

MBI

MASSACHUSETTS
BROADBAND INSTITUTE



at the MassTech
Collaborative

Central Massachusetts Region Massachusetts Broadband and Digital Equity Listening Session

October 2023

Agenda

Welcome!

Introducing MBI

Statewide Planning Process

Digital Equity and Broadband in the Cape & Islands

Breakout Sessions

Thank You & Closing

Meeting Ground Rules



Be **fully present** by not checking your phone or computer

Know when to lead versus **creating space for others to speak**

Be open and listen to others. Even when you disagree, suspend judgment, and look for common ground.

Recognize that **we are all approaching this process with different levels of understanding and lived experiences** surrounding equity and digital equity.



01

Introducing MBI

About the Massachusetts Broadband Institute



***MBI's mission** is to make affordable high-speed Internet available to all homes, businesses, schools, libraries, medical facilities, government offices, and other public places across the Commonwealth. MBI works closely with key stakeholders to bridge the digital divide in Massachusetts.*

Investments: UMass Lowell

The University of Massachusetts Lowell will lead a network of higher education and community partners in a comprehensive Digital Equity Partnership effort covering the Gateway Cities of **Leominster and Fitchburg** and more broadly across the many communities of the Merrimack Valley, Northern Worcester County and the North Shore.

How to get involved?

Connect with the UMass Lowell Team!

Robin Toof, Co-Director, Center for Community Research & Engagement robin_toof@uml.edu

Senior Director, Innovation & Workforce Development Initiatives
Thomas_ODonnell@uml.edu

Carol C. McDonough, Professor, MSP
President, Carol_McDonough@uml.edu



Investments: Tech Goes Home

Expanding the TGH program to reach learners in **Worcester** that will receive **digital literacy instruction, a new device**, and registration support for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) – a \$30 federal subsidy for broadband service.

How to get involved?

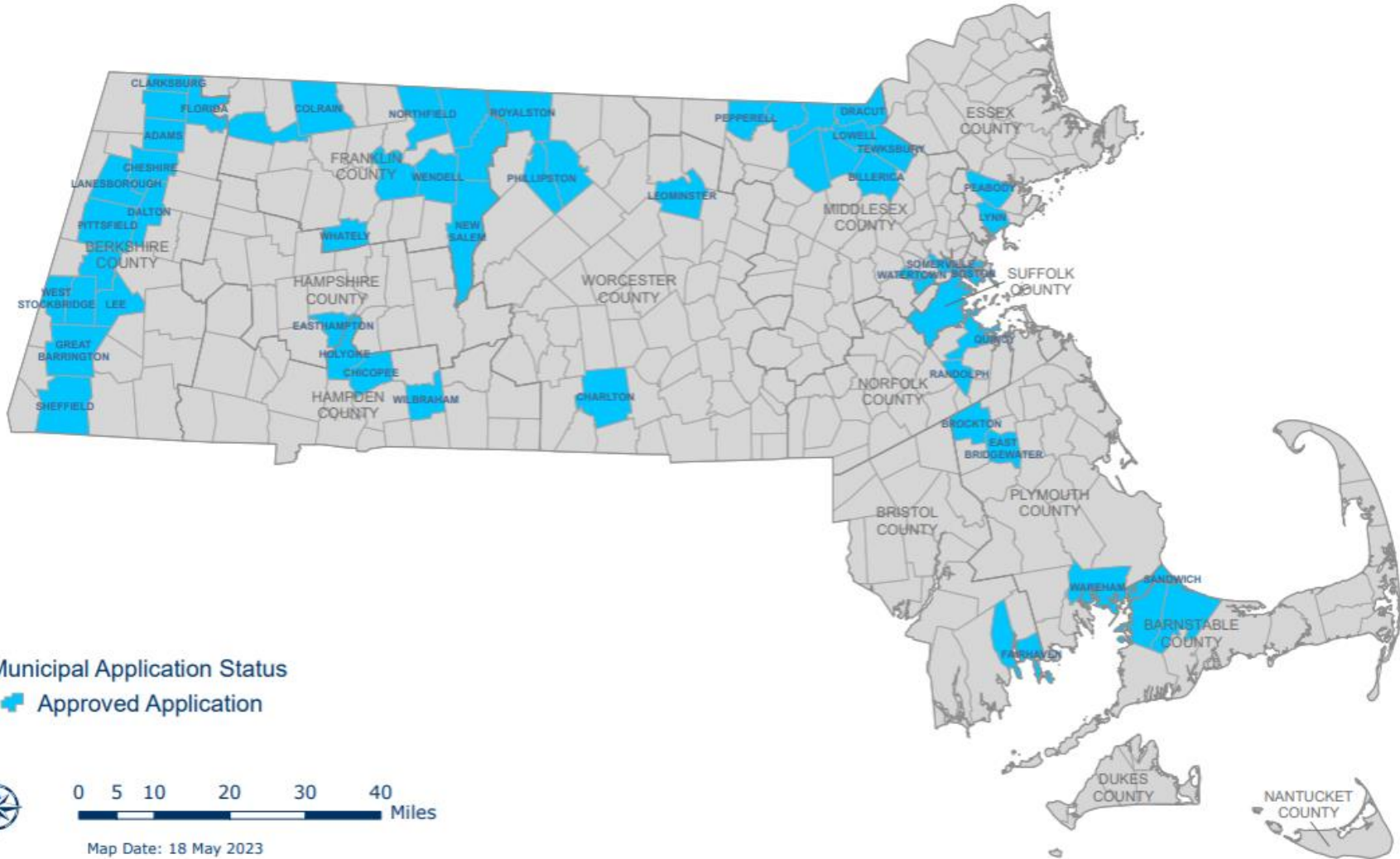
Refer learners to partner sites via TGH Staff and [program website!](#)



