



Region Matters

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Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission
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Winter 2015

MVPC Updates Regional Land-Use Master Plan

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission has updated the "Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy - The Regional Land-Use Plan for the Merrimack Valley Region". The Plan, which was adopted in 2009, was the first Regional Land Use Plan for the Merrimack Valley in over 30 years. It reflects the vision put forth by the region's cities and towns as articulated to MVPC in community interviews and numerous forums. Not only were community representatives interviewed, but all local community Master Plans, 418 Plans, Open Space Plans, and Economic Development Plans were reviewed for guidance.

The 2009 Plan was innovative in that it identified over 50 "concentrated development centers" which are areas of existing development or areas suitable for future high density development. These areas are appropriately zoned as commercial, industrial, or mixed use and have existing infrastructure in place. The Plan also suggested areas that should not be developed in order to preserve the character of the region and to protect environmental resources. Lastly, the Plan evaluated the suitability of the regional transportation network that serves the different land use patterns and recommends smart mobility improvements that will best serve present and future generations.

The updated Priority Growth Strategy reflects and captures new development, new community focus areas, revised zoning bylaws, and completed or planned infrastructure projects that have occurred in the five years since the Plan was adopted. Many of the recommended land-use actions outlined in the original Plan have been put forth and are now recognized in the update.

In addition, MVPC's region has been incorporated into the statewide master plan titled "Planning Ahead for Growth" and this initiative has been reflected in the new Plan. The major change in the new Plan is that the designation of the region's growth areas are re-named and now called "Priority Development Areas" (PDA's) instead of "concentrated development centers" (CDC's). The 56 original CDC's are now classified as PDA's of State, Regional, and Local significance to better coincide with the statewide plan.

"The region can be very proud of its' accomplishments" announced Dennis DiZoglio, Executive Director of MVPC. "Although the past five years have still suffered from the great recession, this region has enjoyed some remarkable achievements. Our cities and towns have been very proactive putting forth new zoning tools to allow for better development of their PDA's, and several new and exciting developments have occurred and are planned for the coming year. New businesses have moved into the region, and existing businesses are growing and expanding, and housing is being built. In addition, the transportation network serving the region has seen many improvements, including the completion of rebuilding/replacing no less than six structurally deficient bridges."

*Written by Mike Parquette
MVPC Comprehensive Planning Manager*



2014 Grand Prize

*Plover chick with plants
Sandy Point, Plum Island,
Ipswich*

Photo by: Ken Jordan

**Essex National Heritage Area
Announces Winners of
2014 Photo Contest**

www.essexheritage.org/photocontest

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MVPC Seeks Additional Funding for Brownfields Program

On December 18, MVPC submitted a three-year \$400,000 grant application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to continue the Merrimack Valley Brownfields Assessment Program to 2018. The Program, which began in 2003, has completed over 70 site investigations and reports on brownfield sites throughout the Merrimack Valley. Many of these investigations have resulted in the cleanup and reuse of formerly contaminated properties into affordable housing, educational facilities, and community gardens, parks, and rail trails. Examples include the Clipper City Rail Trail in Newburyport; Hamel Mill Lofts in Haverhill; and the Dr. Ibrahim El-Hefni Allied Health & Technology Center in Lawrence.

Additional hazardous material and petroleum assessment funding is needed, as the current three-year grant program is scheduled to end in summer 2015, with all remaining funding allocated. Award announcements from EPA are expected in the spring. If awarded, new assessment projects in the region could begin as early as October.

MVPC's Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund also remains active, with a recent grant and loan awarded to the 29 Elm Street project in Salisbury. Once cleanup activities are completed on the site, this municipally-owned property will be converted into affordable housing. In addition to Salisbury, the \$1.375 million MVPC Loan Program has awarded cleanup funding to the Oxford Park project in Lawrence; Heritage Park in Amesbury's Lower Millyard; and Osgood Street property in Methuen.

