

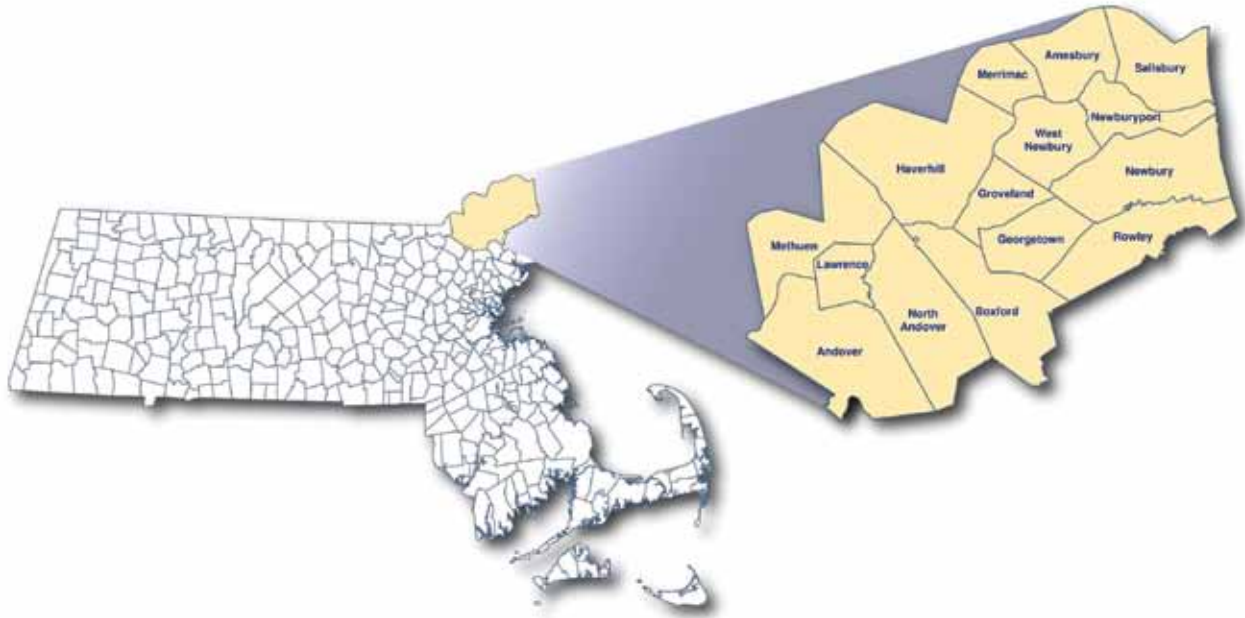


# ANNUAL REPORT 2012



Merrimack Valley  
Planning Commission  
*plan \* develop \* promote*

# Planning Region and Commissioners



## COMMISSIONERS

AMESBURY	Robert Lavoie, <i>vice chairman</i>
ANDOVER	Joan Duff
BOXFORD	Joe Hill
GEORGETOWN	Howard Snyder
GROVELAND	Robert O'Hanley
HAVERHILL	Robert Driscoll
LAWRENCE	Dan McCarthy
MERRIMAC	John Thomas
METHUEN	Kevin P. Haggerty
NEWBURY	David Powell, <i>assistant treasurer</i>
NEWBURYPORT	Ed Ramsdell, <i>secretary</i>
NORTH ANDOVER	Richard Byers, <i>chairman</i>
ROWLEY	Robert Snow, <i>treasurer</i>
SALISBURY	Lou Masiello
WEST NEWBURY	Brian Murphey
REP-at-LARGE	Brad Buschur
MVPC	Dennis A. DiZoglio, <i>executive director</i>



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The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission supports responsible forest management worldwide.



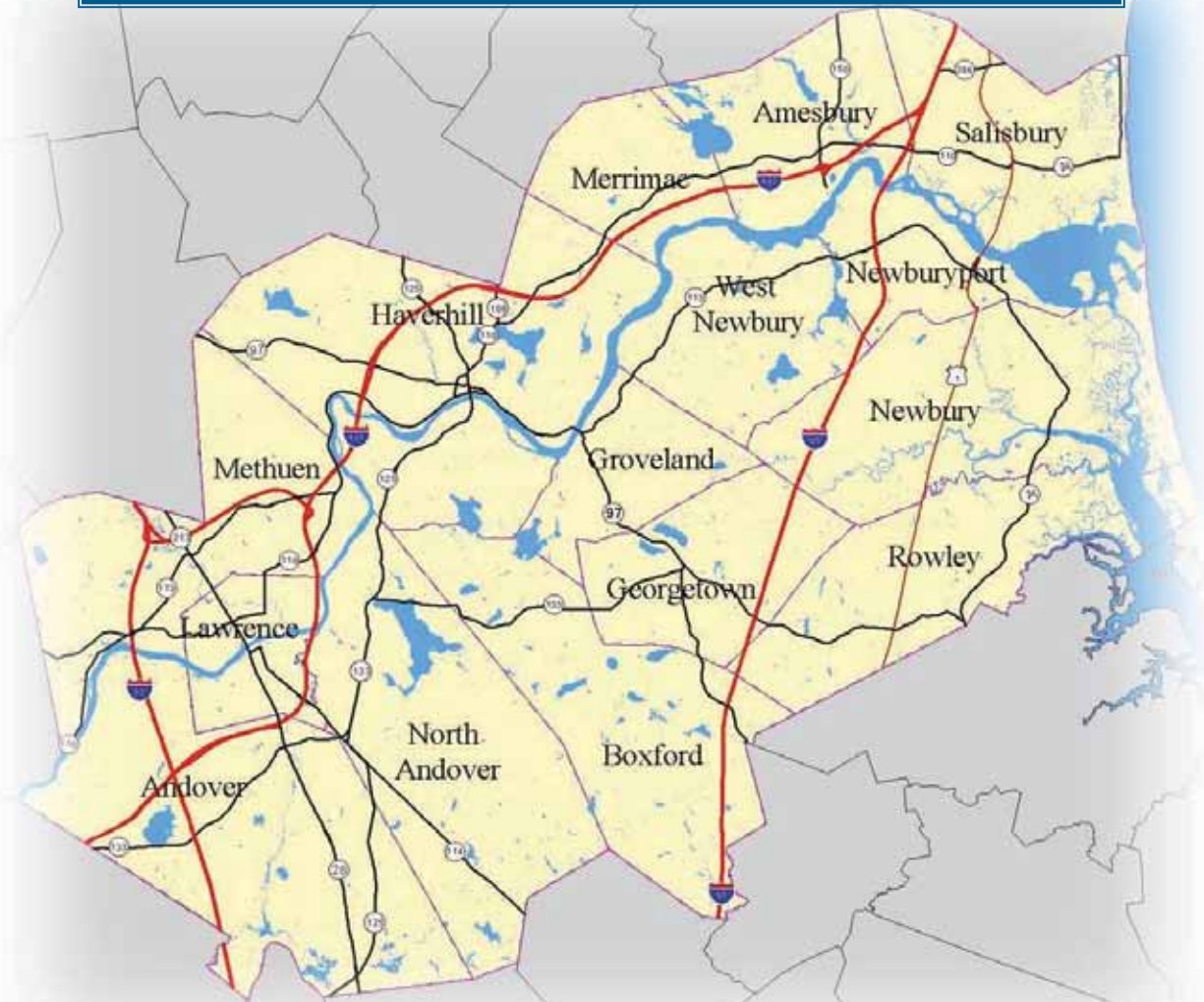
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## Mission Statement