MBI's Digital Equity Programs and Partnerships

Central MA Participants

- Ashby
- Charlton
- Leominster
- Pepperell
- Templeton
- Winchendon
- Worcester



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Massachusetts Broadband & Digital Equity Funding

\$75M - State ARPA Digital Equity
Fund

\$175M - US Treasury Capital Projects
Fund

\$1M - NTIA Digital Equity Act
Planning Grant

\$147M - NTIA Broadband Equity,
Access,
and Deployment Grant (including
\$5M Planning Grant)





02

Statewide Planning Process

State Broadband and Digital Equity Planning

The State Digital Equity Plan will include...

- Vision and input gathered from communities across the state in the planning process
- Community-identified barriers to digital equity
- An assessment of what's working to advance digital equity
- Strategies to build on existing data, reports, and plans



How you can further shape the plan!



Contribute to Asset Mapping Database

Fill out Asset Mapping form with relevant assets including programs, organizations, reports, engagement activities



Take our Public Survey

Send to your friends and family!



Promote a Listening Session

Tell your networks about the regional listening sessions!

Pittsfield 9/13

Holyoke 9/14

Lowell 9/20

Hyannis 9/28

Boston 9/30

Greenfield 10/3

Timeline



→ Visit broadband.masstech.org for upcoming events and ways to get involved.

The background of the slide features a complex network diagram with numerous blue nodes connected by thin lines, creating a web-like structure. A dark blue horizontal bar is positioned across the upper middle of the slide, containing the number '03' in a light blue font. The overall color scheme is dark blue with lighter blue accents.

03

Existing Conditions



Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

– National Digital Inclusion Alliance

Determining Factors of Digital Access



Connection

Fast
Affordable



Adequate Device

Router
Personal Computer /Laptop

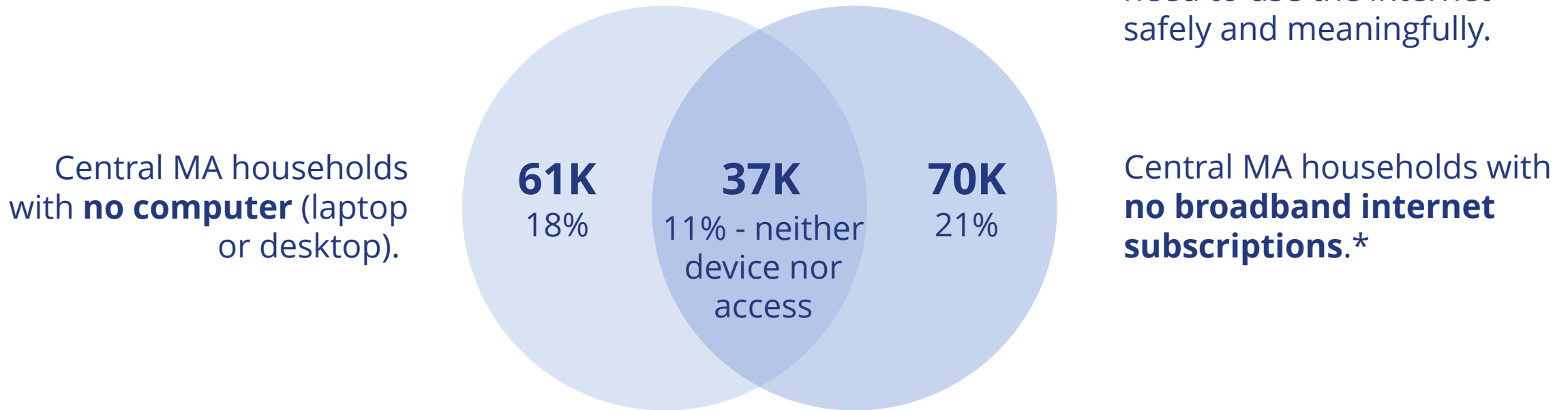


Literacy

Use of Technology
Ensuring functioning equipment
Evaluating quality of information and privacy risks

Digital Gaps in Central Massachusetts

Of **335,500 households** in the region...

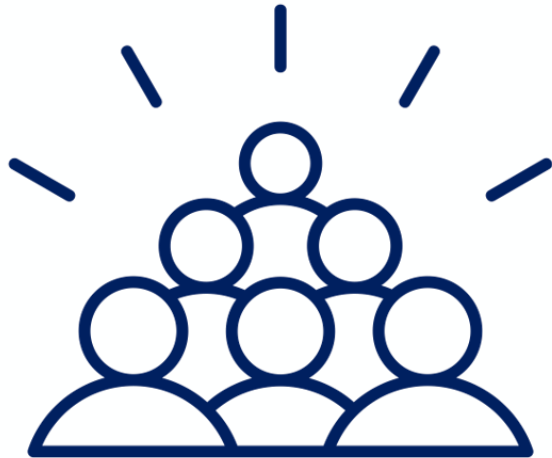


Many more face challenges with finding the support they need to use the internet safely and meaningfully.

