SYLVESTER BAXTER was a Malden journalist who became an expert on urban planning, and public recreation. Born at West Yarmouth in 1850 in a family with Mayflower antecedents, he joined the staff of the Boston Advertiser in 1871. Four years later, his paper sent him to Europe as its foreign correspondent and upon his return in 1880, he wrote for the Boston Herald. An intimate friend of the landscape architect Charles Eliot, a consultant to the Board of Metropolitan Park Commissioners in 1892-1893, Baxter became its secretary, and held the same post for the Metropolitan Improvement Commission in 1907-1909. Around 1891, Baxter settled in Malden, where he acquired the Malden News, and edited and published Outing Magazine. Among his works were articles on European city planning, several travel books on New England, and a lavishly illustrated history of Spanish Colonial architecture in Mexico. He died in 1927, at San Juan, Puerto Rico.¹

Baxter wrote a series of articles on Metropolitan Boston for the Herald in 1890 proposing a greater Boston federation in which he distinguished between the “political” and the geo-social or “true” Boston. Only the “legal fiction” of a score and more municipal corporations prevented the identity of the “political” with the “true” city.² In comparing Boston to Chicago and Philadelphia, whose corporate limits conformed to social and commercial facts, he noted that both boasted populations in excess of 1,000,000; Boston, he maintained, with an official population of barely 500,000, belonged among them since her metropolitan area had 900,000 people. An expansion of Boston’s limits would place her among the first

² Sylvester Baxter, Greater Boston: A Study For a Federalized Metropolis Comprising the City of Boston and Surrounding Cities and Towns (Boston, 1891), 3.
cities of the world and bring added prestige, commerce, and prosperity. Baxter felt these were minor considerations, however, compared with the "vast increase in both economy and efficiency of management" under a single municipal government.3

Extending political limits of cities was a modern trend, exemplified by London, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. Baxter argued that similar action was imperative in greater Boston to prevent "material injury" to the future metropolitan interests of the city.4

From the top of the State House dome, he declared, a person would behold a billowy sea of buildings, stretching away in nearly every direction, . . . as far as the feet of the chain of hills that encircles the bay from Lynn . . . to Milton. . . . [He] shall see how that great sea of buildings has swollen beyond the capacity of its basin, and is surging, like the sea itself at an extraordinarily high tide, up in between the hills and filling with compact ranks of dwellings, arrayed street after street, valleys and glens that but a short while ago were crag-enclosed sylvan solitudes.5

The federal government defined the Boston Postal District as containing more than 600,000 people; the state's Metropolitan Sewerage District encompassed nearly 750,000 persons. If Boston included all territory within a five-mile radius from city hall, she would encompass Chelsea, Revere, Winthrop, Everett, Somerville, Cambridge, and Brookline. A ten-mile radius, which made more sense to Baxter, would comprise twenty-seven municipalities, and contain nearly 850,000 people with property valuations exceeding $1.2 billion. Since people attracted to Boston frequently found homes in the suburbs, common sense indicated some kind of unification.6

Baxter realized that any plan for metropolitan consolidation would provoke strong opposition from the Norfolk, Middle-

3 Baxter, Greater Boston, 4.
4 Baxter, Greater Boston, 4.
5 Baxter, Greater Boston, 5.
6 Baxter, Greater Boston, 8-12.
sex, and Essex "county rings"; suburban executives who exploited low taxes to attract population and industry; and local politicians who struggled to retain their prerogatives. The strongest resistance would come from obsolete county administrations. Anachronistic loyalties persisted, and legislators often voted in county blocs. County officials were remote from the public, their duties a mystery to all but a few political experts. County lines followed no plan or purpose and, with the sole exception of Suffolk County, were too large, and their constituent municipalities lacked common interests. County commissioners did little more than maintain a few roads. Baxter recommended a thorough reform of county administration to accompany the consolidation of greater Boston.7

The metropolitan area needed a plan to equalize the property-tax burden. Prosperous citizens should not be permitted to evade a fair taxation on their handsome estates from the happy accident of residing in such politically independent municipalities as Brookline, Belmont, Newton, Winchester, and Milton. As a result, industrial and densely populated cities like Boston, Cambridge, Everett, and Malden had to provide costly public services for denser and poorer populations.8

Since Baxter realized that the annexation sentiment was dead despite sporadic revivals, he proposed to reorganize the metropolitan area by expanding Suffolk County. The inspiration for this plan was the London County Council recently inaugurated in England. Such a scheme distributed the blessings which size alone could provide, and would bring Boston the efficient administration which had eluded her since incorporation in 1822. It was not sufficient, Baxter added, sporadically to amend Boston's obsolete charter or to respond to metropolitan crises one at a time by creating special districts.9

He recommended the county plan as a piece of regular legis-

7 Baxter, Greater Boston, 18-19.
8 Baxter, Greater Boston, 19-21.
9 Baxter, Greater Boston, 22.
lation. The General Court's authority over cities and towns was an established fact. Reform of metropolitan organization was too important to be determined by the traditional referendum. "[The] welfare of a vast mass of population," was too important to be at the mercy of "selfish motives that might animate any community or communities." Mindful of the fear of suburban Republicans that Democratic Boston might dominate a new political arrangement, he proposed to extend civil service laws to the expanded county government.10

An absurd number of authorities shared responsibility for the region's public services. Sixteen different water systems and twenty-five water boards, eighteen gas and fifteen electric light companies served greater Boston. A unified administration of even those utilities promised to save money and provide better service.