*The mission of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission is to foster a cooperative effort among its communities in resolving common, regional problems, to allow its communities to plan jointly, and to promote with the greatest efficiency and economy the coordinated and orderly development of the region and the general welfare of its residents. This 2012 Annual Report is organized to demonstrate MVPC's commitment to this mission and to provide the region a vision to ensure that the Merrimack Valley is a great place to live and prosper.*



## Chairman's Comments

- *Richard Byers*



Richard Byers is the current Chairman of the Commission after being elected at the annual meeting in May 2012 and represents North Andover on the Commission. He has been a member of the North Andover Zoning Board of Appeals since 2003 and has previously served as a member of the North Andover Housing Partnership Committee. He is an Attorney with a practice in North Andover focusing primarily on real estate law, land use, estate planning and probate. Having been born and raised in Lowell he is a life long resident of the Merrimack Valley, he currently resides in North Andover since 1998 with his wife and two children.

How fortunate I find myself as Chairman of such an esteemed body. This past year we had some changes at the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, as Chairman Joe Sullivan completed his tenure as Chairman in May. I, on behalf of the whole Commission, thank Joe for his years of service to the Commission and wish him well in his future endeavors.

Once again it was a banner year for the Commission, which continues to be a model to the other Regional Planning Commissions throughout the Commonwealth. The Commission was recognized this past year by the Commonwealth with a Leading by Example Award for its' Clean Energy Plan. The Leading by Example Awards recognize outstanding efforts among Commonwealth agencies, public higher education institutions, municipalities, and individuals that have "established and implemented policies and programs resulting in significant and demonstrable energy and environmental benefits." Speaking for the entire Commission, I would like to congratulate the entire staff for this award and to take the opportunity to once again applaud the tremendous skill and dedication which all of our staff bring to this agency.

The Commission continues to find innovative ways to serve its member communities by utilizing a number of cutting edge solutions in its transportation, environmental, comprehensive, GIS or economic development programs. The Commission staff is always on the forefront of searching for solutions to regional planning issues in these areas.

The Commission this past year continued its push toward regionalization through a number of programs, most notably the Mayors and Managers Coalition. This program has lead to such initiatives as the joint procurement program, the regionalization of services as well as many energy initiatives. Since our member communities continue to face difficult fiscal times, the Commission recognizes that a great way to save our member communities money is to pool our resources and find savings where we can.

Lastly, the Commission continues to be a great promoter and cheerleader for the region as a whole. Through its' Merrimack Valley Means Business, the Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy and the Merrimack Valley Economic Development Corporation, the Commission continues to be a resource for current businesses and those that are looking to locate in the Merrimack Valley.

I would like to thank Dennis and the entire staff of the Commission, as well as my fellow Commissioners for their work, dedication and service and look forward to another exciting year at the Commission.

Very truly yours,

Richard Byers, Chairman

# Executive Director's Comments

- Dennis A. DiZoglio



In 2012 MVPC's Merrimack Valley Clean Energy Plan received the *Leading by Example* award from the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs. While the Plan was officially adopted by the Commission in October of 2012 MVPC worked throughout the year with our communities to begin implementing this strategic energy plan for the region. Projects ranging from energy conservation, to renewable energy, to energy purchasing were begun in 2012.

When it comes to the importance of planning, I am fond of saying "you can't get there if you do not know where you are going". We crafted a planned vision for the region in 2010 with the

adoption of the Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy. This vision creates a balance between growth and preserving our natural resources, and a vision for a livable, sustainable region, connected and innovative. This year the Commonwealth through the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development reached out to our region to incorporate our vision into the State "Planning Ahead for Growth" initiative.

In 2008 we developed the Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This year we began work on updating this Strategy. We obtained Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding to explore the potential of identifying industry clusters in the region and have reached out to our communities to begin the process. We hope to be completed with this strategic plan in 2013.

Last year the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) was updated. This year we saw a significant investment in implementing the RTP. Projects advanced included the Route 110/113 & I 93 Rotary, the Duck Bridge, the Rocks Village Bridge, the Bates Bridge and the Whittier Bridge. I encourage you to review the RTP. While we have made great strides in implementing the plan a review of the RTP will certainly show the needs and the dilemma we face in the region to adequately fund our transportation system.

This year marked the beginning of implementing the EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund Program. Two projects were programmed in 2012 and three more are on the drawing board for 2013.

In 2012 MVPC continued its role as a community organizer. Working with the Merrimack Valley Mayors & Managers Coalition and the Town Administrators in the region, MVPC helped these alliances identify ways to work together. One project that has great potential is the deployment of a Regional 311 Call-In-Center and a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS). We hope that this regional approach will help the communities deal effectively with their fiscal challenges and become more efficient.

All of our accomplishments in 2012 can be viewed on our website. As we close our look on the MVPC accomplishments of 2012 we hope to be as successful in accomplishing our goals for 2013.

## 2013 Goals

1. Support the implementation of the Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy and coordinate with the Commonwealth the adoption of the Planning Ahead for Growth Initiative for the Merrimack Valley.
2. Expand the use of Technology throughout the Region.
3. Manage the FFY 2013 TIP & UPWP and develop the FFY 2014 TIP & UPWP. Assist communities advance their prioritized list of Transportation Projects for programming purposes.
4. Update the CEDS for the region and articulate and expand the role MVPC can play in promoting Economic Development in the Region.
5. Provide "Smart Growth" technical assistance to member communities.
6. Provide information and training to the professional and volunteer planners in the Region.
7. Identify ways to improve the overall administration of the Commission to make it more efficient and effective.
8. Continue to elevate the profile of the Commission throughout the Region and the State.
9. Promote regional Cooperation and Collaboration and bring regional solutions to common challenges the communities face.



## *Promoting Redevelopment and Growth*

**M**VPC has a strategy that can drive the orderly development of the region for years to come. The Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy, the cornerstone of this effort, was rolled out by the Commission in 2010. The Strategy identifies where the region encourages growth, where the region would like to preserve and protect land from development, and how the transportation network of the region can be upgraded and enhanced to sustain and connect these development patterns. In 2012 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts contacted the region regarding the inclusion of the Merrimack Valley into the Commonwealth's "Planning Ahead for Growth" initiative. Since 2007, the Commonwealth has been deliberately and consistently planning ahead for job and housing growth across Massachusetts in partnership with regional planning agencies. The Commonwealth hopes to identify Priority Development Areas (PDA) and Priority Preservation Areas (PPA) across the State and target State resources to advance these priorities. The Commonwealth hopes to use the Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy to identify suitable PDAs and PPAs.

To implement the Priority Growth Strategy MVPC focused its activities on "promoting redevelopment and growth", "protecting the region's environment" and "prioritizing transportation investments" during 2012.

