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# BOSTON'S PRELIMINARY RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT

THE BEGINNING OF A SHARED JOURNEY TO HEALING, CONNECTIONS, AND ACTION



MAYOR'S OFFICE OF  
**RESILIENCE**  
—MARTIN J. WALSH, MAYOR—



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APRIL 2016

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## My Fellow Bostonians:

In December 2014, the City of Boston was proud to join 100 Resilient Cities—pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation (100RC). In our application, we proposed a broad definition of resilience that includes the social, cultural, economic and physical environment. We acknowledged our willingness to engage in the difficult conversations that are necessary to move Boston forward. Last fall, we took the important step of hiring Dr. Atyia Martin, Boston's first Chief Resilience Officer, who will lead these conversations and direct resilience efforts throughout City government and partner with communities.

As Bostonians, we think of ourselves as resilient, and we are. We persevere through long snowy winters and we rebound when tragedy strikes. But in order to be a truly resilient city, we must address our past and work together to create a shared vision that prioritizes equity for all Bostonians. As a member of 100RC, this work has begun.

Boston is a city of enormous strength, but we are also a city with deep disparities in both opportunity and outcome. As our population continues to rise, so does the gap between our richest and our poorest. The impacts of economic inequality are far-reaching and fall along lines of race, class,

ethnicity, and geography. People of color and immigrants suffer disproportionately higher rates of poverty and lag in educational attainment. Sudden shocks such as a storm, an illness, or an unexpected tragedy affect some of our neighborhoods and communities in devastating ways. Our aging infrastructure is more susceptible to crisis during storms or natural disasters, and it is our most vulnerable populations who rely most heavily on our public assets for everyday survival.

It is not enough to build taller buildings or to create flood plans and evacuation routes. Resilience must permeate every facet of our work so that all Bostonians can thrive, even in times of crisis. We are looking toward the future, implementing long-term planning initiatives in every major policy area and engaging with residents every day to create a vision that reflects all Bostonians. By building resilience into those conversations, we are building a stronger city where future generations can succeed.

As Phase 1 of this initiative comes to a close, I urge all Bostonians to continue to be a part of this conversation, and I offer my sincere thanks for your commitment to a thriving, healthy, and innovative Boston.

Sincerely,

Martin J. Walsh  
MAYOR OF BOSTON

## WHAT IS URBAN RESILIENCE?

Urban Resilience is the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.

Resilient Systems are:  
REFLECTIVE ▪ RESOURCEFUL ▪ ROBUST  
REDUNDANT ▪ FLEXIBLE ▪ INCLUSIVE  
INTEGRATED

# WHAT ARE WE DOING & WHY?

**BOSTON IS A GROWING CITY:** This growth brings tremendous challenges for our aging infrastructure, limited housing stock, and rising racial and income inequalities. However, there are incredible opportunities for building on Boston's strengths to work through our shared challenges.

Boston's Resilience Strategy is a transformative, healing journey to ensure that all of us have access and support to thrive from childhood to retirement, in our daily lives and during major emergencies. We are striving for an effective, inclusive democracy for all Bostonians so that race and class do not determine success. Join us as we weave our collective efforts together across community, government, and business to strengthen our resilience and our future.

## 100 RESILIENT CITIES (100RC)

100 Resilient Cities (100RC) is a global network pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation to help cities around the world become more resilient to the physical, social, and economic challenges that are a growing part of the 21st century. By being selected as a network member, Boston is demonstrating its commitment and leadership to building resilience. 100RC is thrilled to have Boston as a network member since December of 2014.