Among the leading functions of the metropolitan government would naturally be . . . water supply, sewerage, fire department, police, health department, public schools, highways, public parks, charitable, penal, and other public institutions, lighting, local transit facilities . . . objects of general public concern rather than . . . local interests.11

Until he explicitly defined this county government's functions, Baxter expressed ideals with which few would quarrel, but to include the police and the schools among county responsibilities affronted the most sensitive nerves of Massachusetts localists. The end pages of the pamphlet significantly featured an advertisement for Bellamy's Looking Backward. In the first issue of the short-lived Greater Boston Magazine Baxter again outlined his county scheme. He was one of the first members of the Boston Nationalist Club, along with Mason A. Green, editor of the Greater Boston Magazine. Green was an intimate of Bellamy and of Baxter. William Dean Howells and Hamlin Garland also embraced "Nationalism" for a time. Baxter knew

11 Baxter, Greater Boston, 27. (My italics. J. A. M.)
Charles Francis Adams and Osborne Howes, two Massachusetts capitalists, but how far personal contacts influenced their ideas is conjectural. Howes later served on the Metropolitan District Commission of 1894, which also recommended a metropolitan county. There is a remarkable similarity of language and ideas between Baxter's pamphlet and those in the Commission's Report.12

The Metropolitan District Commission was the idea of Representative Bennett of Everett, who introduced a bill in 1893 to initiate a study of the problem of integrating the greater Boston area. During the hearings, Boston's Senator Parkman asked Mayor Bancroft of Cambridge whether a formula existed to help the poorer suburbs share some of the benefits of the wealthier. Bancroft thought there was such a formula, but ruled out annexation and protested the creation of more state commissions. The bill failed, but Bennett reintroduced it in 1894, with Sylvester Baxter testifying before the Committee on Cities for uniform services. During the same session, the General Court received a petition for a bill similar to Senator Potter's metropolitan city plan of 1873. In July, the House defeated that measure and adopted Bennett's.13

The act of 1894 authorized the Governor to appoint three persons to investigate "the advisability of establishing a general government, with limited powers," for greater Boston, and to reexamine the annexation question. The Commission included William Rice, Osborne Howes, Jr., and Upton U. Curtis, who served briefly before becoming Boston's mayor in 1895. In his place, the Governor appointed William Power Wilson.14


14 Massachusetts, Acts and Resolves, Chapter 446, 1894.
The Metropolitan District Commission conducted about twenty hearings in all metropolitan municipalities except Lexington, Swampscott, Nahant, and Needham; and four hearings at Boston City Hall. Boston's Mayor Nathan Matthews, Jr., Corporation Counsel Andrew J. Bailey, President Charles W. Eliot and Professor Albert Bushnell Hart of Harvard, testified. Ex-mayor Thomas Norton Hart of Boston and Charles Francis Adams, also appeared before the Commission. The volume of testimony was immense, since the Commissioners desired a comprehensive report. In 1895, they received from the General Court one year's extension.15

Witnesses' remarks revealed almost schizophrenic public attitudes. Chairman Rice asked Malden's Mayor Winn if he thought a general metropolitan federation might not improve Boston's politicians, but Winn feared that Boston might corrupt suburban politicians. Testimony revealed sympathy for federation, but also a conviction that the administrations of the smaller cities and towns were “better and purer” than Boston's. “For a few years,” remarked a Malden resident, “Boston would be purified politically. Then the suburbs would be polluted by the great mass of immigration.”16

Albert DuPont Chandler, a dedicated guardian of Brookline's purity, contrasted the town with the situation twenty years earlier. In 1874, Chandler said, the valuation of $20 million reflected largely the estates of rich men. But the figure had doubled since, to $41 million and reflected the modest property of merchants, workers, and artisans. Brookline's government was efficient, honest, and frugal. Every witness from the town vigorously opposed any metropolitan federation or cooperation.17

Mayor Hodgkins of Somerville favored localism; his city was satisfied with present arrangements. One Robert Luce


17 Brookline Chronicle, Nov. 17, 1894.
preferred annexation, adding that "moral" and "social" considerations were irrelevant. "Some people oppose both annexation and federation [because] we are virtuous and Boston is vicious. . . . Boston's almshouse has to be investigated and ours doesn't. . . . we haven't any. . . . we can't afford it." But Luce wanted local option; if federation meant license, he was against it. The liquor question was prominent. Quincy Vernal, declared that "we are a happy community, with a temperate people and we vote for temperance. . . . [with annexation] we should have a rum shop on every corner." But ex-mayor Albion Perry exclaimed, "we vote as we pray, but not all as we drink." He preferred federation for improved services.18

The Commission's activities helped inspire the Greater Boston Magazine, which first appeared in February, 1895. Its opening statement rang with reformist zeal:

This magazine is a champion of the civic interests of the million inhabitants of the . . . municipalities clustered about Boston Harbor. With a view to a better social order, it favors some form of city and town federation for metropolitan Boston . . . and in general it appeals to that stalwart public spirit and civic pride and wisdom which, varied by the community as a whole, works out the highest good of every member in it.19

The publication featured articles on various metropolitan problems: harbor and docks, parks and playgrounds, and vocational schools. It carried worldwide news of communal projects, such as Glasgow's municipal lodging houses, argued that federation "is our manifest destiny," and that a "wise and scientific administration of intermunicipal affairs will beget a new public spirit in local affairs."20

The Metropolitan District Commission's report to the General Court in January, 1896, declared that "in the great majority of cases" witnesses conceded the necessity of standardizing metropolitan administration. But no one had a clear plan.

18 Somerville Journal, Nov. 24, 1894.
19 Greater Boston Magazine, Feb., 1895, 2.
20 Greater Boston Magazine, Feb., 1895, 3-4.
Defining greater Boston as all municipalities in the Metropolitan Water District, excluding Needham, the commissioners reached two general conclusions: there was little sympathy for annexation, and it was imperative to simplify the region's complex political structure. The Report recommended a county organization "to have larger legislative and administrative powers than counties in this State have hitherto possessed."  

The subject of annexation dominated the hearings. PropONENTS appeared unwilling to support any other plan; OPPONENTS feared the least departure from the status quo lest annexation result. Annexation, however, was the most expedient solution, for a simple act of the legislature might unite the whole district to Boston almost overnight, resulting in a larger, more prestigious and prosperous city. Some persons might leave, but very few of the area's people had interests independent of Boston. "Why should the citizenship of a man be determined by the place where he spends his sleeping, rather than his waking, hours?" Most suburban witnesses opposed annexation for superficial or erroneous reasons. The liquor question was chief among them; but a simple law granting local option to each ward of a large city might allay temperance anxieties. Some witnesses argued that Boston desired only to spread the obligation for her enormous debt, but most of the suburbs had higher tax rates and larger per capita debts than Boston. The myth of Boston's "corruption" pervaded the opposition arguments. The Report concluded that "the percentage of public money dishonestly used in Boston is quite as small as that diverted from honest use in the [surrounding] municipalities..."  