**Merrimack Valley Clean Energy Action Plan 2012:** MVPC applied for and was awarded a \$50,000 grant in 2011 from the U.S. Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to develop a regional clean energy plan.

In September, 2012, MVPC completed the Merrimack Valley Clean Energy Action Plan, a plan initiated from the economic development vision generated as MVPC developed the 2008 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Merrimack Valley Mayors and Managers Coalition, which has created a robust regional energy management program, then became the driver for this regional opportunity.



*Solar panels for single family homes, Amesbury*



Solar Arrays atop the Rock Middle School in Newburyport, Mass.  
Photo courtesy: Jim Walker, Amesbury

The Merrimack Valley Clean Energy Action Plan is a very innovative, action oriented document detailing specific recommendations for each city and town in the region to help them advance their energy goals. To becoming a designated "Green Community" through the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, to putting energy efficient infrastructure modernization plans in place, to building solar farms on closed landfills or other town-owned property, the Merrimack Valley Clean Energy Action Plan has ideas for our largest city as well as our smallest town. Performance measures to assess the impact of the Plan on our 15

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

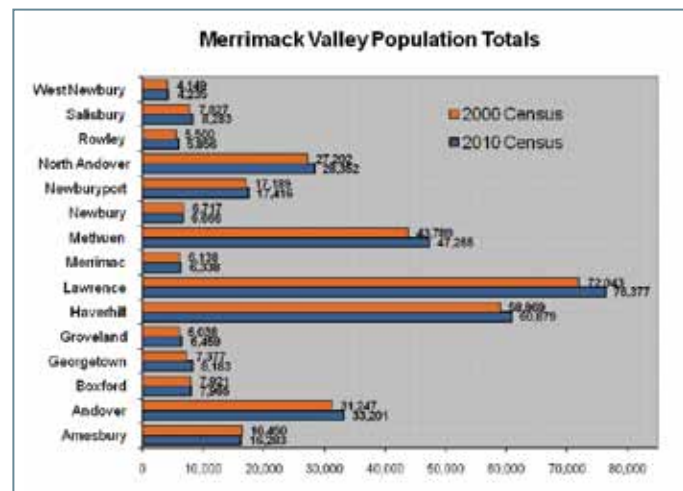
municipalities are an important element of the Plan, and will be crucial to tracking the Plan's success in the months and years ahead.

Soon after the Plan was completed, MVPC was presented with a Commonwealth of Massachusetts Leading by Example Award for the Energy Action Plan. The Leading by Example Awards recognize outstanding efforts among Commonwealth agencies, public higher education institutions, municipalities, and individuals that have “established and implemented policies and programs resulting in significant and demonstrable energy and environmental benefits.”

**Planning Ahead for Growth:** Throughout 2012, MVPC has been working very closely with the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) as they continue developing the statewide development plan called “Planning Ahead for Growth.” Planning Ahead for Growth involves four critical elements: 1) Identify promising places for growth that have community support and are consistent with regional considerations and plans. 2) Create both state and local prompt and predictable zoning in those areas. 3) Invest in public infrastructure needed to support that growth. 4) Market those places to the business and development community. Building off MVPC’s Priority Growth Strategy which identified 57 “concentrated development centers” and “priority preservation areas”, EOHED has undergone an analysis to identify “Development Areas” and “Open Space” that align with the commonwealth’s growth and preservation priorities.

**Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:** The 2012 Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Performance Report was submitted to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) on June 30. The Report provides an update on economic development conditions, studies, and initiatives in the region since the release of the 2008 Merrimack Valley CEDS. The 2008 CEDS was a complete update of the regional master plan, featuring a new set of goals, objectives, and action plan. MVPC has worked closely with the private, public, and nonprofit sectors on numerous initiatives reflected in the CEDS, centered on the themes of infrastructure, marketing, green initiatives, and entrepreneurship support. Following the release of the 2012 Performance Report, MVPC immediately began work on the 2013 five-year CEDS Update, which will be completed in summer 2013. The 2013 CEDS is revisiting the regional economic development goals, objectives, and action plan developed in 2008. The regional CEDS Committee has been reconvened to help guide the process, with Northern Essex Community College President, Dr. Lane Glenn, serving as Committee Chairman. Also, MVPC applied for and received additional EDA planning funds to develop a supplemental regional industry cluster analysis report. Initial findings from the analysis will be included in the 2013 CEDS.

**Regional Data Center:** MVPC is the regional repository of demographic data from various federal and state agencies. In 2012, MVPC continued collecting and analyzing data releases from the 2010 Census and American Community Surveys. The Merrimack Valley region’s population grew by 4.8% compared to 3.1% for the balance of the entire State. Local population, race and housing unit totals from the 2010 Census were released on March 22nd, showing our region growing, albeit more slowly than in previous decades, and continuing to diversify. The region traditionally has seen its population grow faster than the State as a whole.



After the 1990 census the region saw a 10.5% increase compared to a State increase of 4.9% and in 2000 the region again saw a 10.5% increase with the State realizing a 5.5% increase. The total population for the 15-community Merrimack Valley region now stands at 333,748, up from 318,556 in 2000.

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

**Brownfields Site Assessment and Cleanup:** In May of 2012, MVPC was awarded an EPA Brownfields grant of \$200,000 to continue the Merrimack Valley region's highly successful brownfields assessment program. MVPC and our technical consultant, TRC Environmental Corp. began using the new grant funds to help member communities investigate additional sites known or perceived to be contaminated by hazardous substances. Since the program's inception in 2003, MVPC has spearheaded over 70 Phase I and II environmental site assessments and MCP (Massachusetts Contingency Plan) response actions. Many of these have resulted in the cleanup and reuse of former industrial properties for affordable housing, public transit facilities, and community gardens, parks, and rail trails.



*Site near downtown Merrimac*

Also during 2012, as part of our EPA-funded Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Program, MVPC and our technical consultants TRC and Weston & Sampson assisted the cities of **Lawrence** and **Methuen** on two key site cleanup and redevelopment projects near the communities downtowns. In December, MVPC submitted an additional assessment grant request to EPA, which if funded will be used to investigate eligible Merrimack Valley properties contaminated by petroleum hydrocarbons. These sites range from large (3+ acres) industrial mill complexes with long histories of heating fuel use and storage to small (1 acre or less) corner gasoline filling stations. All told, the Merrimack Valley region has over 450 registered former and current underground storage tank (UST) sites and over 500 documented petroleum releases associated with USTs.



**Merrimack Valley Means Business:** The Merrimack Valley Means Business (MVMB) website, officially launched on October 15, 2009, has now been successfully running for over two years. MVMB is a pioneering concept for new and existing businesses in the Merrimack Valley. Developed by the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC), in partnership with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Merrimack Valley Economic Development Council (MVEDC), regional Chambers of Commerce, and community development departments, MVMB offers a unique and technologically advanced service for prospective and existing businesses looking to market or expand in the region. The only comprehensive, field-based inventory of properties in Massachusetts, the website offers valuable

information on over 11,500 businesses and 500 locations for sale or lease in the Valley and employs the latest mapping and imaging technologies.