PHOTO BELOW: 100RC CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICERS MEETING, MEXICO CITY, NOV. 2015



## WHAT ARE OUR CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES?

### ▪ ACUTE SHOCKS

- Extreme Weather
- Infrastructure Failure
- Flooding
- Cyberattacks & Terrorism

### ▪ CHRONIC STRESSES

- Poverty/Inequity
- Lack of Social Cohesion
- Lack of Affordable Housing
- Aging Infrastructure
- Sea Level Rise
- Educational Inequities

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Equitable access to intergenerational wealth
  - Community wellbeing from childhood
- Emergency preparedness and capacity of critical infrastructure
  - Collaboration in and delivery of community governance
- Resilience integration in all long-term planning

## WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

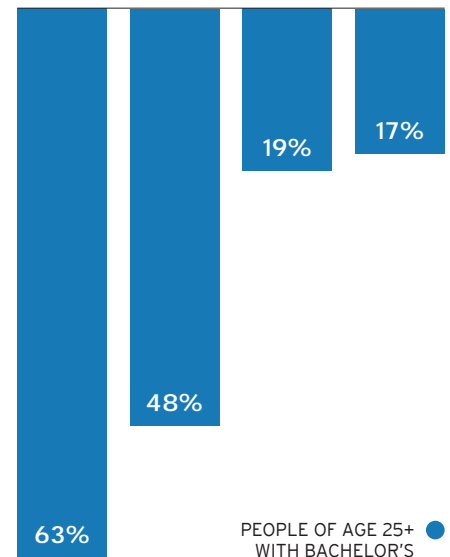
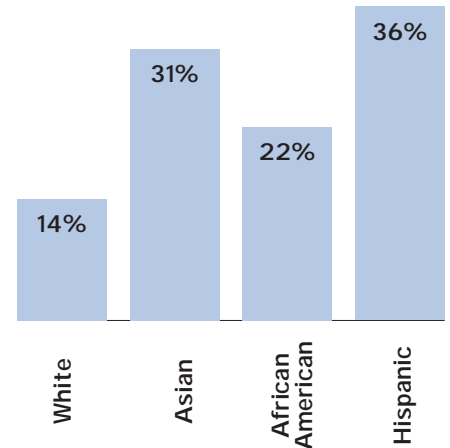
- A racially equitable and socially integrated Boston.
- Equitable access for all Bostonians to the resources and pathways that create intergenerational financial stability.
- A culture of psychological resilience that supports community healing from past and future trauma impacts on children and youth.
- 21<sup>st</sup> century infrastructure that meets the needs of all Bostonians while adapting to current and emerging threats.
- Improved City services through increased collaboration between residents, organizations, and government.
- Resilience integrated into policies, practices, decision-making and planning by Boston communities and organizations.

# WHAT HAVE



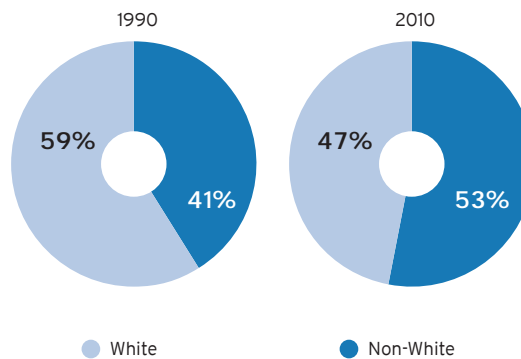
Our rapidly growing population will have increasing long-term physical and social needs.

● RATE OF POVERTY



Persistent poverty and disparities in educational attainment limit economic mobility.

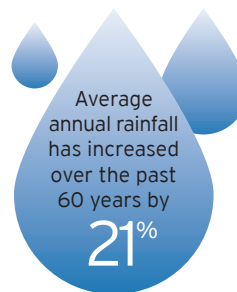
As Boston's demographics shift, so must our city's policies and priorities to reflect its changing and diverse needs.