The Report outlined its own, more rational, objections to annexation. Boston's aldermen wanted the rich towns of Brookline, Newton, and Winchester; their enthusiasm diminished as they looked upon industrial Chelsea, Everett, or

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21 MDC Report, 1896, 4-8, 13.
22 MDC Report, 1896, 9-12, 14-19.
Malden. The notion that centralized government might expand services at lower cost was untrue. Municipal salaries in Boston were from ten to forty percent higher than in her suburbs. Official salaries might decline to the regional average; more likely they would rise to Boston's rates. Once wards of an enlarged Boston, metropolitan municipalities would demand the same range and quality of services offered "old" Boston. The cost was almost incalculable. To expand Boston's limits to include the whole area created the largest city in the world with a population density of six persons per square mile, the lowest in the world. The expense of providing utilities depended as much on the area covered as on the population served. Only a large increase in the tax rate could support this service. Local taxation must remain modest, for commercial and industrial managements were sensitive to property taxes. Finally, Americans, who placed their political capital in small-scale government, had not developed efficient techniques of managing large cities. It was impossible to govern a metropolitan municipality "in a reputable sense."  

The average citizen, continued the Report, was concerned with very local problems, such as schools, police, and garbage collection. It was more satisfactory to deal with a local official with full authority than with a minion of a remote department head at city hall. The general public, especially in Boston despite the lack of verification, seemed convinced that the more remote the official the less his dependability. Suburban citizens, their city and town halls close at hand, seemed to display greater confidence in official probity. Any plan of metropolitan union which threatened to substitute public skepticism for public trust, "would be a change . . . greatly to be deplored."  

Common problems demanded common solutions. The state had attempted to deal with intermunicipal questions in the seventeenth century by establishing counties, but the last ad-

\[23 \text{MDC Report, 1896, 19.}\]
\[24 \text{MDC Report, 1896, 20-26.}\]
justment of county lines occurred in 1793, and by 1896 had only judicial significance. Yet every year Massachusetts voters filled county officers from a list of candidates they did not know and whose functions they did not understand. Such a system of attempting to unite differing cities and towns "can hardly fail to prove unsatisfactory." The General Court admitted the anachronism of county government in creating the Water, Sewer, and Parks Commissions. But while reflecting the essential unity of the metropolitan district, the Commissions merely introduced more administrative confusion. In addition to a score and more separate municipal governments, there converged in the metropolitan area four county governments and three boards of commissioners, each independent of the other, all of the last three varying in the areas over which their jurisdiction extends, and none of the entire seven . . . owing a direct accounting to or coming fairly in touch with the people.25

The metropolitan commissions worked honestly and efficiently. The legislature, however, representing the entire Commonwealth, taxed metropolitan citizens for purely local purposes and placed the power to spend with persons those citizens did not control. Such an arrangement "can not be reconciled with American political methods." The present Commissioners were fresh appointments, and in the future political hacks might occupy a post once graced by Charles Francis Adams.26

The Report recommended a metropolitan county. There were obstacles to such a scheme, notably among the Commissioners of Norfolk, Essex, and Middlesex counties who feared losing the valuations of metropolitan cities and towns. The Report concluded that the costs of rural county government were much less than those of urban administration.27

The range of duties which the Metropolitan District Com-

25 MDC Report, 1896, 32f.
27 MDC Report, 1896, 34f.
missioners outlined for the federalized government was significantly more restricted than that outlined by Sylvester Baxter five years earlier. The Report proposed to transfer all existing county functions to the new authority, and added the responsibilities for metropolitan water, sewers, and parks, along with highways, public transit, and the care of the rivers and harbor. It suggested adopting a county council chosen through direct popular election, on the British model. The concluding paragraphs outlined procedures for organizing a series of referenda on metropolitan federation and drafted a bill for legislative consideration embodying its suggestions.28

The Commission's Report created a local sensation and the General Court opened in turmoil. Normally the Commission bill went to the Committee on Metropolitan Affairs, but the Committee on Counties insisted that the creation of a new county gave it priority. It was anyone's guess where most of the bill's enemies lay. The towns dominating the Metropolitan Affairs Committee opposed any integration. The "county ring" lobbies exercised enormous influence in the Counties Committee, and were established enemies of change in the traditional system. The Committees' conflicting claims tied up the legislature for nearly two weeks, until the chambers instructed both committees to hold hearings.29

While Beacon Hill squabbled, public discussion continued. William Rice, Commission chairman, told reporters he saw no "radicalism" in the metropolitan county proposal. The Treasurer of the Commonwealth thought the plan was illegal, since

28 MDC Report, 1896, 40. The document continued for nearly forty pages. There the commissioners presented the results of studying foreign cities. "The following general conclusions," they wrote, "may be drawn from the municipal experience of England." Annexation was desirable when two or more urban districts shared common political, social, or economic interests. A large city was more desirable commercially than a small one. Representative government was unsuited to large, centralized municipal organizations. A large degree of "worth and dignity" must attach to local office if decentralization was to work. Public services were better organized locally than centrally. Satisfactory government was more feasible when the people possessed some direct control over administrators. Report, 77f.

29 Charles F. Gettemy, comp., Scrapbooks of clippings from Boston newspapers, July 1, 1891 to Aug. 3, 1907, V, 147.
the state's credit was pledged to outstanding water, park, and sewer bonds; to transfer responsibility from the legislature to subordinate governments might damage the Commonwealth's credit. Chelsea's Mayor endorsed the commission's recommendation, arguing that it relieved the legislature of work and bother. The Everett Republican remarked that "the average man" would rather live in a small house of his own "rather . . . than in a ten room house that belongs to a syndicate."  

Every Essex county legislator denounced the bill. Melrose's representative questioned the constitutionality of transferring the responsibility for metropolitan debts. He later declared it would be "positively detrimental" to the progress of existing boards. Metropolitan Commissioner Osborne Howes, Jr., spoke to a legislative committee about "irrational fears" of antiannexationists, although the Report specifically precluded annexation. Most thoughtful men in Boston believed annexation would result in "loss of prestige" and would harm "the business interests of the city." The Medford City Solicitor told the legislative committees that opinion there "very much opposed" a metropolitan county. W. W. Fifield of Medford remained convinced that Boston, with a debt of $17 million, supported the plan only to burden the suburbs with responsibility for its amortization. A new county would bring only "license and Democratic rule." When Boston's Representative Boutwell asked Fifield if he had read the Report, Fifield replied that he had not, but was certain Boston would exploit the suburbs under any form of metropolitan consolidation.  