**Other Economic Development Support:** MVPC staff handled numerous demographic data inquiries and requests for regional economic development overviews for businesses, individuals, and community officials. In addition, MVPC provided technical assistance for the City of Haverhill's application for downtown infrastructure funding assistance from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.





## Protecting the Region's Environment

From the panoramic 20,000-acre Great Marsh and sandy beaches lining our coast, to the patchwork of forests and farms in our uplands and river corridors, the Merrimack Valley is home to some of the most picturesque and ecologically-significant natural resources in the Commonwealth. During 2012, MVPC environmental planners worked closely with our member communities, state and federal agencies, and environmental organizations to help inventory, map, and protect the Valley region's vital land and water resources. Program highlights included assessment and cleanup of contaminated Brownfields properties, updating of the regional multi-hazard mitigation plan, advice and assistance on local open space and recreation plans, and active support for the Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program.

### Merrimack Valley Regional Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan Update:

Following a project kick-off meeting at Northern Essex Community College in March 2012, MVPC planners and GIS staff have been working collaboratively with local emergency managers and other public safety personnel to update the region's federally-approved "Merrimack Valley Region Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan". The current 5-year plan, due to expire in February 2013, prescribes a series of recommended actions communities can take to reduce risks from floods, fires, wind storms, and other natural hazards.



The economic costs of these hazards, together with the emotional and social upheaval they cause, can be staggering. During the last decade alone, the notorious Mothers Day Flood of 2006 and Patriots Day Flood of 2007 damaged hundreds of Valley area homes and businesses, closed scores of public roads, washed out numerous culverts, bridges, and other key infrastructure, and forced the emergency evacuation of nursing home residents and other sensitive populations. By updating the regional plan every 5 years, our communities will retain their eligibility for various federal hazard mitigation grants administered by the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.



**Open Space Planning:** MVPC also worked with municipal planners, conservation agents, and open space committees in **Amesbury** and **Methuen** to help update the communities' 5-year open space & recreation plans. A current plan conforming to state Division of Conservation Services guidelines is a requirement for receiving land acquisition and outdoor recreation facilities grants.

MVPC, in collaboration with the Green Neighborhoods Alliance, continued to assist communities in the drafting and refinement of Open Space Residential Design bylaws. An alternative to conventional subdivision design, OSRD is a proven technique for building new housing and desirable neighborhoods while maximizing the retention of prime open space, including forests, farmland, wildlife habitat, and off-road trail corridors. The result is a more compact, "people-friendly" subdivision that promotes walking and resident interaction while protecting a site's most important conservation and historical attributes.

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

**Municipal Phase II Stormwater Management:** MVPC continued to provide information and advice to local governments on their federally-mandated Phase II stormwater management programs. Assistance included preparation of public outreach materials on household best management practices and the compilation of data in support of MS4 annual reporting. MVPC will offer additional assistance to member communities in 2013 when the next 5-year cycle of the federal Phase II program is expected to get underway.



**Massachusetts Bays Program and Ocean Advisory Commission:** MVPC's environmental staff provided ongoing planning and management support to the Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program, one of 28 federally-designated estuary programs in the country. MVPC served on the program's management committee and assisted on a wide array of coastal education and improvement projects. These included field surveys of invasive plant species in the Great Marsh, as well as seminars on habitat restoration, stormwater management, climate change adaptation, and greenscaping. Sharing a vision of "clear water, clean beaches, and safe shellfish", MVPC and MBP work collaboratively to help protect the vulnerable natural resources of the upper North Shore coastal ecosystem.

In 2012, MVPC was reappointed to the Governor's 17-member Ocean Advisory Commission. The OAC, in conjunction with a science advisory council, provides ongoing advice and assistance to the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs on the development and implementation of the Massachusetts Ocean Management Plan. This comprehensive, first-in-the-nation ocean plan sets forth goals, siting priorities, and performance standards for balancing the stewardship and use of our ocean waters - for fishing, tourism, renewable energy development, ecosystem health and biodiversity, and many other ocean-based interests.



*Snowy Owl Defense*  
*Courtesy of Essex National Heritage Commission*  
*Photo by Ken Jordan*

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region



***Eight Towns and the Great Marsh (8TGM) Committee.*** In 2012, celebrating its twentieth year as a Committee, Eight Towns and the Bay officially changed its name to the Eight Towns and the Great Marsh to more accurately reflect the geographic area and mission of the Committee activities. One of our first projects under our new name was to embark on a project referred to as “Traditional Uses of the Great Marsh”. Marsh resources that have been traditionally harvested and are

in danger of being lost from the marsh culture and landscape are being identified and catalogued. The uses we are focusing on include: oyster beds, eel runs, smelt fisheries, herring runs, salt marsh haying, cranberry bogs, and beach plum groves. The Tuft University Urban Environmental Planning program has been enlisted to help with this effort.



*Wild Cranberries*

**Municipalities Show Interest in Sea Level Rise Symposium:** As chance would have it, while the Nor'east storm of November 8th was lashing the coast with high tides, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission and the Great Marsh Coalition joined forces to cosponsor a Sea Level Rise (SLR) Symposium for Great Marsh municipalities at Castle Hill in Ipswich. Five MVPC communities border on the Great Marsh and will be subject to increased flooding as sea level rises. Over 100 federal, state, municipal, and nonprofit officials heard from various speakers on topics ranging from Massachusetts policy on sea level rise to actions individual communities can take to prepare for climate change impacts. The MA Office of Coastal Zone Management and the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole painted a picture of potential sea level rise impacts on the Great Marsh, including maps of areas of potential inundation. Several examples of problem coastal flood areas in MVPC communities were described in detail by MVPC environmental staff and municipal managers. Local adaptation case studies for other coastal communities that have begun implementing SLR strategies were presented, including freeboard incentives, community regulation changes, vulnerability assessment, sea wall policy, and land acquisition. The COAST (Coastal Adaptation to Sea Level Rise Tool) tool, used for some communities in coastal New Hampshire to evaluate strategies to reduce financial loss, was presented by the Rockingham Planning Commission. All of the symposium presentations are available on the [Greatmarsh.org](http://Greatmarsh.org) website.



*Photos: West Street, Newburyport*

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

**Great Marsh Revitalization Task Force:** As a result of the annual meeting of the Great Marsh Revitalization Task Force chaired by Senators Tarr and Baddour and Representative Costello, stakeholders, nonprofits, institutions, and state agencies accomplished several important steps toward the control of invasive Phragmites in the Great Marsh in 2012. MVPC, acting as staff to the Task Force, coordinated efforts to complete the mapping of the entire Great Marsh, from **Salisbury** to Gloucester, of high marsh, open marsh Phragmites stands. MVPC also contracted for control of sixty acres in over 300 individual Phragmites stands in the **Newbury/Newburyport** area as well as some parts of the Salisbury marsh. Other efforts included testing a pilot methodology for cutting and treating Phragmites in a section of the **Salisbury** marsh using a wet-blade application technique as well as cut and spray methods. Another pilot project was implemented using conductivity equipment monitoring as a surrogate of marsh salinity, a limiting factor for Phragmites growth and expansion.



