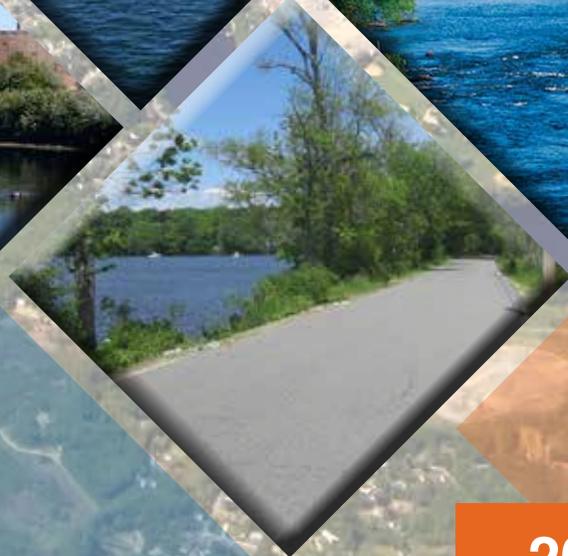
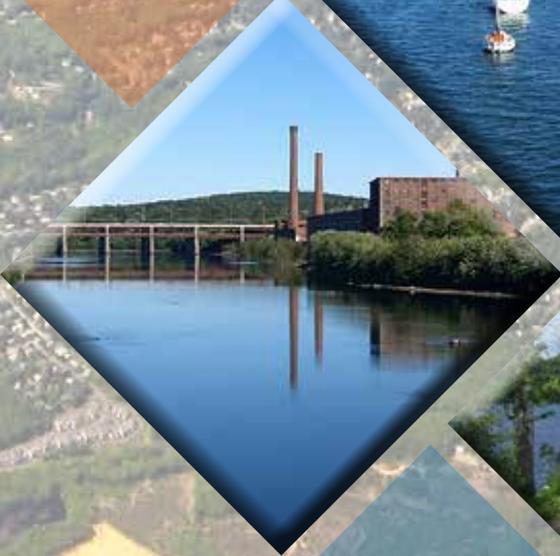
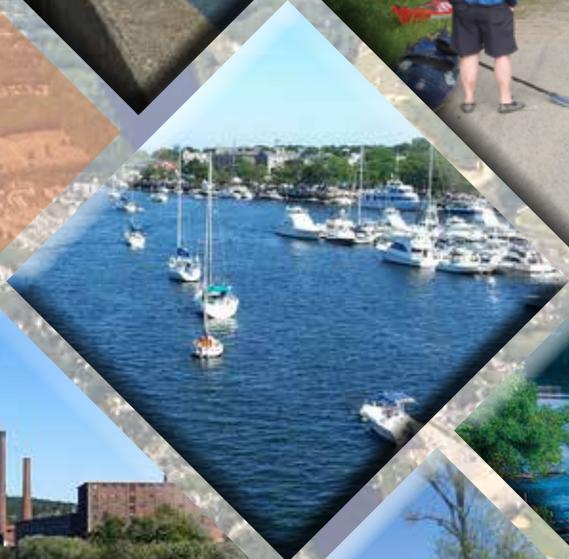
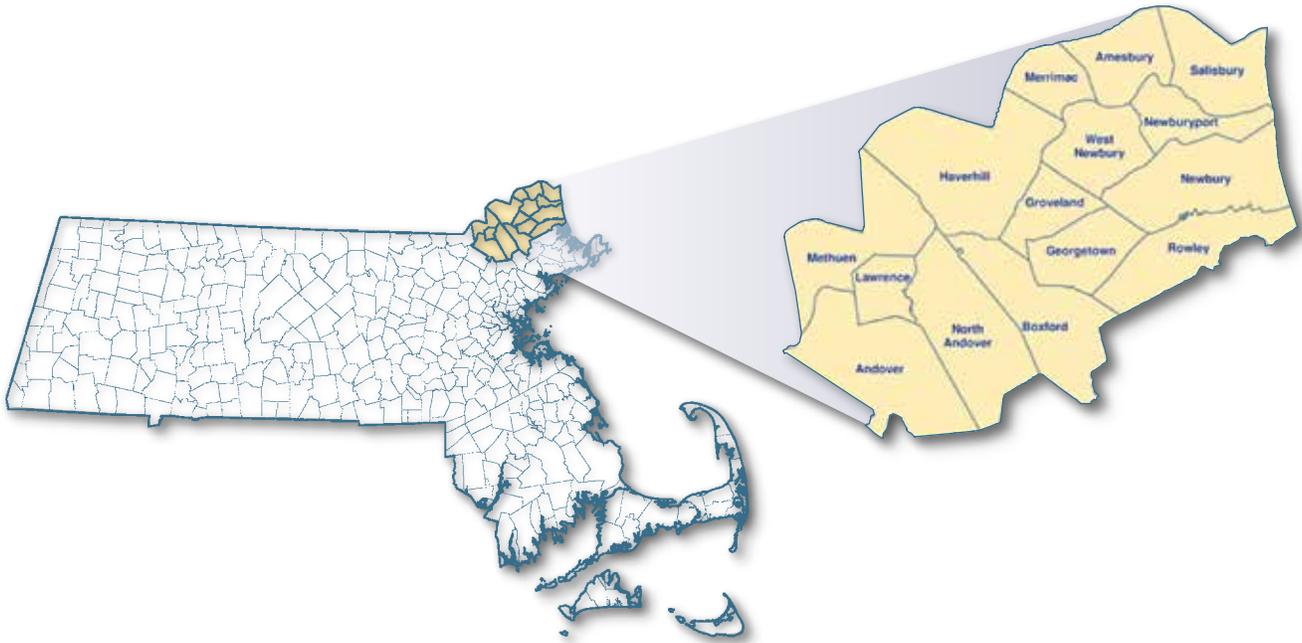