Lynn's Mayor Eugene A. Bessum objected to the bill's referendum formula. If every voter in that city rejected the

30 Gettemy Scrapbooks, v, 141f.; Everett Republican, Jan. 11, 1896.
31 Lynn Evening Item, Jan. 14, 1896; Boston Journal, Jan. 15 and 22, 1896. It is difficult to determine the source of Fifield's figure on Boston's debt. In 1896, the total, net, funded debt of the city of Boston was ca. $40 million. Fifield might have been referring to the debt contracted during 1895. But ca. $10 million of the $17 million was the subway debt. The authorizing legislation required, however, that the annual rent of the subway at least equal the total annual carrying charge.
county, the procedure still included Lynn in the new county. Bessum preferred a city-by-city poll; those municipalities which accepted the plan would join the new organization, those which defeated would remain outside. When Commissioner Howes asked him how many lawyers resided in Lynn and practiced in Boston, Lynn’s Representative Fogg immediately asked, “whose interests [did the commission think] should predominate, those of the lawyers or the real estate dealers and taxpayers.” A Norfolk county judge feared the scheme might overwhelm Suffolk and Norfolk courts with litigation and that the plan would also strip Norfolk county of valuation.32

The combined committees closed the hearings at the end of January, 1896, and recommended referring the Report’s recommendations “to the next General Court.” In Massachusetts legislative practice, a bill so reported did not die with the session, but fell into a peculiar limbo, the “file,” from which during the following session a legislator might request its reconsideration, provided he did so before five o’clock in the afternoon of the second Saturday of the session.33

Attempts to save the bill were not strenuous. The strongest expressions of opinion were negative; most outside the State House were noncommittal, like Mr. Newton, Everett’s City Solicitor. George Brown, Everett’s Representative, denounced the Metropolitan District Commission for exceeding instructions. The act of 1894 asked for a study of the expediency of expanding Boston’s limits. No public support existed for that, he added, and the county plan was merely an attempt to foist a distasteful regional scheme on an unwilling population.34

The opposition was largely instinctive. Many rejected the Report’s recommendations without reading it. That “some form of federation ought soon to be adopted” was universally agreed, but nearly everyone wanted to retain local autonomy. The Commissioners made little effort to influence legislators.

34 Everett Republican, Jan. 25, 1896.
They assumed the evidence of political anachronism and administrative irrationality in their report would influence law
makers and the public in favor of a metropolitan county.35

The Middlesex, Norfolk, and Essex county commissioners
would not countenance enlarging Suffolk county at their ex-
pense. Essex county was least affected, and both Baxter and the
Metropolitan District Commission conceded that it might be
omitted. Middlesex county reported a total valuation of $466
million in 1895. Of that, the metropolitan municipalities rep-
resented nearly $359 million. The total valuation of Norfolk
county was around $172 million, and the metropolitan towns
represented more than $115 million. The Commission in-
cluded Cambridge and Dedham in its proposed county. Cam-
bridge was the largest and wealthiest city of Middlesex county
and also the county seat; Dedham was the seat of Norfolk
county. Both Middlesex and Norfolk counties would bear the
cost of new administrative buildings upon a drastically re-
duced valuation base. The Report attempted to mitigate the
effects of valuation loss by revealing that in English experi-
ence, county costs dropped significantly more than did valua-
tions when major towns were left out. But in Massachusetts
the story was not so simple. The reported valuations of real
estate were unsound; the estimates of local assessors seldom
reflected the true market value. During the last quarter of the
century, to finance public improvements assessments for Bos-
ton and nearer cities like Cambridge, Somerville, and Chelsea
rose almost to market value. But small towns enjoyed nominal
valuations. Cities in the metropolitan area were thus over-
valued compared to municipalities within the same county on
the fringes of the area beyond a five-mile radius. The Com-
monwealth paid for county government and apportioned the
cost among the constituent municipalities according to official
valuation. Cities and towns close to Boston thus bore nearly
the entire cost of county administration. To take them from

35 Somerville Journal, Feb. 1, 1896; MDC Report, 1896, 42; George H. Mc-
Caffrey, "The Disintegration and Reintegration of Metropolitan Boston" (doc-
toral dissertation, Harvard University, 1937), 309ff.
Norfolk and Middlesex counties would markedly decrease the expenditures of county government, yet the remaining rural towns would actually pay much more in county assessments. Greater Boston for two generations provided golden eggs for the fiscal tables of three county commissions.36

Both Sylvester Baxter and the Metropolitan Commissioners recommended a thorough reform of county government along with a greater Boston federation. Baxter explicitly, and the Report in 1896 implicitly, suggested expanding the functions of reformed counties. In 1895, state auditors discovered discrepancies in the books of several western counties. Though auditors blamed administrative sloppiness rather than official corruption, the episode stimulated a public demand for a general review of county government. Critics thought county commissioners throughout the state would not bear any investigation incidental to general reform. Thus two sources damned the metropolitan county scheme. Despite Massachusetts' obsolete county organization, the courthouse was important in party politics. Official handbooks of the General Court listed legislators by county, while House and Senate districts conformed roughly to county lines, and legislators tended to vote in county blocs. A general reform threatened to upset powerful county party organizations.37

Localists were the other source of damnation. Expanding the normal functions of county government to accommodate greater Boston would set a precedent for the whole Commonwealth. In the metropolitan area, opinion was even more apprehensive. Marcus C. Cook petitioned the legislature for a permissive annexation bill. It provided that any city or town contiguous to Boston, or within a ten-mile radius of the State House, or which touched the sea between Marblehead and Hull, might annex itself to Boston any time on concurrent


37 Lynn Evening Item, Jan. 21, 1896; Gettemy Scrapbooks, vol. 5, 142.
vote in both municipalities. That petition may have become confused in the suburbs with the metropolitan county bill.38

