A Look into the Real Upzoning Impacts of the MBTA Community Act in the Greater Boston Area

Subtheme(s): Upzoning, Exclusionary Zoning

Amelia Baum, Simone Peter, and Riccardo Fiorista

Simone
- Lot of discussion going on about the MBTA communities act
- Especially population in smaller towns is worried and ask for exceptions
- Petition, Facebook groups planning demonstrations etc against

MBTA Communities Act

- [The MBTA Communities Act](#) (2021) requires municipalities within the MBTA's service area (including commuter rail) to allow multifamily zoning "by-right" in areas within 0.5 miles from a transit stop. Areas near rapid transit stops have stricter requirements.

- Many suburbs are [pushing back against these requirements](#), claiming that this upzoning will significantly disrupt the urban form and nature of daily life in these places.

Community Category	Deadline
Rapid transit community	12/31/2023
Commuter rail community	12/31/2024
Adjacent community	12/31/2024
Adjacent small town	12/31/2025

MBTA Communities

Community Category
- Rapid Transit
- Commuter Rail
- Adjacent Community
- Adjacent Small Town
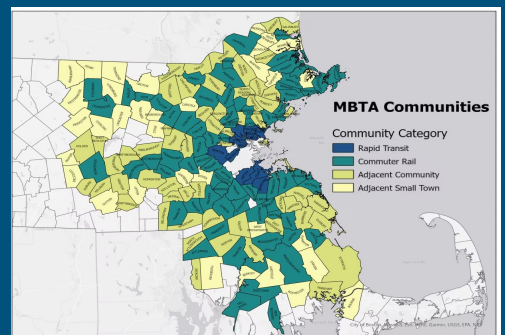
Simone
MBTA Communities Act says:
- Minimum gross density of 15 units per acre
- Located not more than 0.5 miles from a commuter rail station, subway station, ferry terminal or bus station, if applicable
- No age restrictions and suitable for families with children

What are the implications of the MBTA Communities Act on exclusionary zoning, densification, and demographic change?

Amelia

What are the implications of the MBTA Communities Act?

1. How much real **housing density** would need to be added to each municipality to make it compliant with the **MBTA Communities Act**?
2. What is the **accessibility** of these areas for certain Points of Interests such as hospitals or schools, and how might **upzoning** affect that?
3. What do the **demographic trends** MBTA communities look like over the last few decades? How might these changes affect the need for and implications of upzoning?

Amelia

Audience & Purpose

Purpose: Empower stakeholders with comprehensive insights into the prescribed zoning impacts of the MBTA Communities Act while offering valuable context on evolving demographic trends in communities.

Audience: policymakers, city council members, and members of the public who want to be better informed about the real implications of the MBTA Communities Act.

Amelia

Preliminary Analysis


% Single Family Zoning By Municipality

MBTA network

Riccardo
- Darker red color refers to municipalities with higher % of existing single family zoning, lighter red refers to areas with lower % of single family zoning.
- For context, Boston, Cambridge and many municipalities closest to the coast have close to 0% single family zoning (which is not to say they do not have single family homes, single family zoning means that ONLY single family homes are allowed to be built).
- Some suburban cities, especially in the south west of Boston like: Weston, Natick, Hopkington, Dover, Lincoln have nearly 100% single family zoning.

Preliminary Analysis

- Most central areas are eligible
- Inner-ring suburbs are mostly not affected

MBTA C.A. Stations and Municipalities
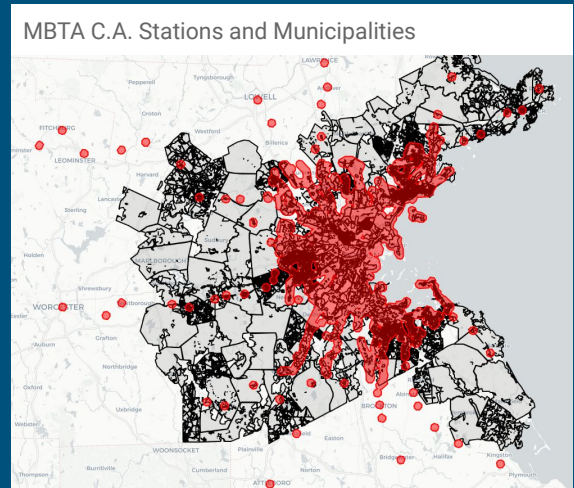
Riccardo

- Most areas in central Boston/Cambridge are eligible, but most of these are already not zoned for single family
- Not a lot of land area in the inner ring suburbs are eligible

