and curation of photography, and migration of program materials, while completing Drupal training and working closely with HWP and HKS IT to implement the site within Harvard's web platform.

This initial website launch is a foundation that we will build on to extend the Field Lab's reach and support its impact. During the coming year, we look forward to engaging alumni, client partners, students, and other users for feedback to help us improve and refine the site. We will also track website traffic and engagement through Google Analytics, with internal reporting on the number of unique visitors, the most visited pages, and time spent on the site.

This feedback and usage data will guide continued improvements, helping us develop the website as an ongoing resource for alumni engagement, client and project development, and dissemination of Field Lab work. These efforts will support the program's long-term growth and institutional continuity.

2026 Rappaport Public Finance Summer Fellows

The Field Lab sponsored five Public Finance Summer Fellows. Two participated in the regular Rappaport Fellows program with support from Polly O'Brien, Associate Director of the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston, and Kathryn Carlson, Executive Director of the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston.

This year's fellows worked with the City of Fitchburg, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, the City of Worcester, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and the Town of Belmont.

Caroline Pinney (MC/MPA, 2026)

**Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC),
Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

Project Partner: Philip Dearing, Assistant Director of Policy

Caroline worked with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities on research related to market-rate housing development and construction costs. Her project examined current development conditions and the factors affecting what types of housing projects developers are able and willing to build. Her work also examined major construction cost drivers and their relationship to building codes. Caroline worked with Philip Dearing to align the fellowship with EOHLC's ongoing research on construction costs and housing development. Her analysis complemented this work and supported the Commonwealth's broader examination of barriers to housing production.

Daniel Oviedo (MC/MPA, 2026)

City of Worcester, Massachusetts

Project Partner: Paul Morano, Assistant Chief Development Officer

Daniel worked with the City of Worcester's Executive Office of Economic Development and the Worcester Redevelopment Authority on the next phase of planning for 611 Main Street. Building on the spring Field Lab analysis, his

summer work involved preparing the City for a developer solicitation. He developed an evaluation and scoring framework, standardized proposer forms, and supporting materials for the draft RFP. He also prepared a financing roadmap identifying potential funding sources and their sequencing, along with tools for assessing prospective developers, operators, and funders. In addition, Daniel synthesized community input and prepared materials for the City's July community meeting. His work helped move the project from preliminary analysis toward the procurement and implementation stage.

Kumar Abhishek (MC/MPA, 2026)

City of Fitchburg, Massachusetts

Project Partner: Myles Phillips-Wilcox, Chief of Staff

Kumar worked with the City of Fitchburg on an implementation focused extension of the spring 2026 Field Lab project on road infrastructure. His fellowship examined three related areas: long-term road financing, state and federal funding, and the quality of the City's road and traffic data. Kumar assessed whether a Proposition 2½ debt exclusion could supplement Fitchburg's road funding and analyzed the City's debt service, levy capacity, assessed value, reserve balances, and potential household costs. He worked with the City Auditor and finance staff to verify financial assumptions and with DPW staff on Chapter 90 funding, grant opportunities, paving plans, and utility coordination. He also examined the expanded Chapter 90 program and the new Lifecycle Asset Management Program and continued the spring team's work on CityLogix road data, traffic information, and Professor Ed Glaeser's accelerometer-based approach to measuring road conditions. Kumar also developed a prototype [Integrated Road Financing and Pavement Decision Model](#) to bring these areas together and support municipal decision-making. The model was developed using AI-assisted coding tools (Claude).

Yann Tarouilly (MPA, 2027)

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

Project Partner: Leah Robins, Director of Government Affairs

Yann worked with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council on a white paper examining Proposition 2½ within the broader challenge of municipal fiscal sustainability in Massachusetts. Building on the quantitative analysis completed by the spring 2026 Field Lab team, he examined the sources and distribution of fiscal strain across municipalities and the extent to which different communities

can use existing mechanisms such as new growth, overrides, exclusions, and other sources of fiscal flexibility. His work included a review of the existing literature, analysis of alternative reform options, benchmarking against approaches used in other states, and further modeling of the fiscal and distributional effects of potential changes to Proposition 2½. He also considered alternative policy levers, including state and federal transfers, local revenue options, and tax-base expansion. The fellowship included consultations with MAPC and other stakeholders and development of a white paper, summary materials, and a dashboard to support future policy discussions.