Suburban residents believed Boston was a cesspool of social wickedness and political corruption. The liquor question was a significant factor, although supporters of the Commission's bill vainly explained that federation did not threaten local option. Boston meant the saloon; the metropolitan county meant Boston; *ergo*, alarmists concluded, federation meant license. Such sentiments probably developed after 1875. The successful annexations might have precipitated a shifting of the metropolitan population, as those who opposed license or who distrusted city hall moved out of Boston's expanded limits. It was difficult to commute to Boston's commercial heart from the south. Westward were the residential areas of the wealthy, like Brookline, Newton, and Belmont. Transportation patterns and income led a movement northward into Somerville, Everett, Malden, Medford, and neighboring municipalities. This movement was a plausible explanation for the change in residents' sentiments concerning annexation between 1870-1873 and 1893-1896. The same suburban newspapers which reported metropolitan county hearings also featured articles on local temperance societies and of the vicious effects of alcohol. Lurid stories of fallen women and suffering children spiced the usual soporific local news. It was an open secret that Boston's political leaders, mostly Democrats, bargained year after year with Massachusetts' Republican legislators to bury the perennial bills to reestablish prohibition or strengthen the license acts. Downstate legislators had learned painfully that temperance sentiment, though noisy, was cherished by a minority of the voters. They saved themselves from the wrath of tipplers by failing to strengthen the liquor laws, and mitigated the danger from angry temperance societies by citing the obstructions of Boston's delegates. But suburbanites, largely Republican, concluded that Boston's saloons existed because

38 Commonwealth of Massachusetts, House of Representatives, Legislative Document No. 827, *Bill Accompanying the Petition of Marcus C. Cook ...* (Boston, 1896).
her leaders were corrupt, even though no evidence existed in 1896 to prove it. Boston had a reputation, until a few years before the first World War, of being well governed, but locally her saloons and Democrats were enough to condemn her.

From 1897 through 1906 the legislature annually reconsidered the metropolitan county bill and consistently referred it to the next General Court, but influential local groups supported various efforts to revive the Metropolitan District Commission's recommendations. In 1898, the Citizens' Trade Association of Cambridge, the West Somerville Board of Trade, and the Malden Board of Trade, supported the new county plan. Osborne Howes, Jr., and Sylvester Baxter urged the Committee on Metropolitan Affairs to approve, but Metropolitan Affairs' members were largely from the towns, the source of strongest opposition to federation. In 1903 a citizens' group presented a fresh petition for a metropolitan county, but the legislative committee considering it reported "leave to withdraw," a traditional gesture of contempt. From 1900 to 1906 the county bill, and permissive annexation bills on the Potter and Cook model, were hardy perennials always referred to the next General Court.39

Three petitions came before the House in 1906, two calling for a general metropolitan government. The third accompanied a bill to form an advisory metropolitan Boston council composed of the region's municipal executives. The measure survived two readings, but the House refused to order a third. The following year, the General Court funded a Metropolitan Improvement Commission with $35,000 to study the region's problems. Sylvester Baxter was its secretary, and for nearly two years the Commission held hearings and questioned experts in transportation, recreation, and municipal planning. The result was a small encyclopedia of metropolitan needs and suggestions, three hundred pages of facts, ideas, maps, charts, and hopes. It emphasized radial highways and recreation, but also

discussed regional transit, railroads, and the beautification of the Charles. The legislature instructed the Railroad, Harbor, Land, Transit, and Park Commissions to study the Report for one year and present a digest. The Joint Board on Metropolitan Improvements produced a preliminary report in 1910: nine pages of lofty language, including predictions of electrified commuter railways and a magnificent man-made island-park in the Charles. All this grandeur merely led to a bill “to authorize the Metropolitan Park Commission to construct a road in the town of Revere.”

While official activity progressed from the magnificance of Charlesbank to the Revere marshes, interested citizens of the region renewed their efforts to transform greater Boston. Both the Metropolitan Improvement League and the Metropolitan Civic League dated from 1907-1908, probably inspired by the work of the Metropolitan Improvement Commission. The Improvement League was the most active and most prosperous. Largely composed of Bostonians, it flourished for several years and even published *Boston, the Better City*, a gracefully illustrated bulletin which discussed the planning of parks, boulevards, and the design of elevated transit stations and branch libraries.

From 1908-1912, the Boston merchant, Edward Filene, inspired a promising but chimerical movement. Owner, in partnership with his brothers, of the largest specialty department store in Boston, he encouraged reforms which antedated the

40 “The Metropolitan District,” Medford Leader, Feb. 1, 1906. The district was to have been Boston, Arlington, Belmont, Brookline, Braintree, Canton, Cambridge, Chelsea, Dedham, Dover, Everett, Hingham, Hyde Park (annexed 1911), Hull, Lexington, Lynn, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Milton, Nahant, Needham, Newton, Quincy, Revere, Saugus, Somerville, Waltham, Swampscott, Wakefield, Wollaston, Watertown, Wellesley, Weston, Westwood, Weymouth, Winchester, Winthrop, and Woburn. All or parts of them were within twelve miles of the State House. Boston Evening Transcript, April 13, 1913; Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Senate, Legislative Document No. 27, Joint Board on Metropolitan Improvements, Preliminary Report under the Resolve to Provide for an Investigation Relative to Public Improvement for the Metropolitan District (Boston, 1910), passim.

new century. In 1908, he invited Lincoln Steffens to Boston to uncover social and political abuses, hoping to let Steffens discover what needed reforming in Boston as a basis for concerned citizens to improve the city's administration. During that visit, the muckraker arranged his famous interview with West End boss, Martin Lomasney. Steffens' study never became public, but Filene read the manuscript and discovered verification of his suspicions. The city lacked a focus of power. Its political and social leadership lay with a large number of persons fragmented into groups which had little mutual contact. Filene earnestly believed that sound business practice might also be good political technique. If he provided a forum for Boston's influential people, he might provide a catalyst for reform. So Filene founded the Boston City Club, hired a good chef, subsidized low prices, waited, and occasionally prodded. Because Filene understood the rivalries and suspicions among the individuals and groups he hoped to mobilize, he expected the Boston City Club to do nothing as an organization. Its sole function was to generate initiative.42

During a banquet at the Club on March 29, 1909, Filene inaugurated a campaign "to make Boston better." The members formed several committees, each to take charge of a single effort. To identify the enterprise without implying an integrated collaboration that did not exist, its sponsors chose the term "Boston-1915."43

The "directors" of "Boston-1915" were among the city's most important citizens. Among them were Louis D. Brandeis, founder of the Savings Insurance League, and Philip Cabot, Treasurer of the Improved Dwellings Association and a member of the National Housing Association's executive board. Ralph Adams Cram was on the city planning and housing committee; President A. Lawrence Lowell and Professor William B. Munro of Harvard University also appeared, with Mrs. Richard C. Cabot, Chairman of the Department of Edu-