Datasets

- MAPC provided:
  - Zoning map

- Additional:
  - MBTA General Transit Feed Specification
  - American Community Survey data (demographics)
  - Points of Interest (OpenStreetMap)

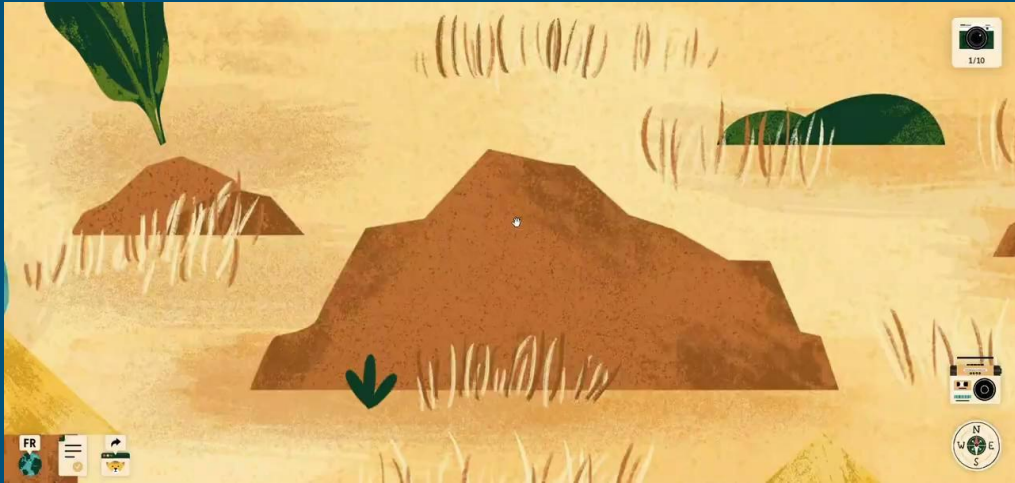Riccardo

MBTA Communities Tracker Map
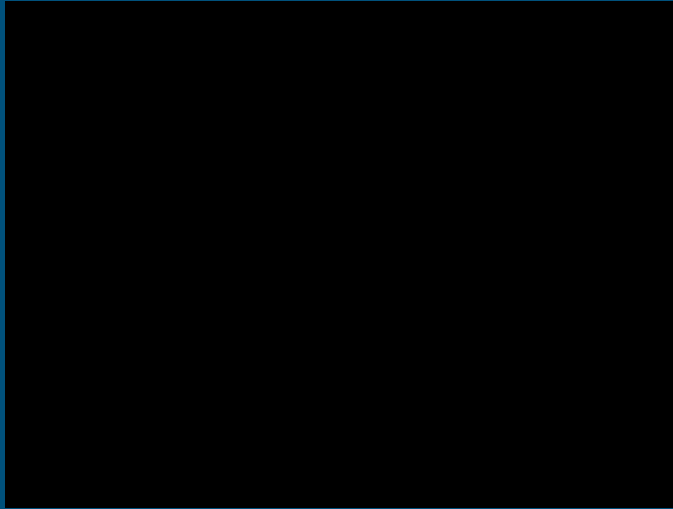
Simone
- Reader-driven (each city council might be more interested in their own area)
- Considers the same topic as our project
- Can hover over certain areas and get additional information (however, in this case very limited)
- No zoom possible

Who cares? - La savane
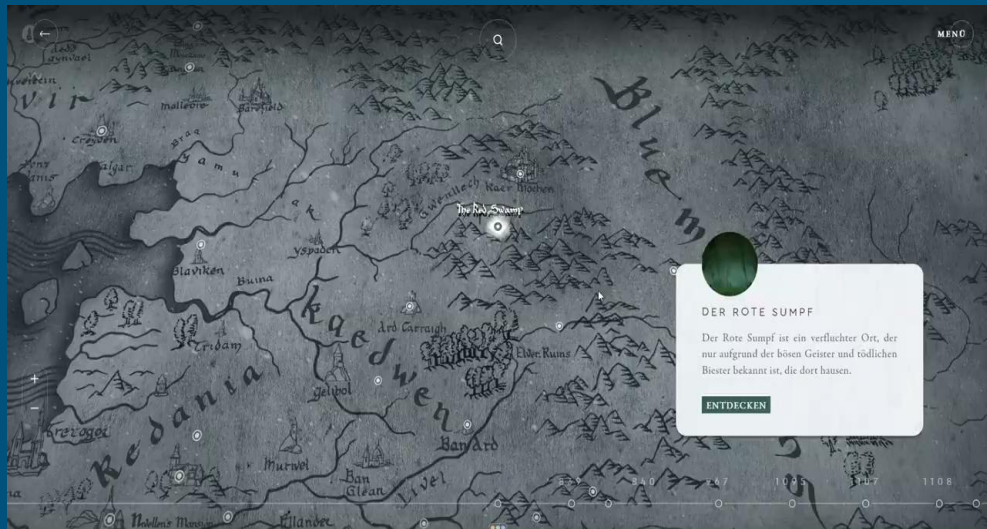

https://whocares.bigbump.fr/

Simone
- Reader-driven
- Easy to handle
- Allows zoom-in
- Get information about specific parts (in this case animals)
- Overview over all animals, could be implemented in terms of a comparison between different/neighboring regions in our project

