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What Keeps 115 U.S. Mayors Up at Night

Mayors' views on housing, climate challenges and federal funding cutbacks

Cities are increasingly on the front lines for addressing housing, climate and other challenges with less support from higher levels of government, according to the recently-released 2017 Menino [Survey](#) of Mayors. The report was issued by Boston University's Initiative on Cities based on interviews with 115 mayors from cities with populations of 75,000+ from 39 states.

Housing

Across the country, mayors of cities of all sizes are concerned about housing access and affordability. Mayors targeted a variety of [strategies](#) they felt would improve their city's housing opportunities, such as increasing affordable multi-bedroom units (39%), increasing homeownership rates (36%) and modernizing/replacing older housing stock (30%). Mayors saw potential in public-private partnerships to help create affordable housing in light of less support from higher levels of government. The survey indicated that 51% of mayors cited [housing costs](#) as the top reason people leave their city, followed by jobs and schools.

Boston recently introduced several housing creation programs, including the sale of city-owned parcels to private developers primarily for affordable and middle income housing projects. The Research Bureau recently released its assessment of the first phase of this Parcel Disposition [Initiative](#).

Climate Resiliency

Two-thirds of the mayors said that cities should take action on climate change even if it means sacrificing revenues and/or spending financial resources. The mayors identified a number of city-level climate resiliency [policies](#) to pursue, such as upgrading the energy efficiency of city facilities and vehicles, increasing residential density, updating building codes and reducing the number of vehicles on the road.

Boston is updating zoning and building regulations and developing plans to protect vulnerable areas from coastal and river flooding, as recommended in the Climate Ready Boston plan.

Federal Funding and City Needs

Mayors are more pessimistic about the level of financial support from federal and state governments. In the face of federal cuts, mayors believe new state taxes or resources are the most promising way to close funding gaps for education and roads and bridges, while citing new local taxes or resources to fund water infrastructure and bike and pedestrian improvements. Federal funding was considered necessary for mass transit and affordable housing projects.

Boston lacks the authority available to many peer cities to adopt new revenue options without state approval under Massachusetts' strict home rule requirements, despite the City being the premier economic engine of the region.