43 Johnson, Liberal's Progress, 100; Boston Globe, March 30, 1909.
cation of the Women’s Municipal League and member of the Radcliffe College Council. Harvey S. Chase, executive committeeman of the National Municipal League; Robert A. Woods, formerly Director of the Pittsburg Survey and in 1909 at the South End House; Bernard J. Rothwell, Chairman of the Boston Chamber of Commerce; and Delcevare King, Chairman of the Massachusetts Anti-Cigarette League and Treasurer of the New England Watch and Ward Society were among the important names. Clergymen and labor leaders also graced the roster. Most of the directors had long careers in reform activities, and for Boston the movement did have important results, like the charter of 1909. Yet “Boston-1915” conveyed an impression that the humbler names on its committees were afterthoughts. There were almost no important municipal politicians, like Martin Lomasney, though he might have declined an offer to join. An important reason for the cleavage among Boston’s leaders which distressed Filene was that the Chases and the Cabots distrusted the Lomasneys and the Fitzgeralds, and the latter reciprocated. To place them together without direction to “communicate” seemed only to aggravate the situation. A man like Edward Filene, who enjoyed almost universal respect, might have provided a necessary focus. The City Club was a roof over a chasm: on one side Mr. Cabot, on the other Mr. Lomasney; but a bridge to span the ravine was missing.44

Among the many simultaneous efforts of “Boston-1915” was the “Real Boston” campaign to federate the metropolitan area. Filene proposed that the Chamber of Commerce manage the effort. He believed that when the “Real Boston” enterprise demonstrated metropolitan integration’s commercial advantages, vigorous suburban opposition might dissolve. “Real Boston” got underway in 1910, when the Boston Chamber of Commerce issued a pamphlet explaining its objectives. Boston’s municipal population, it argued, distorted the area’s true

44 Boston-1915, Prospectus, 33-37, in Massachusetts State Library, comp., pamphlets relating to “real Boston,” envelope w/8 pieces.
potential. Greater Boston’s forty cities and towns were actually one, the fourth largest city in the nation. Industrial growth in “commercial” Boston exceeded Chicago’s by nine percent. But the pamphlet concluded paradoxically and fatally that “the present situation hampers local industrial development,” and recommended “legislative definition” of metropolitan Boston.45

March G. Bennett introduced in the 1910 legislative session a bill to form “the Federation of Metropolitan Boston and an Advisory Council therefor.” The Federation would include all municipalities served by the metropolitan commissions, while Mayors and chairmen of the Boards of Selectmen would be ex officio members of the Advisory Council. The Council was to discuss all legislative business affecting the metropolitan area, determine its position by ballot, and bring its ideas to the General Court’s attention through lobbying, petition, and committee testimony. In the case of projects involving money, only executives of affected municipalities could vote. The bill also required metropolitan commissioners to appear before the Council to explain their plans. Assessments on the constituent cities and towns would provide the Council’s operating funds.46

Bennett explained and defended his scheme in several articles during 1910-1911. In the spring of 1910, he assured readers of the Boston Globe that the bill was not an annexation measure. It anticipated no change in the district’s political organizations, but merely provided that its municipal executives form a council with purely advisory authority. It recognized greater Boston’s essential unity, now expressed only in park, water, and sewer boards. They were an “entirely new and peculiar form of government.” In the twenty years between


46 Commonwealth of Massachusetts, House of Representatives, Legislative Document No. 715, Bill accompanying the petition of March G. Bennett for legislation to create the federation of metropolitan Boston and an advisory council therefor (Boston, 1911).
1889 and 1909 they approved expenditures exceeding $80 million, but local authorities, who raised the money, had no voice in approving projects, or in their design. While Bennett did not question the Commissioners’ integrity, he thought they approved more plans than the cities and towns could comfortably afford. Metropolitan cooperation earlier might have avoided the onerous debt that existed in 1910. A council might also advise each city and town on purely local improvements. Among the potential benefits of federation were uniform building codes, standard health ordinances, and common regulations in other fields. “For the first time in our history,” a metropolitan council would voice the “combined commercial, civic, and social force of this whole” district.47

In the summer of 1910, Bennett promoted his plan in the New Boston magazine. Railroads and industrial expansion, he wrote, made Boston the workshop of New England. By 1910, surrounding municipalities were the “playground and the bedroom” of nearly 1,500,000 people. There were thirty-nine independent cities and towns in greater Boston, each an economic or social satellite. The district always was a single city with common problems, which the post-bellum annexation movement reflected. During the early 1890’s the Commonwealth created special districts for parks, water, and sewage. Each board was wholly independent of the others, with commissioners, experts, and maintenance personnel. The system accumulated a debt of more than $80 million, which might have been avoided if metropolitan executives had an official forum to control the rate of expenditure. The current bad situation was a direct result of greater Boston’s impotence relative to the Governor and the General Court.48

Bennett flayed the metropolitan boards again in a “Real Boston” pamphlet. “Metropolitan Boston is a federated city half-baked,” he charged. “Conservatism and timidity” threw away a golden opportunity in 1889 to realize greater Boston’s

47 Boston Globe, April 10, 1910.
unity. The boards were "vicious" compromises. Metropolitan municipalities had no control over them. Their citizens spoke only through a legislative delegation outvoted five to three. Damage claims, many patently unjust, from persons or towns beyond the commissions' jurisdictions, received the sanction of an indifferent legislature. Bennett added that a metropolitan council might stimulate regional cooperation in highways and transportation.49

Bennett's bill came up during the session of 1911, and in a whimsical, informal way "Boston–1915" galvanized into action. Its Program for 1911 outlined "Project 2," to federate metropolitan Boston. "Boston–1915," the Program continued, did not mean only the city, but "Greater Boston, the fourth largest city in the United States," and tenth of the world.50

The Metropolitan Affairs Committee "received" Bennett's bill, an almost certain death sentence. Town members dominating the committee resisted all attempts at metropolitan amalgamation. During the legislative hassle, Newton's aldermen appointed a special committee to study the plan. Its report well expressed suburban fears and prejudices. The Newton Report used the Chamber of Commerce propaganda to argue that greater Boston's industrial growth was among the nation's highest because of, not despite, metropolitan political fragmentation. The nation's great metropolitan cities, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, were too large for efficient management. Statistics were subject to manipulation, and it was doubtful that a greater Boston executive council could influence the region's economic progress. The aldermen discovered grave flaws in the council's proposed composition. Twenty-seven of the thirty-nine cities and towns claimed an aggregate population of 2,200,000; the remaining twelve, more than 1,200,000. Bennett's plan granted less than one-sixth of the metropolitan population more than seventy percent of the


votes. Its manifest inequity indubitably would lead to corrective legislation. Such a “reform” might amount to virtual annexation, universally condemned.