These challenges have **disproportionate impact for specific population groups** depending on a range of socioeconomic, historical, and geographic factors.

* Residents with no broadband access (cable, fiber optic, or DSL) in their household. **Source:** U.S. Census Bureau

Statewide Survey - Preliminary Findings



Total Responses

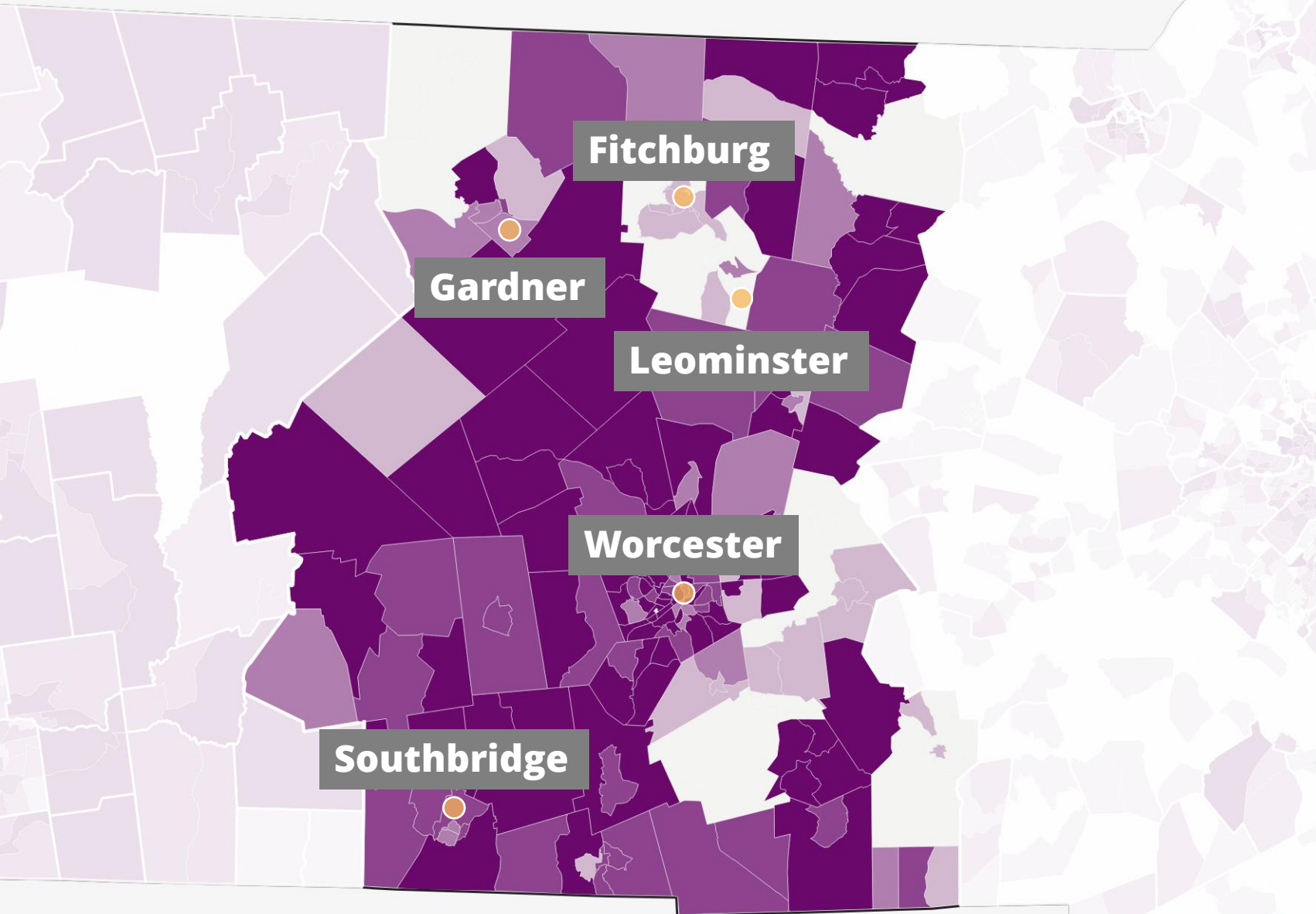
Covered Population Responses x Central MA

Total Responses			Covered Population Responses x Central MA		
Region	Responses	Target	Covered Population	Responses	Target
The Valley	933	307	Aging Individuals	288	86
Greater Boston Region	1,182	1,085	Veterans	35	18
Cape Cod & Islands Region	936	112	People of Color	225	75
Southeast Region	1,303	608	Households with Limited English**	8	7
Northeast Region	1,181	455	Individuals with Disabilities	117	45
Central Mass Region	764	378	Low-Income Households	86	56
Berkshire Region	1,479	55	Residents in Rural Areas	132	90
Unknown	87	-			
Total	7,865	3,000			

*Response numbers are updated as of Monday, 10/2.
 ** This is an estimate based on the number of non-English surveys submitted.

Note: The availability gap score is comprised of three scores: 1) average upload speeds, 2) average download speeds, and 3) percent of the population (2021) not using internet at 100/20 megabits per second. This metric does not capture infrastructure.

Sources: ACS 2017-2021, 5-year estimates and Ookla speed tests.



Access and Quality of Service

26% of statewide survey respondents reported that their internet service is not good enough to meet their household's needs.

37% of municipalities in Central MA have little or no competition in the broadband market.