Joshua Young (MPP, 2026)

Town of Belmont, Massachusetts

Project Partner: Chris Ryan, Director of Planning & Building

Josh worked with the Town of Belmont, continuing the spring 2026 Field Lab work on development feasibility in the Brighton Street corridor. He recalibrated the Belmont Economic Feasibility Model to reflect current market and financing conditions, expanded it so the Town could analyze custom parcels rather than only the original test scenarios, and linked key model assumptions to the Town's evolving zoning framework. He also prepared a step-by-step user guide so Town staff and residents could use the model independently and updated the public-facing feasibility dashboard for continued use by Belmont. In addition, Josh completed follow-on analysis of two issues raised during the spring project. He examined affordable-housing and zoning options for Hill Estates following its 2025 sale and analyzed how commercial development in the corridor could contribute to Belmont's tax base. His work gave the Town additional tools for evaluating development, affordability, zoning, and fiscal tradeoffs as planning for the corridor continued.

Building the Field Lab of the Future

Founded in 2004, the Greater Boston Applied Field Lab was the first experiential learning course of its kind at HKS, training students through immersion in real-life challenges facing local communities. This experiment has now been adopted widely, both at HKS and throughout the university. HKS Dean Jeremy Weinstein is a long-time advocate of this approach, having launched a similar effort at Stanford during his time as a professor there.

Now in its 21st year, the Field Lab benefits from an extensive pipeline of active alumni, the majority of whom work in state, local and national governments

around the US and the world or in related jurisdictions, including foundations, non-profits, educational institutes and think tanks focused on relevant issues. Our alumni include members of Congress, including Rep. Brendan Boyle (PA) and Rep. Seth Moulton (MA); mayors, including Mayor James Solomon of Jersey City; congressional staff, including Philip Tizzani of the House Appropriations Committee and Tyler Evilsizer of the Senate Budget Committee; and hundreds of city officials from San Francisco, CA, to St. Louis, MO, to Watertown, MA.

An important feature of this alumni pipeline is that many former students remain connected to the Field Lab as their careers develop. They return as client partners, members of the teaching team, and advisors. This continuity enables the Field Lab to build on relationships over time and creates an expanding network of alumni with direct experience in the state and local government issues at the center of our work.

Taken together, this teaching team and group of advisors give the Field Lab a strong base from which to carry on and expand our work. Bran and Brian bring deep experience in public finance, budgeting, financial management, real estate and state government. Samantha brings experience in transportation and infrastructure across state and federal government. Sanjay brings experience in urban planning, GIS, climate resilience, environmental policy and teaching. Just as importantly, each has a longstanding connection to Harvard and to the work of the Field Lab.

In the coming years, we hope to bring these advisors more fully into the team and to continue expanding opportunities for Field Lab alumni to return as client partners, teachers and advisors. This builds on one of the Field Lab's greatest strengths over the past 21 years: an extensive pipeline of alumni whose experience in government and related fields can help support the next generation of students and the future of the program.

Priorities for the Coming Year

In the 2026-2027 academic year, the Field Lab will continue its tradition of embedding student teams directly with local governments to address complex policy challenges. Building on the momentum of our 21st year, we look forward to deepening our partnerships across Greater Boston and welcoming a new cohort of students to the work of public service.

Looking ahead, the Field Lab will devote considerable effort to formalize three core processes: how client partners and projects are identified, selected, and

scoped; how students are selected for the Field Lab; and how summer fellows are selected and coordinated with the Rappaport Institute. The goal is to create a more consistent year-round flow from client recruitment and project development through student selection, academic-year projects, and summer fellowships. The program will also continue to strengthen its alumni database and outreach and to develop a broader network of alumni and advisors who can remain engaged with the Field Lab over time.

As always, none of this would be possible without the generosity and vision of the Rappaport Foundation, whose sustained support has enabled two decades of experiential learning, and the dedication of our project partners, teaching team, and alumni community. We thank our friends and supporters for their continued commitment to the Field Lab and to the communities we serve.