

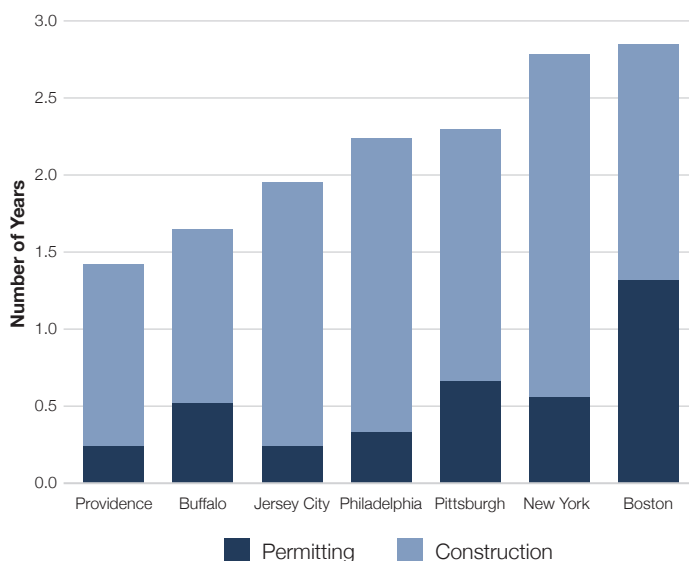
NATIONWIDE, GREATER BOSTON HAS THE THIRD-LONGEST PERMITTING TIMELINE FOR NEW HOUSING

A September 2026 study out of the University of Chicago and Princeton quantifies how long it takes local authorities to approve new housing developments in 60 large U.S. metropolitan areas. The results show that, between 2009 and 2025, [it took an average of 16 months](#) to issue a building permit for new housing after an application was submitted in Greater Boston. Only in San Francisco (18 months) and Miami (17) did it take longer.

The study also quantifies construction timelines in the same metropolitan areas. Greater Boston is third on this list as well, with a typical new building approved for occupancy [nearly three years](#) after the initial application filing. In San Francisco and Miami, it's closer to 3.5 years. This means that, by the time an average Greater Boston home builder is allowed to start building, construction for an analogous project in Phoenix or Jacksonville has already been completed for six months.

Still, among Northeastern metropolises, it's the permitting timeline that really sets Greater Boston apart. The average

Figure 1: Average Residential Permitting and Construction Timeline among Major Northeastern Metropolitan Areas, 2000–2025*



*Some metropolitan areas don't have data available for the full study period.

As of 2024, South Boston is the Boston neighborhood with the most developer-built income-restricted housing units under the city's Inclusionary Development Policy. Meanwhile, Roxbury is home to the most units built with city funds from "payment in lieu" IDP arrangements.

[Source: [Boston Municipal Research Bureau](#)]

FACT OF THE MONTH

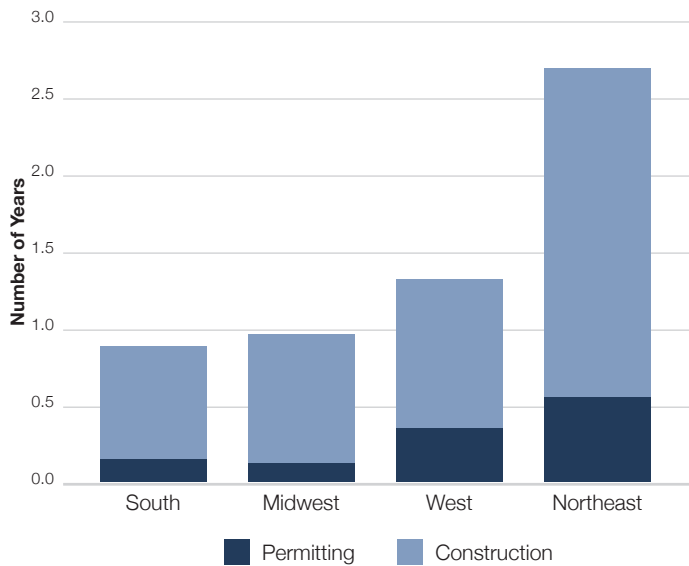
length of the permitting process in the region is more than twice as long as any other major metro within 300 miles of Boston (see Figure 1).