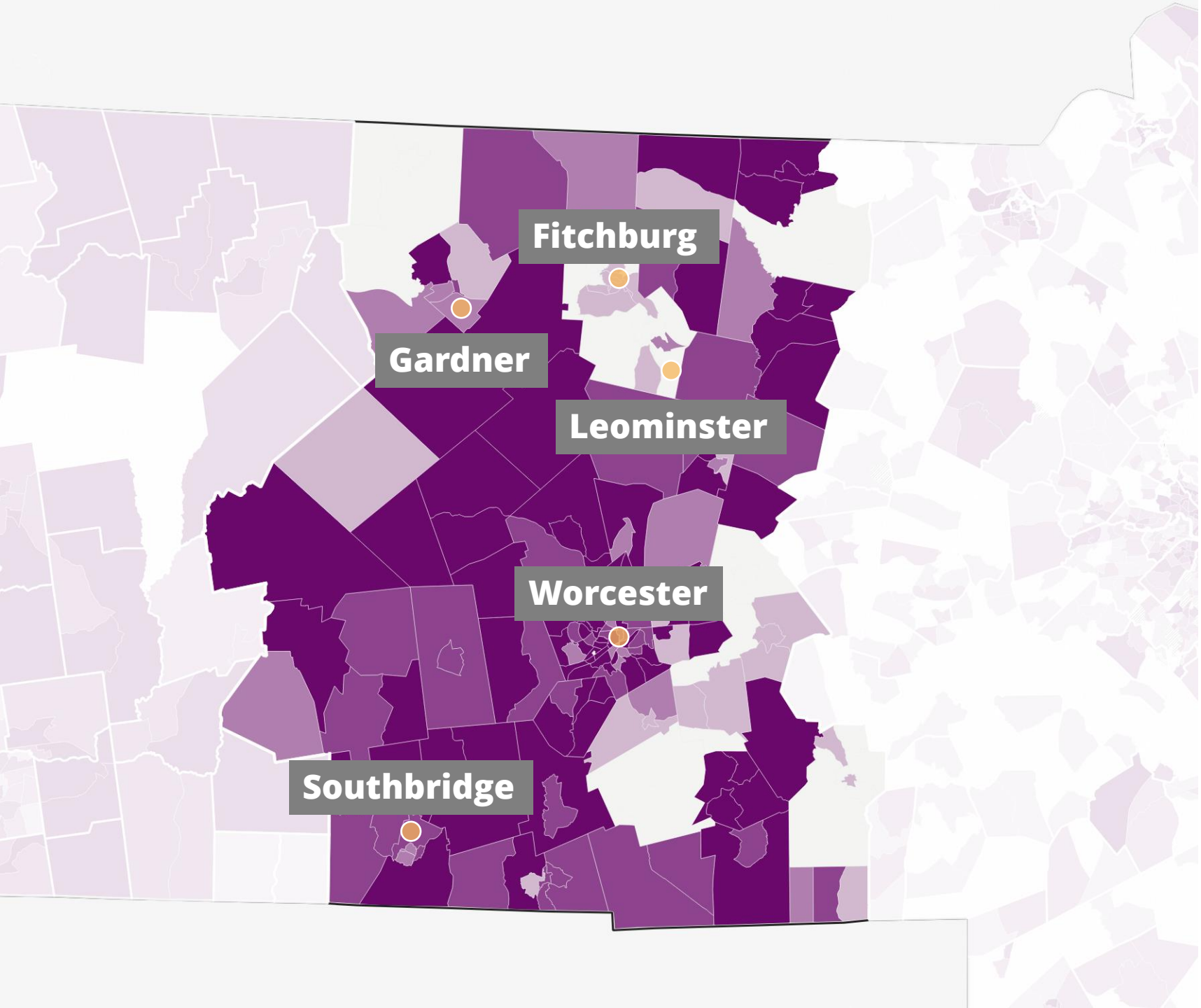
Legend

The availability gap score ranges in value from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest gap in availability.



Access and Quality of Service

In Central MA, there are **~7,190 Unserved or Underserved** locations.

