



Massachusetts Municipal Association

MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

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MMA Policy Committee on Municipal and Regional Administration Best Practice Recommendation: Economic Development Factors Within Municipal Control

BEST PRACTICE: Municipalities should act on factors that are within their immediate control to boost economic development in their communities.

The Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University created an Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool to help cities and towns better understand the factors that contribute to healthy economic and employment growth. This tool collects information from cities and towns on: Access to Customers/Markets; Concentration of Business and Services (Agglomeration); Lease/Rental Rates; Labor Quality and Cost; Municipal Process; Quality of Life (Community); Quality of Life (Site Amenities); Business Incentives; Tax Rates; and Economic Development Marketing. Boiling down the trends, the study ranks the factors that were most highly correlated with percentage change in employment and establishments in cities and towns.

The factors that were most highly correlated with percentage change in employment were:

1. available development sites
2. site amenities
3. economic development marketing
4. timeliness of approvals
5. parking
6. school "success"

The factors that were most highly correlated with an increase in establishments were:

1. economic development marketing
2. timeliness of approvals
3. parking
4. public transit
5. cross marketing
6. low traffic congestion
7. fast-track permitting
8. site availability

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To facilitate desired economic development, a best practice for municipal leaders is to act on measures that are within their immediate control and that are shown to result in employment growth and attractiveness to business and industry.

The following are some recommendations:

- Improve the city or town website to boost economic development marketing and draw in developers.
- Identify sites for economic development and make that information available to developers.
- Make sure identified sites are zoned to encourage development.
- Look into ways to highlight site amenities such as on-site parking, public transportation, nearby educational facilities, etc.
- Make sure application and permitting processes are available to developers ahead of time and are as transparent as possible, with predictable timelines. Develop flow charts to identify the different pathways to approval.
- Provide an online application process and allow for online permitting, if possible.

Resources:

- "What Makes Working Cities Work," presentation by Northeastern University professor Barry Bluestone: www.mma.org/resource/what-makes-working-cities-work-2
- Town of Easton's Commercial and Industrial Property Site Finder: tinyurl.com/EastonSiteFind
- City of Somerville's SiteFinder tool: tinyurl.com/SomervilleSiteFind
- Town of Ashland's Downtown Planning Initiative: courbanize.com/projects/ashlanddowntown/comaps/48