The gaps in permitting timelines are partially attributable to the type of housing being built. Multifamily buildings take longer to both permit and build than single-family homes. In 2025, Greater Boston had a larger share of new home authorizations in multifamily buildings than [91 percent](#) of the nation's metropolitan and "[micropolitan](#)" (i.e., relatively small) statistical areas. That said, even in large cities with relatively lengthy permitting processes, like Seattle and Oakland, multifamily housing developments [are typically approved faster](#) than *single-family* ones are in Greater Boston.

The University of Chicago and Princeton study shows that longer permitting timelines correlate with both higher home prices and a slower rate of home production. Across the country, the average length of the permitting process [has generally increased](#) since 2000. Most metrics show that the average time to permit peaked between 2020 and 2022 for both single-family and multifamily homes.

While coastal cities like Miami, San Francisco, and Boston top the list of longest average permitting timelines nationwide, at a regional level, the Midwest has the shortest permitting timelines in the nation. A weighted average shows that a typical housing development in the Northeast has a permitting process [nearly five times longer](#) than a typical development in the Midwest (see Figure 2). Figure 2 also shows that, in the Northeast, it takes an average of more than two years to complete the development after a permit is issued, twice as long as anywhere else in the country.

Figure 2: Weighted Average Residential Permitting and Construction Timeline by Region, 2000–2025*



*Some metropolitan areas don't have data available for the full study period.

That said, the individual cities with both the highest permitting volumes and fastest processes are in the South. On average, since 2018, Little Rock, Arkansas has approved permits for new housing [in about two weeks](#), the shortest permitting timeline in the study. Meanwhile, Jacksonville, Florida was [the only city](#) that issued more than 100,000 residential permits over the full study period of 2000–2025, likely a reflection of both a fast pace of growth and a large share of single-family homes rather than multifamily. Durham, North Carolina issued [the most permits per capita](#) — from 2010 to 2025, roughly one for every 10 residents.

After a surge in home construction in 2024 and 2025, many parts of the South and West have seen stable and even falling home prices [in recent months](#). But expediting the delivery of new homes starts with a streamlined and predictable permitting process that is lacking in most of Greater Boston.



COURTS AGAIN UPHOLD CONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE MBTA COMMUNITIES ACT

On September 18, 2026, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) [rejected](#) the Town of Marshfield's legal arguments that the MBTA Communities Act violated the state constitution and the Local Mandate Law. The [MBTA Communities Act](#), a 2021 law formally known as Chapter 40A Section 3A, requires cities and towns with access to transit to create at least some zoning capacity for multifamily housing.

Marshfield originally sued the state [in February 2025](#) after [two failed town meeting votes](#) to adopt a 3A-compliant zoning district. Among other assertions, the town's lawyers argued that Section 3A constitutes an “unfunded mandate” under the 1981 [Local Mandate Law](#), which prohibits the state from imposing direct costs on municipalities without providing funding to pay those costs.

As part of a court case involving eight other towns, a Superior Court rejected that argument in [June 2025](#), with presiding judge Mark Gildea [referring to the related costs](#) as “indirect” and indefinite. Marshfield alone appealed to the SJC.

In the September 2026 decision, the SJC similarly [ruled](#) that Marshfield failed to demonstrate that it “incurred costs outside...incidental local administration expenses and voluntarily incurred expenses” related to MBTA Communities Act compliance.

Marshfield also argued that, since town meeting rejected its Section 3A compliance approach, the state's attempts to enforce the law amounted to a violation of its citizens' voting rights. However, since only the town and its select board were listed as plaintiffs, the court ruled that they [lacked standing](#) to allege that voters' constitutional rights were violated.

“

On Cape Cod, hotels and restaurants have been providing dorm-style housing [for their employees] for a while. But we shouldn't be comfortable with returning to the 1800s when employment and housing were tied. Workers can't leave one without losing the other and that creates a power dynamic no one should have to accept.”

Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Cape Cod Executive Director [Stefanie Coxe](#)

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Other towns have made similar constitutional arguments against the MBTA Communities Act in court, notably Milton. The Milton case, [decided in January 2025](#), simultaneously upheld the law's constitutionality and mandated that the state repeat its regulatory rollout of the law, in practice giving many municipalities more time to comply.

As of August 31, 2026, [all but nine](#) of the 177 MBTA communities are compliant with the law. As of September 11, [more than 10,000 homes](#) are in development under Section 3A in 104 individual projects, including more than 1,800 income-restricted homes.

Assessing the full impact of the MBTA Communities Act will take more time. Very few Section 3A developments have been occupied by their new residents. The Lex Residences, a 32-unit condo building in Lexington, was one of the first to open, with [a ribbon-cutting ceremony](#) held in July 2026.

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