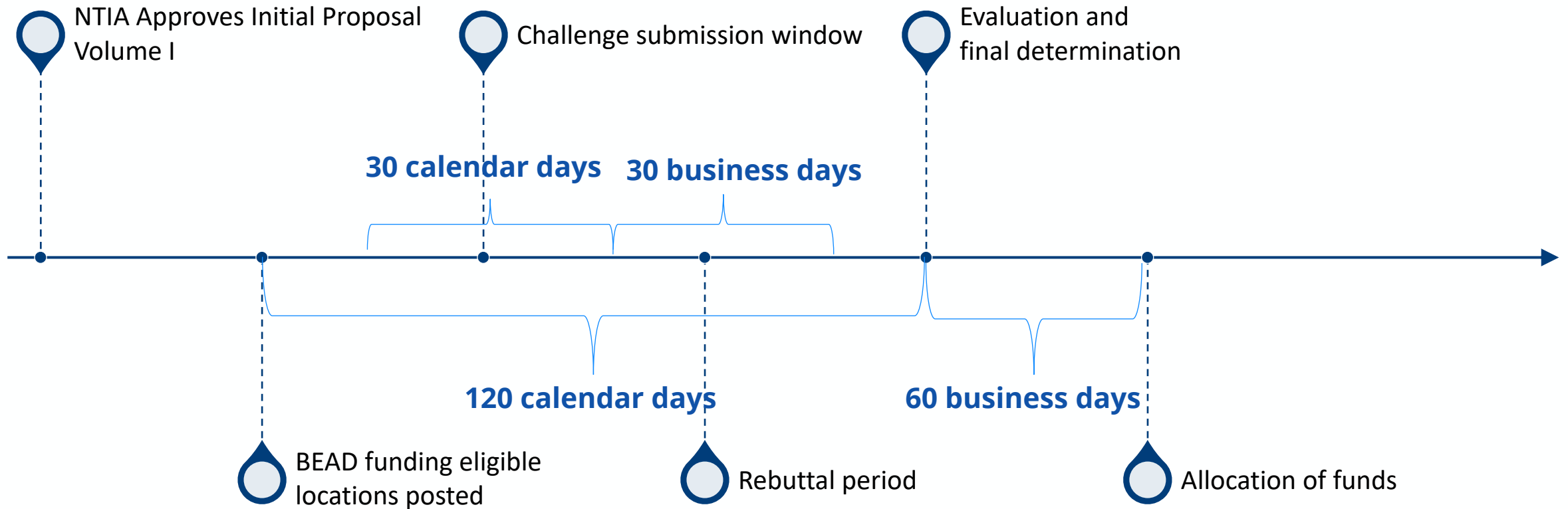


Top 5 Municipalities – Unserved Locations	
Barre	81
North Brookfield	76
Warren	74
Sturbridge	57
Lunenburg	48

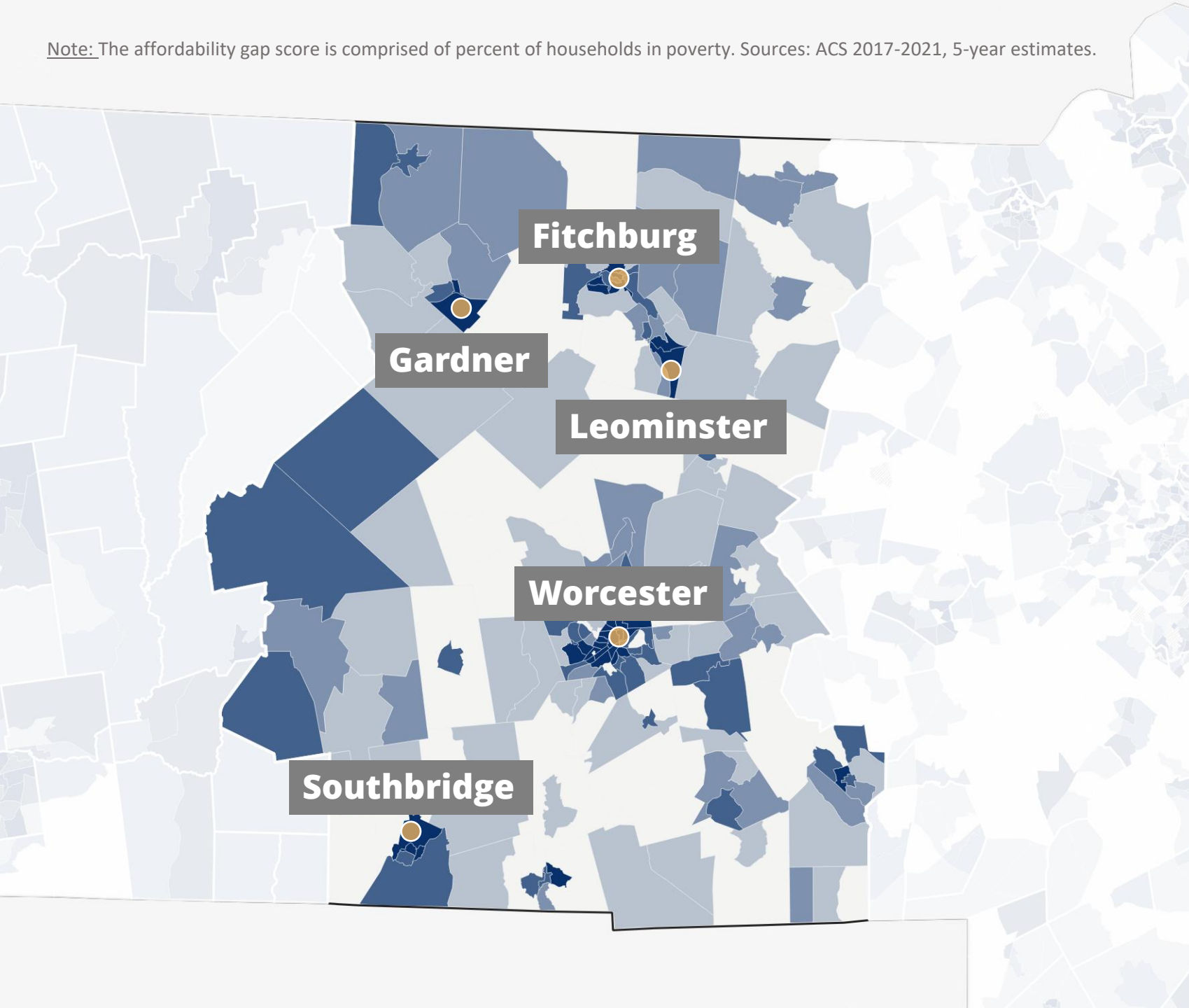
Top Municipalities – Underserved Locations	
Shrewsbury	5535
Townsend	20

Source: Federal Communications Commission, Broadband Data Collection (2022)

Challenge Process



Note: The affordability gap score is comprised of percent of households in poverty. Sources: ACS 2017-2021, 5-year estimates.