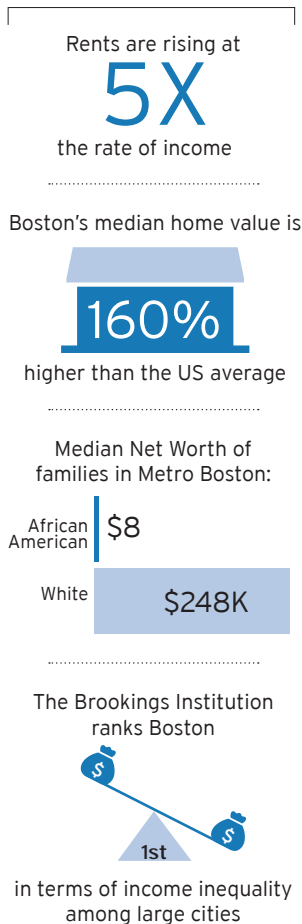
Days with temperatures over 90 degrees are projected to increase by over

**400%**

From 12 to 60 days by 2095



The City is facing urgent and increasing impacts to both its infrastructure and social systems from climate change.



## Resilience Strategy Development Process





# WE LEARNED?

## STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

From September to December 2015, Boston's Chief Resilience Officer participated in a series of community meetings and convened outreach events with four primary goals:

- Gain comprehensive understanding of the average Bostonian's perspective on racial equity and social cohesion in the city;
- Define Boston's Resilience Strategy focus and associated research needs;
- Ensure inclusive governance and engagement with diverse stakeholder participation
- Secure government and civic leadership commitment to the process and work ahead.



## WHAT WE HEARD

"We must change the culture and conversation around race in Boston."

"I don't have what I need to get my family on a path to financial security."

"I don't understand the programs, planning, and initiatives the city government has, how to engage with them, and how they support my community."

"I can't afford to live in my neighborhood anymore."

"Our city is not adequately prepared to meet future infrastructure challenges."

"Our most vulnerable children often suffer unrecognized and profound impacts from trauma."

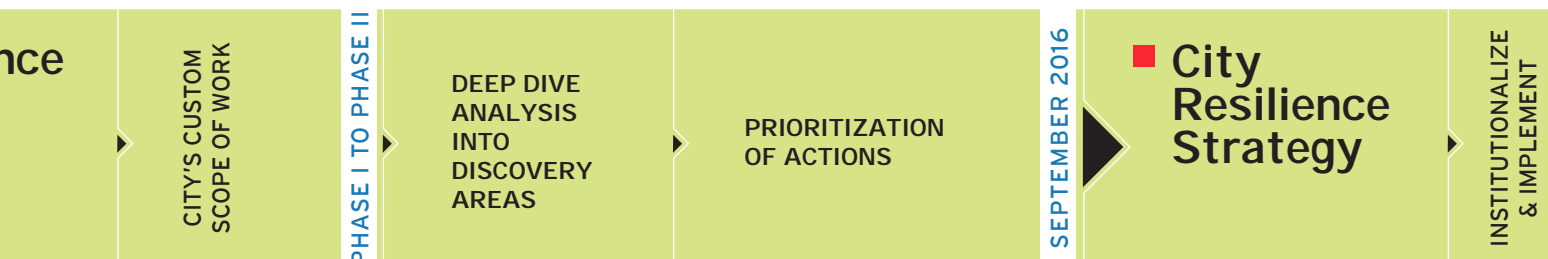
**How do we integrate resilience and equity into current Boston planning to maximize value and address unmet needs?** The Walsh administration has a deep commitment to planning for Boston's future, with many ambitious initiatives underway. To learn more about them, visit [cityofboston.gov](http://cityofboston.gov).

Open Space Plan  
Go Boston 2030  
Climate Ready Boston  
Health in all Policies

Imagine Boston 2030  
Housing a Changing City  
Greenovate Boston

Boston Creates  
Climate Action Plan  
Economic Inclusion & Equity Agenda

Small Business Plan  
Boston Public Schools Ten-Year Educational and Facility Master Plan  
Age-Friendly Boston Initiative



# WHAT WILL OUR RESILIENCE



## CROSSCUTTING THEME

### Advance Racial Equity & Strengthen Social Cohesion

#### VISION

A racially equitable and socially integrated Boston.

How can we advance racial equity in policy, practices, and culture across neighborhoods and institutions?