*Wet Blade Moving on the Salisbury Marsh*

### Phragmites Sites on the Great Marsh





## Prioritizing Transportation Investments

**MVMPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP):** Any transportation project in the region that is to be funded in whole, or in part, with Federal transportation dollars must appear in the regional TIP.

Amendments to the FY 2012-2015 TIP were made in March of 2012 to update the FY 2012 transit element to change the funding match for two projects from Regional Transit Authority Capital Assistance Program (RTACAP) to Toll Credits and to remove the replacement of two commuter coaches for the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA). The March 2012 Amendment also added the repair, reconstruction, and resurfacing of Sunset Drive in **Newbury** to the FY 2013 Highway element with funding provided by the Refuge Roads program of the Federal Lands Highway Program.

The final Advance Construction (A/C) “repayment” of \$8,585,000 for the **Groveland/Haverhill** Bates Bridge Reconstruction project was able to be completed in late 2012 through changes in the status of some of the federal aid bridge projects in Massachusetts. Therefore, the funding programmed for 2013 for the project was not needed and was removed from the 2012-2015 TIP.

The MVMPO endorsed the FY 2013-2016 TIP in late June 2012, it includes one of the largest roadway projects the Merrimack Valley has seen in many years, the Interchange Reconstruction on I-93 at Route 110/113 Rotary in **Methuen**. This nearly \$60,000,000 project will be Advance Constructed with federal reimbursement from several different funding categories over the three years from 2013-2015. The project will eliminate the rotary, replacing it with new intersections and ramps. The reconstruction of Route 110 at **Merrimac** Square is also slated for FY 2013. The final reimbursement of Federal funding for the reconstruction of Route 125, South Main Street, in **Haverhill** will be completed in FY 2013 and the reconstruction of Sunset Drive in **Newbury** remains in FY 2013.

Additional projects programmed in the future years 2014, 2015 and 2016 are the reconstruction of Route 150 in **Amesbury**, construction of the **Bradford** section of the Haverhill Riverwalk, replacement of the Washington Street Bridge over Route 1 in **Newburyport**, construction of the remaining portion of the Powwow Riverwalk in **Amesbury**, Federal Safe Routes to School funding for the **North Andover** Middle School area, Interstate Maintenance of I-95 from **Georgetown** to **Salisbury**, rehabilitation of Route 97 in **Groveland**, construction of the City Branch of the Clipper City Rail Trail in **Newburyport**, improvements to Route 125, Main Street, in **Haverhill**, replacement of the Lowell Street Bridge over the B&M railroad in **Lawrence**, intersection and signal improvements at Route 125 and Mass. Avenue in **North Andover**, construction of the **Salisbury** section of Border to Boston multi-use trail, and replacement of the Route 125 bridge(s) over the Merrimack River and the abandoned railroad in **Haverhill**.

### Projects in the 2013-2016 TIP

- endorsed June 2012

- I-93 Interchange Reconstruction at Route 110/113 Rotary—*Methuen*
- Reconstruction of Route 110—*Merrimac Square*
- Reconstruction of Route 150—*Amesbury*
- Route 97 Rehabilitation—*Groveland*
- Improvements to Route 125, Main Street—*Haverhill*
- Construction of the City Branch of the Clipper City Rail Trail—*Newburyport*
- Construction of the Salisbury section of Border to Boston multi-use trail—*Salisbury*
- Continuing Operation of MVRTA regional transit services
- Constructing a new bus station in a new location in *Haverhill*

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

**Transit:** MVPC works closely with the MVRTA to plan for improvements to the transit system in the region and to respond to community inquiries about transit services. Highlights for 2012 include completing the MVRTA's Strategic Plan and completing the Draft Transit Mobility Plan for the region. In partnership with the MVRTA and the Merrimack Valley Transportation Management Association, MVPC assisted with the outreach efforts for a new employment route to the River Road area west of I-93, now called Route 76. MVPC also assisted in the planning for a fixed bus route to Salem, New Hampshire.



**FFY 2013 Unified Planning Work Program:** In June 2012, the Merrimack Valley MPO (MVMPO) endorsed the region's Federal Fiscal Year 2013 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which outlines the major transportation planning studies and activities that will take place in the Valley in FFY 2013 (October 1, 2012 - September 30, 2013). This document is prepared annually by the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission on behalf of the MVMPO.

Route 110 Corridor Traffic Study in **Methuen** will examine traffic and safety conditions along the section of the roadway that lies between Burnham Road and Woodland Street. This section of Route 110 lies just east of the section of the highway that will be improved as part of the Route 110/113 Rotary reconstruction project, which will get underway later in 2013. Area business owners' concerns over the recurrent congestion issues along Route 110, which is also known as Haverhill Street, prompted Methuen officials to have MVPC identify improvements to the corridor that would both correct any congestion and safety issues and integrate this section of the highway with the section west of Burnham Road that will be improved as part of the Rotary reconstruction project.

Staff will also collect and analyze traffic information that can be used to support the signalization of the off ramps from I-495 to Massachusetts Avenue in **North Andover**. This project was proposed as part of MassDOT's I-495 Corridor Study to correct safety and traffic congestion issues at these two locations.

Recurring congestion at Marstons Corner, the intersection of Howe Street/Jackson Street and Route 113 in **Methuen**, coupled with recent changes in development patterns and traffic lane configuration has led MVPC to undertake a traffic study at this location with a focus on examining options for adjusting the timing and phasing of the traffic signals.

Perhaps the largest task to be undertaken in FFY 2013 will be the development of the Merrimack Valley Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The recent openings of the Salisbury Eastern Marsh Trail and the Newburyport Rail Trail, coupled with funding committed to the construction of Phase I of the Powow Riverwalk in **Amesbury**, a section of the Bradford Rail Trail in **Haverhill**, Clipper City Rail Trail in **Newburyport** and the northern segment of the Border to Boston Multiuse Trail in **Salisbury** constitute a dramatic change in the bicycle and pedestrian transportation landscape in the region. Ongoing efforts to create bike lanes and bike routes throughout the region further point to the need to develop an updated bicycle and pedestrian plan that will help local and regional officials and the members of the MVMPO to coordinate local and regional bicycle and pedestrian planning activities.

**I-93 Bus on Shoulder (BOS) High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lane Feasibility Study:** With the MVRTA's sponsorship, the MVPC continued work on this Study in 2012 to assess the potential of expanding transit and increasing the use of high-occupancy vehicles in the I-93 corridor north of Boston. Staff convened a Technical Advisory Committee including transportation officials from Massachusetts, New Hampshire and the five Metropolitan Planning Organizations in the corridor to advise and contribute to the work. MVPC staff researched the performance of various



## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

North American BOS and HOV lane applications and began forming BOS / HOV lane concepts for further analysis.

MVPC also adjusted its Study timeline to match work being conducted by NHDOT's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Committee and the Boston MPO's preparation of a two-phase, region-wide Preferential Lane Study. As a result, the MVPC and its MPO colleagues are developing an information set that will make best use of available transportation demand modeling while creating a corridor-wide cooperative planning effort. Such an effort has been recommended in previous I-93 studies as the most effective way to improve I-93 operations in the future. Work is expected to be complete in 2013.