Affordability Gap

Over **1 in 3** survey respondents statewide reported having at least some difficulty paying for their internet.

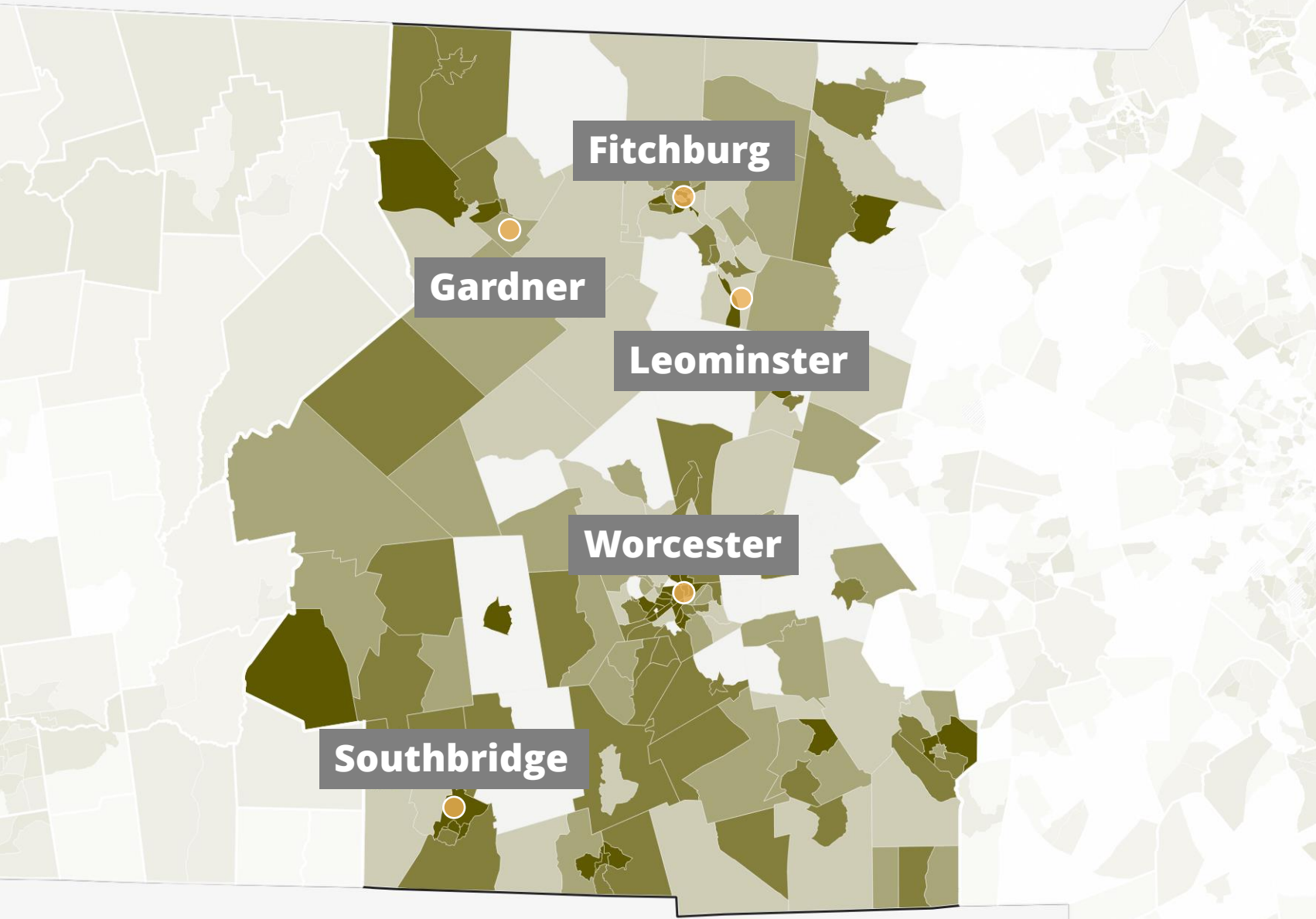
The average for the lowest broadband price regionwide is **\$58.50**.

Legend

The affordability gap score ranges in value from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest gap in affordability.



Note: The adoption gap score is comprised of two scores: 1) percent of homes without internet access or not subscribing, and 2) percent of homes with no computing devices.
Sources: ACS 2017-2021, 5-year estimates.



Adoption Gap

In Central MA, adoption gaps are highest in towns such as Worcester and Southbridge.

Statewide, **nearly half** of survey respondents without internet at home cite cost as a prohibiting factor.

Legend

The adoption gap score ranges in value from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest gap in adoption.



Community Anchor Institutions



Education Institutions



Community Centers



Libraries



**Museums and Cultural
and Religious Centers**



**Healthcare
Infrastructure**



Public Housing

Assets in Central MA

MBI is collecting unique assets that contribute to digital equity in each region.

178

Digital equity assets submitted to date for the region

Example Assets:



Fitchburg Public Library -

Individuals 18+ with an active library card can borrow the Wi-Fi hotspots for 2 weeks at a time, which provide free T-Mobile Wi-Fi service to the borrower



Southeast Asian Coalition of Central Massachusetts assists individuals in applying for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

A background network diagram consisting of numerous blue nodes connected by thin lines, creating a complex web-like structure. The nodes are of varying sizes and are distributed across the entire frame. The overall color scheme is dark blue with lighter blue highlights for the network elements.

