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Vision for Sustainable Greater Boston 2050

Socio-Economy

Metropolitan Boston in the year 2050 is a socially and economically vibrant region, characterized by greatly reduced poverty, first-rate educational and healthcare systems accessible to all, strong alternative energy and green building sectors, and a thriving recreational, arts and cultural scene. In the first decades of the 21st century, a broad recognition developed that GDP and material consumption were poor indicators of personal and societal well-being. As a result, unquestioned economic growth was abandoned as the driving force, and the U.S. economy has undergone significant transformation in which spending on defense and other non-productive sectors has been substantially lowered. Moreover, the average work week has been reduced to about 30 hours, allowing much more time for leisure and recreational and social activities. With priorities reordered towards advanced education, wellness, universal access to quality preventive health care, shorter work hours and lower material consumption, the region enjoys reduced poverty and inequality and measurable reductions in our ecological footprint.

The delight of Boston residents who work on average 30 hours per week reflects a value shift towards the appreciation of leisure time for recreation, family, and community engagements, and away from the narrow focus on consumption of material goods. While a shorter work week, and consequently lower incomes, have decreased personal consumption, this has not resulted in a decline in individual well-being, which has been shown to diverge from material consumption beyond a modest level of affluence. With less time spent at work and commuting, residents of the Boston region are more active, have less stress and anxiety, and are thus healthier. They enjoy more time spent with family, friends and neighbors and take advantage of the cultural affairs, art, markets, open spaces, parks and an overall vibrant urban setting. As neighborhoods become more diverse and people spend more time in public venues, race relations and cultural exchanges benefit, making the city a more habitable, equitable, supportive living space.

The restructured economy and shorter work week has created tens of thousands of new jobs, maintains very low unemployment levels, and enhances equity in the region. The poverty rate in the region has been reduced by almost 90% by 2050. Most jobs are higher-skilled, reflecting the increased number of advanced education degrees, while sufficient numbers of jobs for middle education levels exist, primarily in sustainability-oriented fields including recycling and materials reuse, retrofitting homes and other buildings to improve energy efficiency, and cultural and recreational activities. The Boston area continues to be considered a medical mecca, with globally respected hospitals and medical schools along with a world renowned biotechnology and life sciences sector. Collectively, these provide a significant job base for the region.

Improved access to higher education and quality health care continues to supply a productive, well-trained workforce. The powerful corporate accountability movement that flourished in the

early part of the century resulted in a significant reorientation and broadening of corporate missions beyond narrow financial interests to include social and environmental goals. The strong accountability and governance frameworks that have emerged benefit not just shareholders, but all stakeholders—employees, communities and the natural environment.

In the last fifty years, an overhaul of the region's health care system towards wellness, preventative care and universal access has made quality care available and affordable for the entire populace. Boston's high level medical services are now accessible to people of all races and socio-economic groups. The region leads the country in a shift towards a more equitable and efficient health care system. In 2005, the U.S. spent more per capita on health care than any other country in the world, yet millions of Americans still lacked sufficient care. In 2050, the U.S. spends far less on health care, yet with a societal focus on wellness, preventative care and access, the region's entire population benefits from an effective health care delivery system. In addition, Boston residents benefit from decreased incidence of illnesses induced by environmental pollution and inactive lifestyles (e.g., respiratory disease, diabetes, heart disease) that were so common at the turn of the century. These developments, combined with a concerted government-sector effort to eradicate urban poverty, have greatly reduced the gross inequities in health outcomes among income groups within the region.

The new, more sustainable economy is measured not by GDP, but rather by a Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) or a similar indicator to better assess quality of life and sustainability. The GPI accounts for depletion of natural resources and does not consider expenditures on pollution clean-up as a positive addition to the economy. The GPI accounts for quality and distribution of economic growth and incorporates factors such as leisure time, child care, volunteer activities and household work to account for activities that enhance the economy even if they do not include monetary exchanges.

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