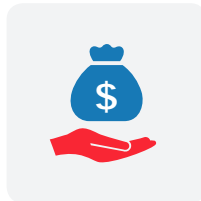
- How do we establish a shared framework for discussing racism and racial equity to support action at the individual and institutional levels?
- How do we leverage existing leaders and organizations to lead conversation and commit to action that advances racial equity?
- How can we implement policies and practices that build social cohesion across races and ethnicities?
- How do we ensure that all resilience themes and city services advance racial equity?



Racial Equity means “closing the gaps” so that race does not predict one’s success, while also improving outcomes for all. It is not just the absence of racial discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

## Resilience Themes: ASPIRATION

## Discovery Questions: F



### Close the Wealth Gap

**VISION** Equitable access to the resources and pathways that create intergenerational financial stability for all Bostonians.

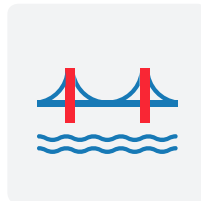
How do we close the wealth gap in communities bearing a disproportionate burden of economic inequality?



### Address Individual & Collective Trauma for Community Wellbeing

**VISION** A culture of psychological resilience that supports community healing from past individual and collective trauma while protecting against the impact of future trauma with a focus on children and youth.

How do we address the root causes of trauma in children and youth to foster psychological resilience at a community level?



### Ensure Critical Infrastructure Meets the Needs of the Most Vulnerable

**VISION** 21st century infrastructure that meets the needs of all Bostonians while adapting to current and emerging threats.

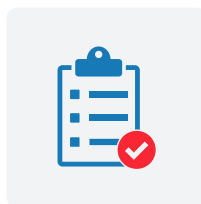
How do we maintain and improve our infrastructure systems to support all Bostonians’ needs?



### Facilitate Community Governance in the Delivery of City Services

**VISION** Improved city services through increased collaboration among residents, organizations, and government.

What are the most effective ways for the community and government to partner on decision-making to improve city services?



### Adopt a Resilience Lens for All Planning, Policies, and Practice

**VISION** Resilience integrated into policies, practices, decision-making and planning by Boston communities and organizations

How can Boston build a resilience lens that informs critical future planning, policy, and programmatic initiatives?

# STRATEGY ADDRESS?

## : FURTHER RESEARCH + ANALYSIS



- How do we prevent individuals and families currently living in Boston from being displaced from neighborhoods because of the increasing cost of housing?
- How do we use existing social networks and organizations to connect people to economic opportunities?
- How do we overcome barriers to asset building and prepare Bostonians for employment and business opportunities for financial security?
- What role can homeownership play in intergenerational wealth-building and financial stability strategies?



- What types of approaches maintain the mental health and well-being of children and youth in the face of community stresses and trauma?
- What are the impacts of social inequities and exposure to violence on children and youth, and what specific needs does this create?
- How can effective citywide systemic interventions reduce the impact of childhood psychological trauma from chronic stresses and acute shocks?
- How can we coordinate and increase access to long-term mental health services for children and youth?



- How do we ensure that infrastructure investments create multiple benefits and factor in the needs of socially vulnerable communities?
- How do we plan for emergencies based on our previous disaster experience, projected infrastructure threats, and communities' vulnerabilities and strengths?
- How can interdependencies between existing infrastructure assets lead to disruptions and how do communities' vulnerabilities and strengths affect overall outcomes?
- How does transportation infrastructure affect the daily lives of residents and their ability to respond to emergencies?



- How do we break down information silos across city agencies to improve communities' access to city services and data?
- How do we infuse community participation into decision-making for city service delivery?
- How do we ensure that socially vulnerable communities are part of the decision-making process?
- How can we promote civic engagement, expand opportunities to develop civic leadership, and increase resources for community/grassroots initiatives?