**Route 28 Study in Methuen:** The MVMPO's Congestion Management Process has identified the section of Route 28 in **Methuen** between Route 213 and the New Hampshire State Line as a congested roadway corridor. However, recent improvements to this section of the roadway, coupled with the redevelopment of the State Line Shopping Center led MVPC to review traffic operations in the area to determine if they had been successful in relieving this congestion problem.

The study found that each of the signalized intersections in the study corridor now functions at Level of Service 'B' under estimated Average Annual Weekday PM Peak Hour traffic conditions. The overall Arterial Level of Service in the corridor has improved from 'D' before the roadway improvements were made to 'C' afterward. Travel speeds have improved during the PM Peak Hour and the addition of new turning lanes have resulted in much shorter traffic queues at the three signalized intersections. With the increase in travel



*Route 28 @ Village Mall and Rosewood Road, Methuen*

speeds in the corridor and the reductions in the vehicle queues, this section of Route 28 should no longer be considered a severely congested roadway. The study also found that the addition of opposing left turn lanes on Route 28 at its intersection with the Village Mall Driveway and Rosewood Road could be accommodated within the available ROW at this location (66 feet). The installation of the left turn lanes, coupled with a protected signal phase, would likely reduce the many cross-movement crashes that take place at this location.

**Local Technical Assistance:** Each year, MVPC receives requests for technical assistance from local officials to address transportation issues that arise in their communities. In 2012, staff assisted the City of **Newburyport** in examining the traffic and safety issues that would arise from a proposed rezoning of two parcels along Route 113 (Storey Avenue) from residential to commercial use. MVPC also prepared a work scope for a possible study to assist the City of **Haverhill** in evaluating the feasibility of installing a traffic island on Route 125 between Arlington Street and Ashland Street. Also in **Haverhill**, staff developed some concepts for realigning the intersection of Routes 110 and 108 in **Haverhill**. To support the development of the City Branch Rail Trail, staff collected traffic volume information on Harrison Street and Purchase Street in **Newburyport** that will be used to finalize the design of that facility, which is slated to be advertised for construction in FFY 2015. MVPC provided guidance to the Town of **North Andover**, which is seeking to guide travelers to the downtown area through improved signage along I-495. Staff assisted the City of **Haverhill** in analyzing pedestrian safety and crosswalk locations along Route 125 between 10th and 12th Avenues. Finally, staff analyzed roadway volumes and parking along Bartlet Street in **Andover** and recommended bicycle sharrows to create a safe bicycle connection between Philips Andover Academy and the downtown.

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

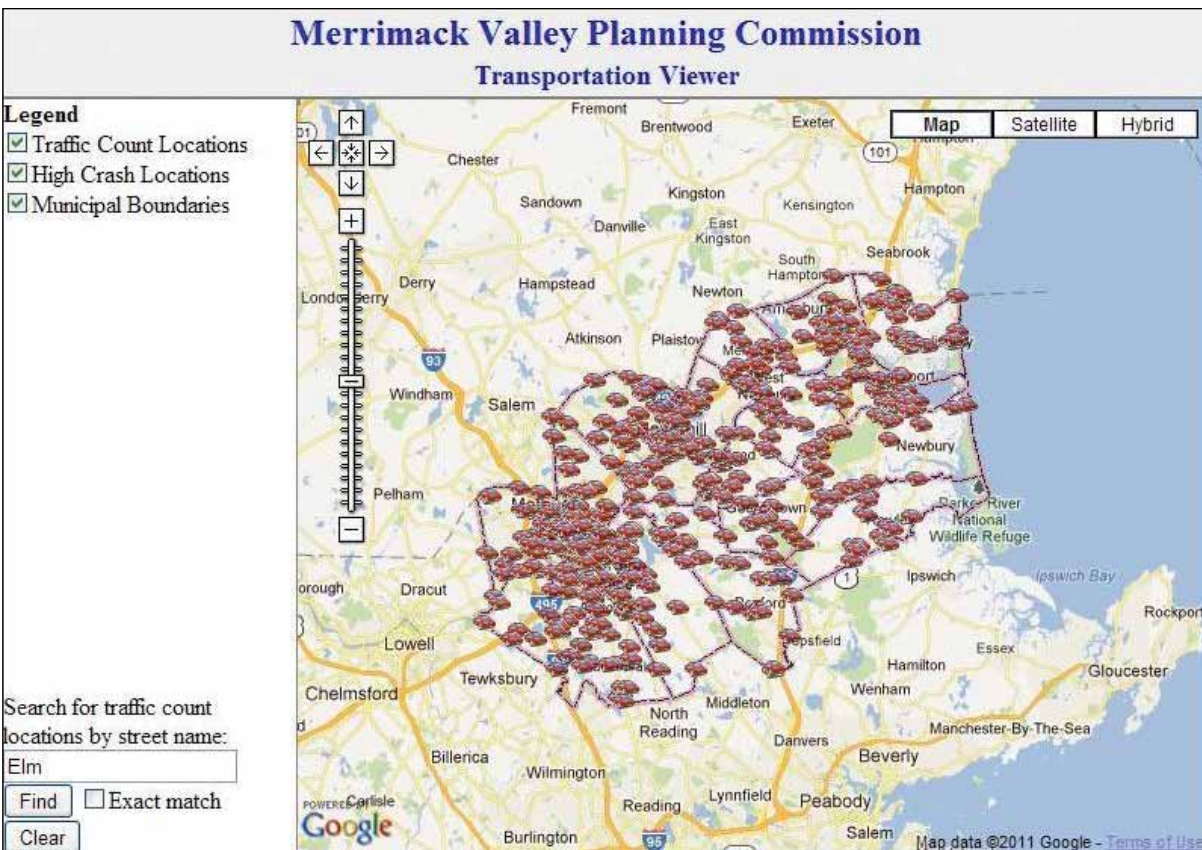
**MVPC Completes Safety Studies for the Region:** In recent years, MVPC staff has been performing safety studies at some of the most hazardous locations within the Merrimack Valley region as identified by crash report data compiled by MassDOT's Registry of Motor Vehicles. These safety studies have included Road Safety Audits (RSAs) at each of the locations. An RSA as defined by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is "the formal safety performance examination of an existing or future road or intersection by an independent, multidisciplinary team."

In 2012, safety studies were conducted at one location in **Haverhill** (LaFayette Square) and two locations in **Newburyport** (Merrimac Street ramps with Route 1 and the Storey Avenue (Route 113) ramps with I-95).

**2012 Traffic Volume Counts:** This past year MVPC collected Automatic Traffic Recorder (ATR) data at 112 locations throughout the 15 communities in our Merrimack Valley region. Seventeen of these locations were selected by MassDOT with the remaining counts taken from the annual, two, and four year cycles determined by MVPC. In addition, staff collected Turning Movement Counts at intersections in the communities of **Haverhill, Merrimac, Methuen and Newburyport**.

These counts are to be used by MVPC for a number of purposes including the maintenance of the regional traffic model and the measurement of traffic growth in the region. This information is also requested on a regular basis from developers and other private sector interests for use in decisions on business locations and development. An updated history of all traffic counting data will be available online in early 2013.