The Report saw no need for a council because there was nothing for one to do. Local authorities managed schools, public health, and police according to their needs; standardization was undesirable and unnecessary. The Metropolitan Park Commission was capable of handling the highway situation; the state established a harbor and land commission to look after the waterfront; the docks were Boston’s responsibility. The water and sewer boards performed efficiently. Overall metropolitan planning was dangerous and unnecessary.

The committee faulted Boston’s Chamber of Commerce for not adequately studying the metropolitan region. “Real Boston” made no review of similar plans in other parts of the nation, and utterly failed to demonstrate federation’s advantages. In fact, “Real Boston” pamphlets conceded that high taxes and waste were persistent problems in large political units. Central authority expanded, but did not dilute, its prerogatives. The Report stressed the diversity of greater Boston. Federation was “like mixing oil and water.” Any attempt to formulate common solutions to common problems would paralyze a metropolitan council. The aldermen warned that to establish an ineffectual body was dangerous. If the council failed, the temptation would be to grant it more power; if it accomplished anything, the legislature might increase its authority.

Newton’s aldermen praised the General Court’s impartiality, explaining that the district’s common health and recreation problems already were the purview of state boards, responsible to a legislature sixty percent of whose members came from beyond metropolitan Boston—a sound guaranty of impartiality. The metropolitan Boston council was a futile and dangerous innovation.51

Publicly the Newton *Times* praised the aldermen's *Report*, denouncing the council as a disreputable conspiracy of the Boston Chamber of Commerce. A metropolitan executive assembly, however weak, was a "Trojan Horse" for the minions of authoritarian centralization of such purely local functions as education and the police. Newton's Mayor Charles E. Hatfield denounced Bennett's bill, exclaiming that since the turn of the century Boston attempted to foist "annexation" upon her neighbors. A council would merely soften the suburbs for "voluntary and full annexation." The Everett Republican agreed that it was wiser to handle metropolitan problems through state boards, and that a regional executive committee was a prelude to annexation. Malden's legislative delegation hastened to oppose Bennett's scheme, refusing to compromise Malden's "individuality." Mayor George H. Fall supported the bill only because he accepted Bennett's word that it would not upset local control.52

The failure to establish a Metropolitan Boston Council was predictable. Opinion in the cities and towns surrounding Boston long before had become hardened against administrative unity. The bill's supporters faced a serious dilemma. To broaden the council's powers would create a county council on the London model, which would immediately galvanize the opposition of the Middlesex, Essex, and Norfolk "county rings." Legislators owed their careers to the county party organizations, and only those ready for political suicide would support a strong council bill.

The Metropolitan District Commission’s hearings in 1894-1895 revealed strong suburban suspicion of Boston’s politicians. Suburban residents, including many in elective offices, saw themselves as vulnerable innocents who, under any plan of metropolitan federation, might not be able to resist the designs of Boston's predatory bosses. Their attitudes became stronger with time.

52 Newton *Times*, March 15, 22, 29, 1911; Everett *Republican*, March 25, 1911; Malden *Evening News*, March 22, 1911.
The shadow of the Boston Chamber of Commerce compromised the Bennett bill. That “business interests” endorsed a scheme about which they already had serious reservations was enough to condemn it. The Chamber of Commerce allegedly disavowed “annexation,” but the suspect organization commanded no confidence from its enemies.

Above all, there was the nagging question of the real purpose of a metropolitan council. What would such an executive body do? Ghosts from the past and fears of the present stimulated localists to action. Among the probable specters was Sylvester Baxter’s little book of 1891, where he wrote that “naturally” a county council would administer schools and the police. But nowhere did central authority, certainly not in Massachusetts, “naturally” control police and education. The existing metropolitan commissions administered services many considered neutral. Even if Bennett’s council did not usurp education and the police, there was a strong fear that it might successfully recommend more metropolitan boards.

Attitudes towards standard housing and building codes were equally negative. Any municipality might do many things with such regulations other than protect public welfare. Such ordinances helped preserve the “tone” of neighborhoods or even entire towns. Brookline, Belmont, Wellesley, Weston, and Newton were enclaves of prosperous families. Many settled there to escape the imagined contagions of an immigrant and industrial city. A general council for all of greater Boston threatened them.

Such reservations were fantastic, even fraudulent; but there were sound, more reasonable, objections to March Bennett’s bill. It made political sense in 1911 to promise that a metropolitan council would not interfere with the existing political structure, but even a superficial glance revealed that such a guaranty made little administrative sense. Forty municipal governments, counting Boston’s; four county administrations; and two special state commissions—the legislature combined the water and sewer boards in 1900—shared jurisdiction over
greater Boston. The General Court capped a structure which
the Metropolitan District Commission had demonstrated to be
ridiculously complex. Was yet another artificial jurisdiction,
however weak, justified? If not, what were Bennett's motives
for suggesting it?

His written apologies revealed his reasons plainly enough.
A Metropolitan Boston Council was not to introduce ad-
ministrative efficiency; it was not, despite his vague and uncon-
vincing predictions, to standardize the area's regulations and
services. His remarks made clear that a greater Boston execu-
tive council would enforce retrenchment upon the metropoli-
tan boards. Even if Bennett's ideas about the future activities
of such an organization proved true, the essential objection
remained. It was yet another jurisdiction added to a notably
complex structure.