Ethan Melad

Central MA Regional
Planning Commission

Internet for All & Municipal Digital Equity Planning

OCTOBER 5, 2023

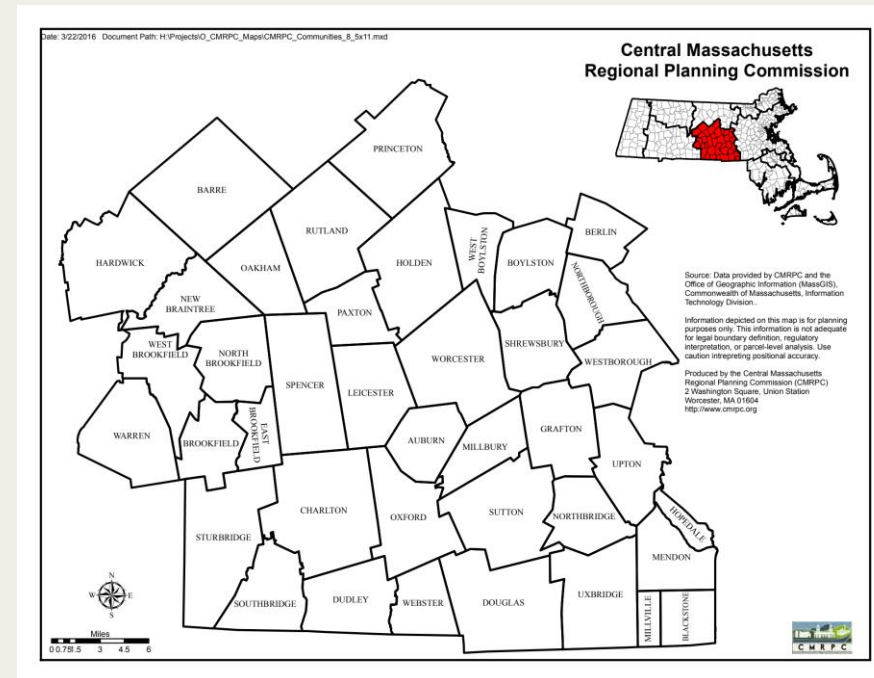
CENTRAL MA REGIONAL LISTENING SESSION



ABOUT CMRPC

The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) provides a variety of services to 40 communities in Central MA.

- Regional collaboration
- Community planning
- Resiliency planning
- Transportation planning
- Land use planning



DIGITAL EQUITY PROJECTS & INVOLVEMENT

CMRPC staff attended an MBI workshop in the Fall of 2022, with information and trainings from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance & the Institute for Local Self Reliance.

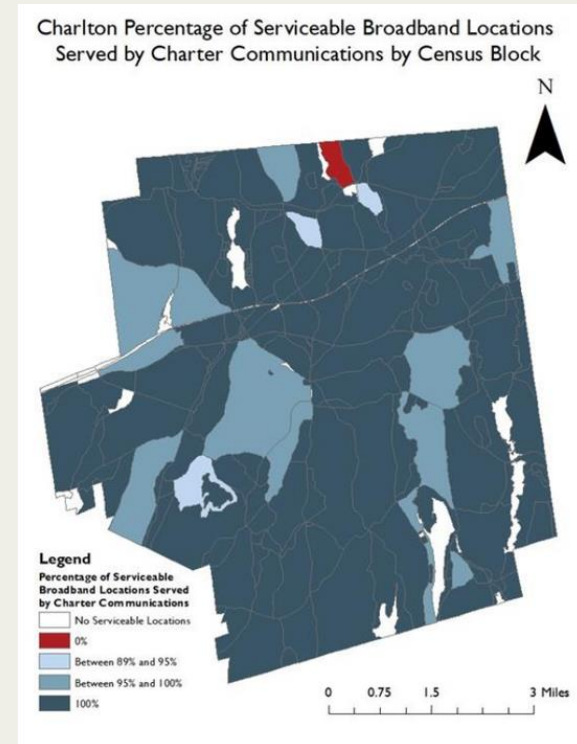
CMRPC is currently a prequalified consultant for MBI's Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program, and available to work with municipalities in our region.

To date, we have worked with the Town of Charlton and are about to kick off a partnership with the City of Worcester.

