

GREATER BOSTON CHAMBER'S YOUNG RESIDENTS SURVEY SHOWS HOUSING IS KEY TO RETAINING AND GROWING WORKFORCE

On April 22, 2026, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce [published a survey](#) of Boston-area youth ages 20–30, with a focus on factors motivating them to either stay in or leave the region as they build careers and start families. The survey was a follow-up to [a similar one](#) the chamber conducted in 2023 and published in March 2024.

More than a quarter of survey respondents [reportedly plan on leaving](#) Greater Boston in the next five years, with men under age 25, Latinos, and Essex County residents among the most likely to say they plan to leave. A similar overall share of youth (25 percent) said they were planning on leaving [in the 2023 survey](#).

Most respondents listed job availability and the cost of rent as “very important” factors helping determine whether they remain in Greater Boston. Massachusetts had [45,000 fewer total jobs](#) in February 2026 than it did in February 2020. Meanwhile, the cost of living has increased markedly, with average Greater Boston rents [rising by 31.3 percent](#) in the same time frame.

Another 45 percent of respondents said their ability to buy a home was very important. According to Boston Indicators, from 2021 to 2025, the minimum income needed to afford an entry-level home in Greater Boston [jumped by 66 percent](#), from \$98,000 to \$162,000.

“Housing that is affordable” is the most important issue Greater Boston youth want local leaders to prioritize, with [50 percent of survey respondents](#) including it in their top three issues to be addressed. Renters, youth currently

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It's a process to talk to homeless people and work with them to get them into housing. If you're make it conditional [on getting mental health or addiction treatment], they're not going to come in."

**Council of Large Public Housing Authorities CEO
[La Shelle Dozier](#)**

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

In 2024, there were more Massachusetts senior citizens living alone in 3+ bedroom houses than there were family households led by young adults (under age 35) living in 3+ bedroom houses.

[Source: [U.S. Census Bureau Micro Data Access Tool](#)]

FACT OF THE MONTH

living with family members, and women ages 25–30 were especially likely to want policymakers to prioritize low-cost housing.

The Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce survey was published against a backdrop of a longstanding outmigration trend in Massachusetts particularly acute among young adults. In 2023, the most recent year for which data is available, residents between ages 26 and 34 [accounted for 46 percent](#) of total net outmigration from Massachusetts. Florida and New Hampshire were [the most common destinations](#) for taxpayers leaving Massachusetts in 2023.

Outside of IRS data, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that [a net of 33,000 people](#) left Massachusetts for other states between July 2024 and June 2025, up from 19,000 who left [the year prior](#). While housing cost and availability are not the only reasons for this outmigration problem, the Greater Boston Chamber survey suggests they are significant ones.

Net domestic migration to Massachusetts has been negative [every year since 2011](#), but the state's population has still grown in most years due to international migration and an excess of births over deaths. With [stricter federal immigration policies](#) and [negative private-sector employment growth](#), Massachusetts could see [a substantial decline](#) in the workforce as our population ages. In fact, between March 2025 and February 2026, the Massachusetts labor force declined in volume [every month for which data is available](#). If this becomes a long-term trend, the implications for the state's economy and budget [could be dire](#). Broad-based housing affordability and abundance could help stem the tide of outmigration and set Massachusetts up for better economic vitality.

A PREVIEW OF PIONEER'S AI DATABASE OF LOCAL LAND USE REGULATIONS IN MASSACHUSETTS

In 2005, Pioneer Institute published [a database](#) of municipal housing regulations in Greater Boston that has since informed [academic research](#) on the effects of these policies on housing prices and permitting volumes. Today, however, the database is outdated, limited in scope to Greater Boston, and difficult to use for broader analysis due to its reliance on hand-collected data and questionnaires completed by municipal officials.

In January 2025, Pioneer began planning an AI-driven update to the database. Drawing on the original database, practitioner input, and guidance from technical advisors, we identified roughly 30 core prompts to address. These prompts span a wide range of housing-related issues, including affordability mandates, accessory dwelling units, dimensional requirements, development approval processes, environmental regulations, and wastewater infrastructure rules.

In the summer of 2025, an intern compiled answers for an initial sample of 30 cities and towns using municipal websites and other sources that aggregate local regulations. That sample was then used to train a large language model (LLM) to extract information directly from bylaws and ordinances in a fraction of the time required by human researchers. The process involved several rounds of refining coding language and resolving discrepancies through human review. As of this writing, Pioneer is conducting reliability checks by running the model multiple times for each data point to confirm consistent results.

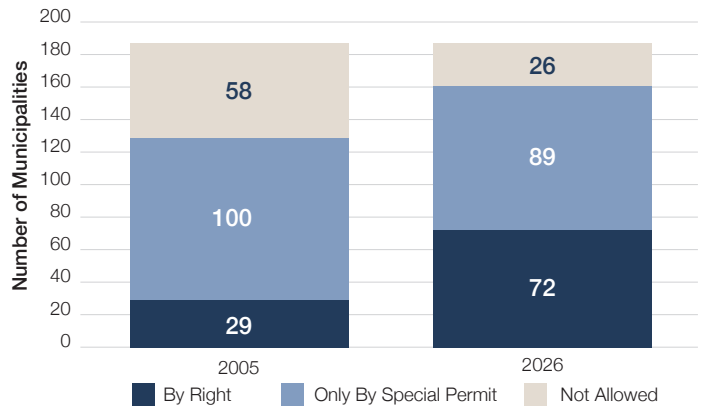
The findings not only show how the LLM interprets regulatory details in individual municipalities, but—when paired with the original database—also allow for comparisons of the regulatory landscape over time. For example, the model suggests that since 2005, a growing number of Greater Boston municipalities have allowed attached single-family homes, commonly known as townhomes or rowhomes, to be built without special zoning approvals (see Figure 1).

RECENT OP-ED

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[Banker & Tradesman](#)

Figure 1: Allowance for Townhomes in Greater Boston by Municipality, 2005 and 2026*



* The municipality only needs to allow townhomes by right in at least one district to be coded as allowing them by right.

The final database is slated for release this summer after beta testing. If you would like to be a beta tester, please reach out to Andrew Mikula at amikula@pioneerinstitute.org. Eventually, Pioneer hopes to release an expanded database.

In the meantime, this database will help policy researchers and academics study how land use regulations affect housing market outcomes. In marketing it to the public, we envision several additional types of users: 1) local officials and reformers seeing how the LLM interprets land use regulations in their community and others; 2) practitioners seeking insight on where it is easiest and most expeditious to build new homes; and 3) lawmakers and lobbyists examining priority areas for reform, including with state legislation.

In fact, many of the regulations examined in the database are already the subject of pending legislation. In April 2026, Governor Healey's economic development bill [included a provision](#) that would codify definitions and guardrails around local site plan review in state law. According to Pioneer's LLM, at least 94 percent of the state's municipalities require site plan review procedures for at least some new housing developments.

COMING SOON

Upcoming issues of *The House Call* will include segments on:

- Rent control
- 2025 building permit volumes
- And more!