While Bennett fought for his council bill, the Metropolitan
Plan Commission studied the expediency of enforcing an over-
all program of integrating planning and services. Edward
Filene, a founder of "Boston-1915," served as its chairman.53

Filene's commission reported to the legislature in 1912.
After the group had studied large municipal organizations
in the nation and Europe, it reported that in no place were so
many independent municipalities crowded together as in
greater Boston. Forty cities and towns occupied less than 250
square miles of territory. The commission, reflecting Filene's
ideas, concluded that housing was the region's most pressing
problem. The worst conditions were in Boston, but rapidly
growing suburbs would suffer in the future without preventive
action. The same conditions which created slums in Boston
were at work in the suburbs. It was not possible to control the
situation in single cities and towns. The time was propitious
for an authority to harmonize the area's divergent needs and
plans. Quick action would save the suburbs from haphazard
development, so socially and economically costly to Boston.
Stable economic growth promised to stabilize living costs and

53 Johnson, Liberal's Progress, 105; Massachusetts, Resolves, chapter 84, 1911.
abolish conditions “which make so many citizens a burden rather than a benefit” to the community. It guaranteed greater prosperity and more efficient services. The Commission recommended a Metropolitan Planning Board of five men. The Mayor of Boston would appoint two, the Governor, three, for five-year terms, with the appointment of chairman reserved to the Governor. The General Court might define the board’s jurisdiction. It would not affect existing metropolitan authorities. After “systematic consultation with all the local authorities,” the board would publish “from time to time” a comprehensive metropolitan plan. The board would study congestion, fire protection, transportation, and financing regional improvements. Local authorities remained free to make their own plans, which the metropolitan board might survey and integrate into a regional blueprint. In case of disagreement, one year’s delay would allow the board and local officials to produce a compromise. The Commonwealth would finance regional projects, and apportion costs upon those municipalities directly benefiting.54

The Metropolitan Plan Commission’s work was abortive. Its demise was inevitable because Bennett’s council bill had mobilized the forces resisting any change in the status quo. Into the same legislative session which received the Commission’s report, Representative Kiley of Boston introduced yet another general annexation bill. The opposition was thorough; as in 1896, such a bill compromised all other suggestions to integrate the greater Boston area.55

But Filene’s planning board was objectionable on practical grounds. It strengthened, not weakened, the particularism that plagued metropolitan Boston. By promising to arbitrate conflicts between local and regional plans, it offered almost endless haggling. Localists saw that very flaw as a threat; debacle might lead to legal redefinition of the board’s authority,


55 Malden Evening Mail, Feb. 16, 1912.
which might strengthen it. Small towns especially recoiled from approving even local housing codes and building ordinances, which "compromised" natural liberty.

"Boston–1915" was a flickering lantern by April of 1913, when the Transcript featured a special section on the city's future, under the caption "Boston in 1950." Governor Eugene Foss wrote on the future of a revived port, already in decline in 1913. Frederick Law Olmstead and Arthur Shurtleff prophesied marvelous parks and wooded reservations, while Sylvester Baxter envisioned flowered Charles banks and smokeless factories. Mayor John Francis Fitzgerald predicted that Boston at mid-century would be a city of beauty and harmony, with municipal steam plants supplying heat and hot water to every house, factory, and shop, and no slums marring gracious streets. So "Boston–1915" passed into "Boston in 1950," and Newton's aldermen and Brookline's selectmen continued to wrap their garbage in the Transcript.58

For a generation a "greater Boston" was among the major topics of the day in city and suburb. The sustained controversial atmosphere refined and strengthened those opposed to innovation. Suburban notables had lived through a psychological state of siege since the Metropolitan District Commission's hearings in 1894-1895.

Little of importance on the metropolitan question occurred after the turn of the century. Meanwhile, Massachusetts Progressives were agitating for a constitutional convention during which they hoped to secure amendments reforming the tax structure and providing for initiative and referendum. Other public questions were at issue, but these two were Progressive goals. In 1916 the legislature submitted the question: "Shall there be a convention to revise, alter, or amend the Constitution of the Commonwealth?" which carried two to one. In an outstanding example of unfortunate timing, Massachusetts voters chose delegates in May, 1917. The convention met in two sessions, during the summer and autumn of 1917, and the

58 Boston Transcript, April 13, 1913.
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summer of 1918. Its official publications revealed little discussion of metropolitan problems. The Commonwealth established a special commission to furnish delegates with information, including a short report on confederated city government. It mainly discussed New York and London, and lamely concluded that any plan for greater Boston's integration must avoid unnamed "pitfalls." The 1918 session, however, submitted Article LXVI, organizing the state's executive into twenty departments, which carried in November.57

The annexation question was revived briefly during the General Court's 1919 session, when Boston's Mayor Andrew Peters petitioned for the creation, without referendum, of a metropolitan municipality. The city's printing department published a short pamphlet by Peters, outlining traditional annexationist arguments. While he hoped to allay suburban doubts by promising local control of education and liquor, he significantly advocated an enlarged Boston "to impress Washington." Recent Interstate Commerce Commission decisions on uniform freight rates had injured New England shippers and manufacturers and especially those in Massachusetts. A larger city might affect the Commission's attitudes. Peters also complained about constructing public works, for it was impossible to "fling a bridge across one of our rivers" or build an intercity road, without asking the legislature for special laws.58

Peters' Greater Boston bill would certainly not carry. The legislature proceeded to discuss and pass acts necessary to implement the new constitutional amendments. In a section of


the act reorganizing the Commonwealth's executive, the General Court established the Metropolitan District, under a commissioner and four associates. It was a simple piece of legislation, merely consolidating the Water and Sewer Board and the Metropolitan Park Board.\textsuperscript{59}

The Metropolitan District Commission had a long history. In 1894, the Malden Board of Trade endorsed a state board to handle water, sewers, parks, and highways, as an alternative to a county council. The following year, one Tilly Haynes advocated the same idea, suggesting that three businessmen and two lawyers make up the board. And in 1901, Metropolitan Affairs reported unfavorably on a bill almost identical to that adopted in 1919.\textsuperscript{60}

Indisputably, the act of 1919 evaded the metropolitan problem, although it made sense finally to consolidate the metropolitan boards. Greater Boston needed an organization with authority to act on highways and waterways, recreation, public health, police and fire protection, specialized educational institutions, and planning. But that was not politically possible in 1920 even though Senator Potter demonstrated its necessity as early as 1873.

\textsuperscript{59} Massachusetts, \textit{Acts}, chapter 350, 1919.
\textsuperscript{60} Malden \textit{Evening News}, Nov. 22, 1894; "Greater Boston Discussed," \textit{Greater Boston Magazine}, April, 1895, 4.