For more information on MVPC's regional Brownfields Assessment and Cleanup Program, contact Joseph Cosgrove, MVPC Environmental Program Manager at 978-374-0519 ext. 16 or jcosgrove@mvpc.org.



Written by Ted Semesnyei

MVPC Economic Development Coordinator



Merrimack Valley Means Business

On October 6, the Merrimack Valley Mayors and Managers Coalition (MVMMC), in conjunction with MVPC, announced the release of the updated and streamlined *Merrimack Valley Means Business (MVMB)* marketing initiative. Representing the communities of Amesbury, Andover, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Newburyport, North Andover, and Salisbury, the Coalition has been working with MVPC on ways to better market the region to prospective developers and businesses. MVMB.biz features an easy-to-use property search tool, highlights priority development projects, and provides quick links to key municipal officials, zoning links, and important information on doing business. The goal of the initiative is to attract new economic development by strengthening the regional business support network, enhancing the marketing of development opportunities in the Valley, and bolstering the collection of timely market data.

Written by Ted Semesnyei

MVPC Economic Development Coordinator

Labor Force Outlook Brightens in the Region

The number of employed people in the Merrimack Valley hit a record high of 161,435 in November, according to the latest data from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. With a total labor force of 171,829, nearly matching the peak of 171,948 set earlier in the year in July, the unemployment rate in the Valley stood at 6.0% in November, a significant decrease from the Great Recession high of 11.0% reached in January 2010.

Moreover, according to the latest data release, the number of jobs in the region in the second quarter of 2014 reached 141,179, up 1.6% from the year before and a solid 8.9% from five years previous. By comparison, employment for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts grew 6.7% for the same five-year period. In addition, while the state experienced a decline of 3.5% from 2009 to 2014 in the closely watched manufacturing sector, the Merrimack Valley managed a small increase in manufacturing employment, in large part to the Gateway communities of Lawrence and Haverhill. Manufacturing in the City of Lawrence rose from 4,732 in 2009Q2 to 4,954 in 2014Q2, a healthy 4.7% increase. Meanwhile, manufacturing in the City of Haverhill increased a remarkable 50%, rising from 2,011 in 2009Q2 to 3,026 in 2014Q2.

Written by Ted Semesnyei

MVPC Economic Development Coordinator

Safe Streets in Haverhill



Washington Square, Haverhill

If you were pulled over by the police in Haverhill this summer to discuss your poor driving, bicycling or walking behavior, then you unwittingly participated in a new program. This year, the Haverhill Police Department (HPD) and MVPC partnered with MassDOT to initiate a safety program aimed at reducing bicycle and pedestrian crashes. The program takes a three pronged approach – enforcement, education and environment. The HPD stepped up the enforcement of driving, bicycling and walking laws, educated people about safe travel behavior and asked them for information about why they did what they did. So, for example they learned that the pedestrian light was not working at the Winter and White Streets intersection and that on Merrimack Street, the crosswalk was not in the most useful spot for pedestrians.

Data was collected and used for the third part of the program -- infrastructure improvements.

WalkBoston and MassBike led two groups on walking tours to discuss how to make the streets safer. We discussed pedestrian improvements at Washington Square and along Winter Street noting smaller items such as missing signs to larger problems such as intersection realignment.

With no safe place for bicycling and a lot of traffic, most cyclists downtown ride on the sidewalk. The bikeability audit highlighted the need for bicycle parking throughout the downtown, wayfinding signage and complete streets. The group discussed both the idea of eliminating some car parking along Merrimack Street as well as making Bailey Boulevard a primary bicycle route and using the less traveled side streets to connect cyclists to downtown.

The program will continue next year with the addition of implementing the infrastructure improvements. We also hope to increase the education component by getting a larger coalition of organizations involved in the effort.