For the latest traffic data, please see the "Transportation Data Viewer" and the Traffic Volume Report on our website mvpc.org.







## *Coordinating Activities in the Region*

**M**VPC has extensive experience in helping its member communities plan for their future. Within our Geographic Information System Program, significant technological advancements have taken place such that GIS data is now more accessible and easier to use than ever before. MVPC's GIS staff have created a series of applications to access as well as update GIS data using mobile devices (tablets and smartphones). For example, working with the Town of **Andover**, MVPC has created a mobile catch basin inspector that allows field workers to use tablet computers (iPads) to collect and store information about the cleaning history of each catch basin managed by the Department of Public Works. Similarly, users of MVPC's MIMAP (see below) are able to use the Global Positioning System (GPS) functionality within their mobile device to assist in the review of GIS data in the field. These are significant advancements that really bring the power of GIS data and technology to a broad array of new users.

**Municipal Information Mapping Access Program:** MIMAP is an acronym for MVPC's Municipal Information Mapping Access Program. MIMAP has evolved to become an essential tool for the majority of MVPC communities. It uses sophisticated programming to deliver simple-to-navigate, web-based GIS to the end user. Seeing MIMAP as an efficient tool for distributing information to the public, the towns of North Andover and Andover have added a publicly accessible viewer to their MIMAP installations. Most recently, the Town of Boxford joined the regional MIMAP contingent with their viewer launched on 12/31/2012.

**Parcel Mapping Initiative:** During 2012 MVPC's annual parcel mapping program continued successful operation – providing update and mapping services for 11 of MVPC's 15 municipalities. A major work component associated with parcel mapping comes through MVPC's designation as a Regional GIS Service Provider under the State's Information Technology Division (ITD). Under contract with ITD, MVPC is working collaboratively with MassGIS to convert the region's parcel data to a recently released parcel mapping standard.



## Coordinating Activities in the Region

**Pictometry:** Also having taken place within the GIS Program during 2012 is the acquisition of new Pictometry images. As part of MVPC's ongoing commitment to empower its municipalities with information and tools to help facilitate the orderly growth of the region, MVPC's GIS Program worked collaboratively with Pictometry International, Inc. to acquire oblique-angle aerial photography for the entire region including the Town of Plaistow, NH. The new images, flown in March and April 2012, have spectacular resolution and are already very popular across the region. Newly introduced this year is an easy-to-use, web-based version of Pictometry called Pictometry Online (POL). POL enables access to the images and tools used for analysis via the web is an advancement that makes the installation and update of Pictometry much more efficient. POL has also been integrated within MIMAP giving users a rich set of data and images all through MVPC's MIMAP information portal.

MVPC's Geographic Information System technology continues to be a staple of the organization's services to the region.



## Coordinating Activities in the Region

**Manchester and Lawrence (M&L) Branch Shared Use Path Feasibility Study:** The City of Lawrence requested that MVPC examine the challenges and opportunities for developing as a trail a segment of this former Boston and Maine Railroad right-of-way that is now owned by the MBTA. If constructed, the path would parallel MA Route 28 (Broadway) in one of the MVPC region's most densely urbanized communities. As part of a regional trail network, this segment would connect to the recently opened Methuen Rail Trail, other pathways established along the former M&L Branch in southern New Hampshire as well as the Spicket River Greenway and the Merrimack River Trail.



*M & L Rail Corridor*

**MVPC Transportation and Livability Information Sessions:** MVPC held five livability-related workshops during 2012. Two workshops focused on transit accessibility in **Salisbury**. MVPC co-sponsored, with Bay State Roads and Brown Walker Planners, two Complete Streets Workshops in **Salisbury** and **Haverhill**. MVPC also co-sponsored with the Coastal Trails Coalition, a workshop that introduced the concept of cycle tracks.

**Brownfields Workshops:** Nearly 100 public officials and economic development stakeholders from across the Merrimack Valley region gathered at Northern Essex Community College to participate in the Northeast Regional Brownfields Coalition forum. "Brownfields: Assessment to Redevelopment and Everything in Between" was jointly planned and developed by MassDEP, MassDevelopment, EPA, EOHED, the Planning Office of Urban Affairs and MVPC. This interactive forum presented case studies highlighting the use of best practices to successfully assess, restore and redevelop contaminated properties during financially troubled times. In addition, MVPC Director Dennis DiZoglio was asked to present at the EPA Brownfields Grant Recipient conference in Worcester this year.

**A Report Card on Manufacturing in Massachusetts, with Dr. Barry Bluestone.** Through MVPC's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) program, 50 community leaders from the public,



*Dr. Barry Bluestone*

private, and nonprofit sectors gathered on the morning of December 11 at Northern Essex Community College (NECC) in **Haverhill** to hear a compelling argument for the fundamental strength of the manufacturing sector in Massachusetts by renowned researcher, speaker, and leading public figure, Dr. Barry Bluestone, founding Director of the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, and the founding Dean of the School of Public Policy & Urban Affairs at Northeastern University. His presentation centered on the recently released report, "Staying Power II: A Report Card on Manufacturing in Massachusetts 2012." NECC President, Dr. Lane Glenn followed Bluestone's presentation with a synopsis of the college's leadership efforts towards filling critical workforce development gaps in sectors such as manufacturing. MVPC staff closed the meeting with corresponding industry data for the Merrimack Valley, demonstrating manufacturing's great importance to the regional economy.



## *Cooperating Through Regional Collaboration*

**E**ncouraging member communities to cooperate and jointly work together has always been a responsibility of MVPC but it has become a priority in these trying fiscal times. Instigated by a weak economy and limited financial resources, communities have embraced the idea of forming alliances to identify ways of working together. MVPC has been at the forefront of this trend by supplying the administrative and technical support needed to identify and analyze potential collaborations. The Commonwealth has recognized this new priority and resources have been provided to MVPC to support this effort. With the support of the regional legislative delegation District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funds have been provided to do the preliminary planning necessary to understand and implement these activities.

### **“Cooperating Through Regional Collaboration”**

Formed in 2007 the Merrimack Valley Mayors & Managers Coalition comprised of **Amesbury, Andover, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Newburyport, North Andover** and **Salisbury** has been focusing on promoting collaboration and joint problem solving. MVPC provides administrative support and a forum for the Coalition. This year the Coalition continued its joint purchasing and collaboration efforts between the member



Departments of Public Works. The DPW subcommittee of public work officials also held meetings on acquiring a Reflectometer for use in the region, a mobile device used to access MIMAP data, increasing recycling and computerized maintenance management system software (CCMS). The Coalition submitted a grant application for Commonwealth Community Innovation Challenge funds to implement a region-wide 311 Call-in-Center and a CCMS program.

The Coalition’s Merrimack Valley Energy Management Program continues to be very effective. The program administered by the MVPC offers technical assistance thru Peregrine Energy Group to communities to help them develop energy management strategies and energy conservation programs. One of the efforts pursued under this program in 2010 was the regional procurement of an Energy Services Company (ESCO) to implement energy conservation improvements on public buildings. ESCOs perform these energy conservation improvements like replacing boilers, chillers, lighting, windows etc. and use the cost savings from these improvements to pay for the upgrades. In 2012 six communities continued to work with Ameresco Inc. the selected ESCO Company: **Lawrence, Haverhill, Methuen, Merrimac, North Andover** and **Salisbury**.