The Witcher

Simone
- reader-driven
- Zoom-in on map, click certain parts and get brief overview, opportunity to explore more (get referred to separate page with more details)
- Map shows additional features, which could in our case be zoning data and existing transit stations
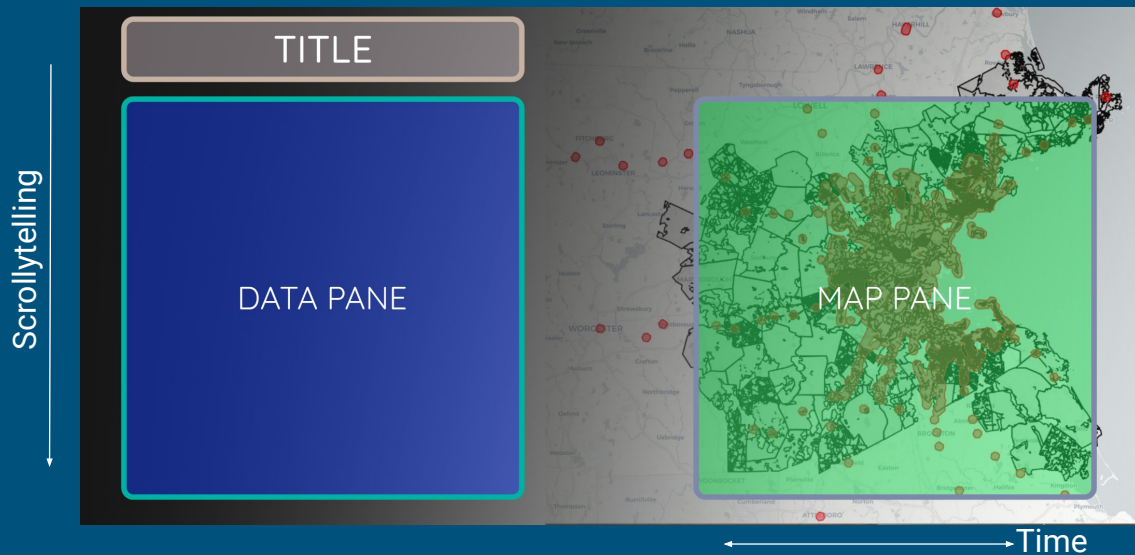
General Layout

The MBTA Communities Act

What are the implications on

Exclusionary Zoning,
Densification, and
Demographic Change?
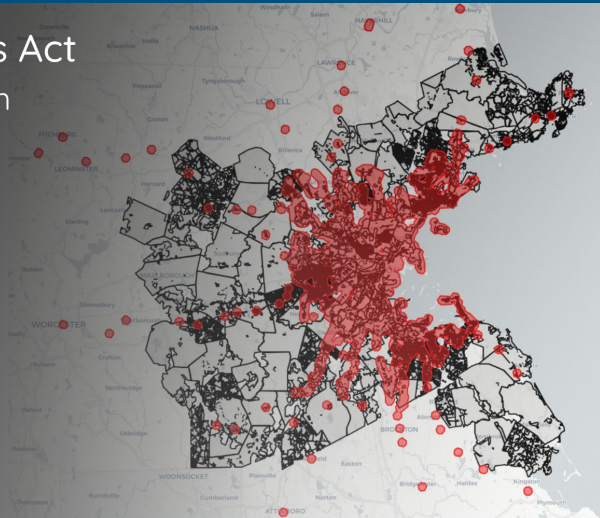
Simone

Simone
- Data pane for additional explanations (including user-defined parameters)
- Map for overview and geographic intuition
- Left part scrollytelling, introducing author-driven component, map on the right reader-driven

Soliciting Feedback

- Interesting to show the demographic changes over time
- How to integrate accessibility metrics and think about accessibility in the context of a hypothetical upzoned future
- How to ground the interactive data exploration with narratives about certain municipalities that are resisting the act

Amelia
We are interested in soliciting feedback on our slides in a few key areas.