For more information on Safe Streets, contact Betsy Goodrich at (978) 374-0519, ext. 21 or email: egoodrich@mvpc.org

*Written by Betsy Goodrich
MVPC Sr Transportation Planner*

Great Marsh Team Monitors Marsh Edge Erosion



Photos above & below are of Hog Island, Plum Island Sound



The Great Marsh Restoration team, spearheaded by the MassBays National Estuary Program of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, has begun work on documenting and investigating tidal marsh bank erosion in Plum Island Sound, Essex Bay, and Salem Sound. In recent years it has been anecdotally noted that the marsh edge has been eroding and calving off at a higher rate than in the previous several years. Over a dozen sites have been selected as representative erosion sites in the three marshes. Using a highly accurate RTK GPS unit, the sites were delineated this fall in advance of the winter storm season. The objective of this project is to (1) monitor the rate of marsh bank erosion and (2) attempt to determine the root causes of the erosion. To that end, monitoring equipment, including video cameras, is being installed in the marsh to help identify the erosional effects of bioturbators (green crabs), sea level rise, boat wake, storms, etc. Funding has been provided by the MA Division of Marine Fisheries and supported by the State Senators of the Great Marsh through the MA Division of Ecological Restoration.



Marsh in Essex Bay

*Written by Peter Phippen
MVPC Eight Towns and the Great Marsh Coordinator*



Don't Miss our Upcoming Workshops

MVPC to Host Citizen Planner Training Collaborative Workshops

MVPC will be hosting the Citizen Planning Training – a three session certification program (MIIA approved) in 2015 for municipal officials. Topics will include permitting, interdepartmental cooperation and coordination, and responsibilities of boards and commissions. For more details go to: www.mvpc.org

MVPC urges planning, zoning, building officials as well as municipal staff members who serve Planning and Zoning Boards to attend these highly informative workshops. To register contact Nancy Lavallee at 978-374-0519 x10 or email: nlavallee@mvpc.org.

2015 Session Dates

Session I—Monday, April 6
Session II—Monday, April 13
Session III—Fall CPTC Workshop (TBD)

Time: 6:00pm

Location: MVPC Offices, 160 Main Street Haverhill, MA 01830

Program Fee: \$100 per person

Public Hearings & Workshops

January 15 6:00pm — **Priority Growth Strategy Public Hearing**
Location: MVPC Commission Office 160 Main Street Haverhill, MA

January 20 10:00am — **MIMAP Training for Merrimac Municipal Officials**
Location: Merrimac Town Hall
Contact Jerrard Whitten jjwhitten@mvpc.org

January 26 to January 30 8:00am to 3:30pm - **CMMS Training (Computerized Maintenance Management Systems)** (for Amesbury, Andover, Haverhill & Newburyport)
Contact Jerrard Whitten jjwhitten@mvpc.org

March 10 8:00am to 10:00am—**Parks and Recreation Staff (Workshop 1)**
Location: Northern Essex Community College, Lawrence Riverwalk Classroom LRW 312
Contact: Joe Cosgrove jcosgrove@mvpc.org

March 20 8:00am to 11:00am—**Buildings, Facilities, Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance (Workshop 2)**
Location: Andover Public Services Building and Public Works Maintenance Yard
Contact: Joe Cosgrove jcosgrove@mvpc.org

April 10 8:00am to 11:00am—**Stormwater Management and Infrastructure Maintenance (Workshop 3)**
Location: Northern Essex Community College, Lawrence Riverwalk Classroom LRW 312
Contact: Joe Cosgrove jcosgrove@mvpc.org

2015 MVPC Monthly Commission Meetings

MVPC Commission Office
160 Main Street Haverhill, MA

Contact: Nancy Lavallee
nlavallee@mvpc.org Tel: 978-374-0519 ext. 10

Third Thursday of the month @ 7pm

January 15	April 16
February 19	May 21
March 19	June 18

Check our website for Commission Meeting Agenda and details on upcoming events www.mvpc.org



Serving the communities of:
Amesbury Andover Boxford Georgetown Groveland Haverhill Lawrence Merrimac Methuen
Newbury Newburyport North Andover Rowley Salisbury West Newbury