- How do we ensure that key city planning initiatives are integrated into the Resilience Strategy and the Resilience Strategy is integrated into other plans?
- How do we ensure that the Resilience Strategy is adopted in government policies and practices and those of non-governmental partners across the city?
- How can a resilience lens be incorporated into city budget decisions?



What word best describes your hopes for the Resilience Strategy process?  
—Resilience Steering Committee and Racial Equity Working Group Launch, December 2015

## HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

Establishing a resilience strategy for the City of Boston will only be successful if we hear from voices across our city. Phase II of our strategy will consist of idea generation, strategy partner engagement, and preparing resources for long-term implementation. We encourage you to visit [BostonResilienceCollaborative.com](http://BostonResilienceCollaborative.com) to:

- Nominate yourself or someone you know to be a member of one of the Resilience Strategy Working Groups
- Learn more about ongoing Resilience & Racial Equity Events in Boston including:
  - The Racial Equity Summit on May 16-17, 2016 at Northeastern University
  - The Resilience Strategy Summit in July 2016
- Sign up to stay informed about the Resilience Strategy Process

Please email the Mayor's Office of Resilience with ideas or questions at [Resilience@boston.gov](mailto:Resilience@boston.gov).

## SPECIAL THANKS TO

Resilience Steering Committee  
Racial Equity Working Group  
A Better City  
Boston Alliance on Race and Equity  
Boston Alliance on Community Health  
Boston Branch of the NAACP  
Boston Children's Chorus  
Boston Children's Foundation  
City of Boston Economic Development Cabinet  
City of Boston Energy, Environment, and Open Space Cabinet  
City of Boston Health and Human Services Cabinet  
Charlestown Substance Abuse Coalition

Chinatown Coalition  
Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation  
Facing Our History and Ourselves  
Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)  
International Sustainability Guild  
City Life/Vida Urbana  
MA Black & Latino Legislative Caucus  
Mattapan United  
Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH)  
South Boston Collaborative Advisory Network (CAN)  
The Boston Harbor Association  
United South End Settlements (USES)  
And many more...



**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF  
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—MARTIN J. WALSH, MAYOR—



## ABOUT THE RESILIENCE STRATEGY PROCESS AND PRELIMINARY RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT

Boston's Preliminary Resilience Assessment (PRA) is based on stakeholder engagement, previous and current relevant initiatives, and preliminary research. As a result, the Chief Resilience Officer, Resilience Steering Committee, and Racial Equity Working Group developed the Resilience Themes and Discovery Area Questions in the PRA. The PRA is a critical milestone in developing Boston's Resilience Strategy.

The objective of the Boston Resilience Strategy is to provide a framework for building resilience. This framework is meant to trigger action, investment and support to facilitate change both from within city government and more broadly throughout Boston. This will be an inclusive process that needs participation and ownership from all partners.

The strategy development process is divided into three phases: Phase I establishes the foundation for the Resilience Strategy, Phase II is strategy build-out, and Phase III begins the implementation of the strategy. The City of Boston is now at the end of Phase I which will guide a more targeted discussion of approaches, actions, and implementation for Phase II.

Rather than a static traditional written plan, the Resilience Strategy will become the collective efforts of the Boston Resilience Collaborative (BRC) for development, implementation, and measurement of progress. The BRC will consist of the Mayor's Office of Resilience, the Resilience Steering Committee, the Racial Equity Working Group, the remaining Working Groups currently under development, and others willing to be active partners.

**DATA SOURCES** | U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census; 2014 1-Year American Community Survey; Guiding Growth: Towards an Inclusive City, 2016; Zillow Home Value Index, 2015 1-Year average; Federal Reserve Bank of Boston; The Brookings Institution; U.S. Census Bureau, 1870-2010 Decennial Census, BRA Research Division Analysis; Boston Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2014; Boston Water & Sewer Commission Task Force Final Report, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 - 2013 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), BRA Research Division analysis.

**PHOTO CREDITS** | Mayor's Office Photographers; Jesse Costa, WBUR; Bertelsmann Foundation; Benji Aird, Unsplash.