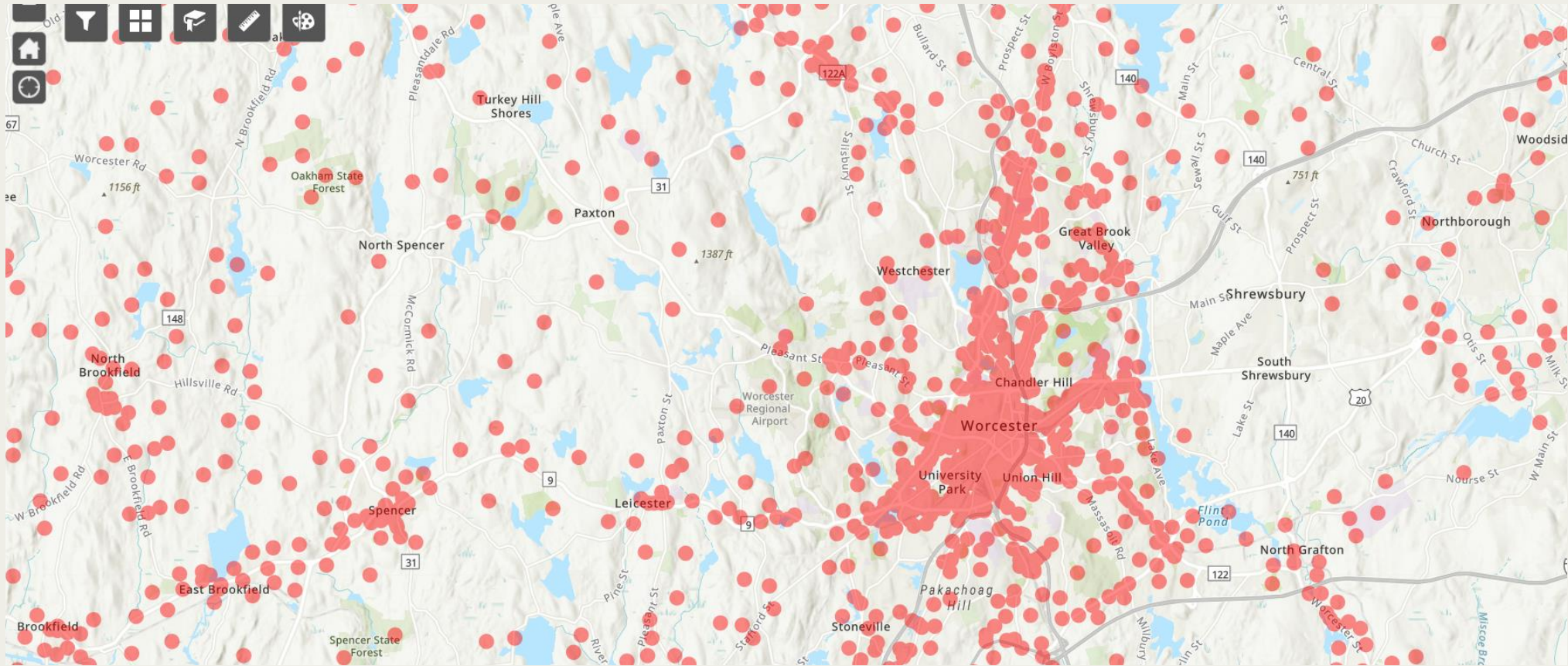


MUNICIPAL DIGITAL EQUITY PLANNING PROCESS

- Data Collection and existing conditions analysis
- Municipal & community engagement
- Public Charette
- Data evaluation
- Develop strategies and report



DATA COLLECTION



OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

The Town of Charlton applied and selected CMRPC as their consulting team.

Community engagement included attending Charlton's Blueberry Festival, reaching out to stakeholders, and creating a relationship with Charlton's Public Library.

MBI's statewide survey was also boosted in this process.

Charlton's Blueberry Festival



DIGITAL EQUITY IMPACTS

- Digital Literacy - Has become an imperative skill for everyone whether to communicate, find employment, receive comprehensive education, or socializing.
- Public Health - Broadband allows for necessary communication, scheduling, and 1-1 health services
- Transportation - Enables technology that can alleviate congestion, enhance road safety and reduce the environmental impact of transportation.
- Workforce Development - Broadband-enabled job training.
- Economic Development - Broadband enables towns, regions, and states to develop retain, and expand job creation. It enables business growth and the expansion of existing businesses into new markets.



CHARETTE

The 'Connecting Charlton' Charette included public participation to gain additional perspectives on strengths, weaknesses, and common themes around digital equity.

'Connecting Charlton'

The graphic features a light blue background with the title "Town of Charlton Digital Equity" in a large, bold, dark blue serif font. In the top left corner, there are two logos: the CMRPC logo (Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission) and the Town of Charlton seal. The center of the graphic is dominated by three white hexagonal icons. The top hexagon contains a laptop with various digital icons (lightbulb, music note, location pin, hourglass) floating above it. The bottom-left hexagon shows a laptop with a magnifying glass over the screen. The bottom-right hexagon depicts a laptop, a desktop monitor, and a cloud icon. In the bottom left corner, there are logos for MBI (Massachusetts DBAND INSTITUTE) and the MassTech Collaborative.



Thank you!

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03

Breakout Discussions

Remember the Ground Rules



Be **fully present** by not checking your phone or computer

Know when to lead versus **creating space for others to speak**

Be open and listen to others. Even when you disagree, suspend judgment, and look for common ground.

Recognize that **we are all approaching this process with different levels of understanding** surrounding equity and digital equity.

Respect confidentiality. What is discussed in this room stays in this room.

Visioning Exercise

Thank you for your participation in breakout discussions. We would like to move into a visioning exercise to close out today's activity.

What does Internet for All mean to you?

Imagine it's five years in the future. The Digital Equity Plan has been a resounding success. After some initial challenges, Massachusetts's solutions are having a huge impact on the world in ways you'd never even imagined!

- Take 1 minute to scan the QR code to the right and use one word to answer the question above.





04

Closing Session

Report back

Thank you for your participation in our facilitated discussion. We want to learn more about what you heard and discussed.

What was
discussed in
your breakout
room?

Timeline



→ Visit broadband.masstech.org for details on events and ways to get involved.

Thank you!

Contact MBI at

broadband@masstech.org