In 2011 MVPC put under contract the Meister Consultant Group to assist communities interested in renewable energy projects. In 2012 Meister met with **Newburyport, Boxford, North Andover, Newbury** and **Amesbury** to identify solar energy opportunities. Plans are also underway to develop a regional net metering credit purchase RFP for **Amesbury, Newburyport, West Newbury, North Andover, Lawrence** and **Haverhill**. The Coalition also explored energy aggregation to save money during 2012.

A new initiative this year was the creation of a health department subcommittee to determine if there are opportunities for the health departments in the region to consider regional cooperation.

## Cooperating to Address Common Challenges

Again this year, as an extension of this alliance, MVPC reached out to the smaller communities in the region: **Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Merrimac, Newbury, Rowley and West Newbury** and invited the Town Administrators and Finance Directors to consider participating in some of the regional solution ideas being put forth by the Coalition.

**Quarterly Planning Directors Meetings:** We also continued to hold quarterly meetings with the community planning directors from the region. Collaborating together the directors have discussed common planning issues and have shared experiences in an effort to provide “peer” assistance.

**Annual Legislative Caucus:** This year we also continued to meet with the Regional Legislative Delegation to talk about the important issues facing the region and how the legislature can help deal with these issues. Discussion during the meeting focused on energy, economic development and transportation priorities.



**Whittier Bridge Working Group:** The communities of Amesbury, Newburyport and Salisbury and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation formed this working group to assist with the planning for and mitigating the impacts of the upcoming project to replace the Whittier Bridge over the Merrimack River. MVPC is also part of this group and was an active participant at meetings held during 2012.

**Regional Planning Day:** At this year’s Regional Planning Day, transportation needs and how to finance these needs were the topics of the day. All the speakers focused on the role their level of government plays on ensuring that our region has a strong transportation network. Congresswoman Nikki Tsongas reviewed the status of SAFETEA-LU reauthorization and the current efforts to resolve differences in the conference committee. Jon Davis, acting MBTA GM and MassDOT Transit Administrator and Frank DePaola, Highway Administrator for MassDOT, described the statewide need for transportation investment and Tony Komornick, MVPC Transportation Program Manager and Joe Costanzo, MVRTA administrator, provided an overview of the region’s transportation needs. A panel discussion highlighted by Senator Thomas McGee, Chair of the State Joint Transportation Committee, Ben Forman from MassINC and Kristina Egan from T4 Massachusetts discussed the transportation finance crisis facing the commonwealth and possible approaches to deal with this problem.



*MVPC's Executive Director Dennis DiZoglio and Congresswoman Nikki Tsongas*



*Senator Thomas McGee, Ben Forman, and Kristina Egan*

## Administration and Finance

**Distribution of Fiscal Year 2012 Funds:** MVPC's operating funds for FY2012 supported a broad range of planning and technical services in the following six major functional areas:

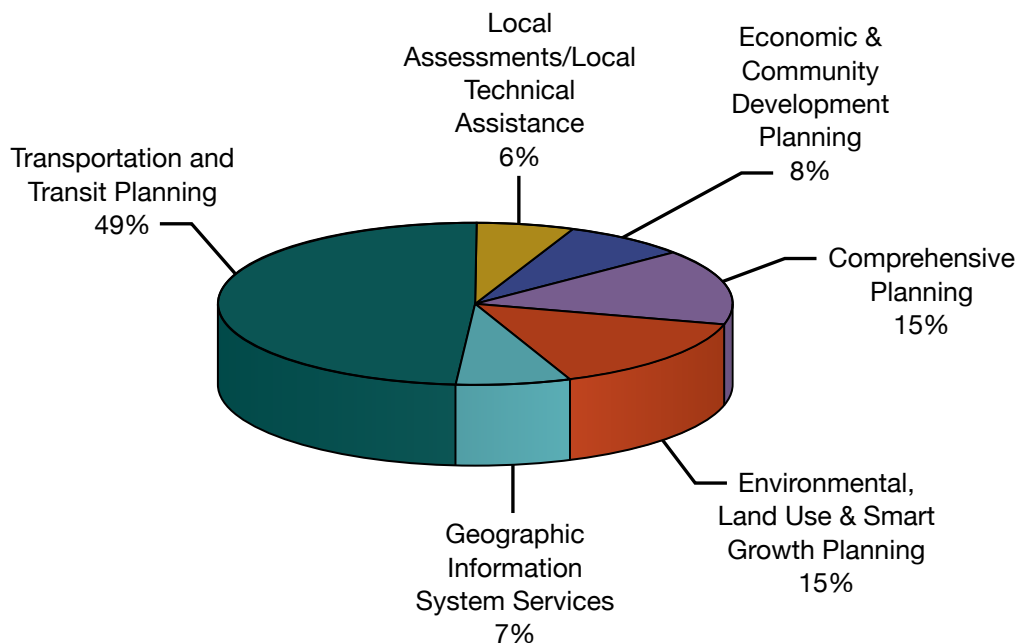
- Transportation & Transit Planning (49%)
- Local Assessments & Local Technical Assistance (6%)
- Economic & Community Development Planning (8%)
- Comprehensive Planning (15%)
- Environmental, Land use & Smart Growth Planning (15%)
- Geographic Information System (GIS) Services (7%)

Five of these six service areas accounted for 94% of the agency budget, and were derived from a variety of largely *non*-local sources, including state and federal grants, as well as contracts with selected non-profit organizations and businesses that support MVPC's mission.

Only 6% of the budget was derived from local assessments to our member communities. These local funds were used by MVPC as match to leverage the 94% of outside funding brought into the region by the commission staff.

**Independent Audit:** The independent audit is in progress. Unaudited statements show MVPC expenditures to be within the budget and the fund balance remains positive.

### Funding Areas in Fiscal Year 2012



## MVPC Professional Staff

### **Administration**

Dennis A. DiZoglio, executive director

Jenifer Dunlap, financial administrator

Nancy Lavallee, executive assistant/office administrator

### **Environment**

Alan Macintosh, assistant director/environmental program manager

Peter Phippen, environmental planner/coastal resources coordinator (8T&GM)

### **Transportation**

Anthony Komornick, transportation program manager

Mary Kay Beninati, senior transportation planner

Jim Terlizzi, senior transportation planner

Daniel Ovalle, field services specialist

Elizabeth Goodrich, senior transportation planner

Todd Fontanella, senior transportation planner

### **GIS**

Jerrard Whitten, GIS/IT manager

Steve Lopez, GIS specialist

Jeff Normandin, GIS Technician

### **Community and Economic Development**

Mike Parquette, comprehensive planning manager

Ted Semesnyi, economic development coordinator



Merrimack Valley  
Planning Commission  
*plan \* develop \* promote*

160 Main Street  
Haverhill, MA 01830

Tel: 978-374-0519      Fax: 978-372-4890

[www.mvpc.org](http://www.mvpc.org)  
[www.facebook.com/mvpc.org](https://www.facebook.com/mvpc.org)

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