Merrimack Valley  
Planning Commission  
*plan \* develop \* promote*



# Planning Region and Commissioners



## Commissioners

AMESBURY	Robert Lavoie, <i>vice chairman</i>
ANDOVER	Vacant
BOXFORD	Vacant
GEORGETOWN	Howard Snyder
GROVELAND	Robert O'Hanley
HAVERHILL	April Derboghosian
LAWRENCE	Theresa Park
MERRIMAC	John Thomas
METHUEN	Kevin P. Hagerty
NEWBURY	John Weis
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>

Go to the [MVPC website mvpc.org](http://mvpc.org) for more information on your community's Commissioner

# 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. The 2015 annual report has been organized to demonstrate the MVPC 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 with his wife and two children.

2015 was another busy and successful year at the MVPC. The Commission continued in its mission to find innovative ways to serve its member communities by utilizing a number of cutting edge solutions in its transportation, environmental, comprehensive planning, GIS and economic development programs. From the Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Fund to the creation of a non-motorized network of trails throughout the region, to local and regional traffic studies, the Commission continues in its efforts to improve the lives of the citizens in its member communities in a number of ways.

The Commission also has continued to be a partner in the protection of one of the Northeast's most valuable resources, the Great Marsh. Through its involvement with Eight Towns and the Great Marsh the MVPC works with communities and the general public to foster stewardship of coastal resources by heightening public awareness of solutions to pollution problems. It also provides technical assistance and supports local research and education projects, all in an effort to preserve and protect this important area and associated watershed.

On the economic development front, the Commission continued to promote economic development in the region in support of the Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy. One of the initiatives has been the creation of the Merrimack Valley Support Team whose purpose is to assist communities in their planning and development efforts in an attempt to make the Growth Strategy become a reality. As always, the Commission continues to promote the region as a whole. Through its Merrimack Valley Means Business Website, 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. The Merrimack Valley Means Business Website was updated last year and greatly enhanced by the Commission and is a valuable resource for developers and businesses that are looking to locate here in the Merrimack Valley.

This past year, the Commission continued its efforts in the area of regionalization in a number of programs, most notably via the Mayors and Managers Coalition. This program has led to such initiatives as the joint procurement programs, the regionalization of services, as well as many energy initiatives.

Last year also saw a focus of the Merrimack River as an economic tool for the region, on October 16th in **Haverhill** over 100 people attended the "Rising with the Tides" event organized by the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce with the support of MVPC. This event was organized as a unique opportunity to showcase the Merrimack River's symbolic and functional importance. Speakers highlighted the River's evolution as a natural resource, a locus of employment, and how specific revitalization and transportation projects along the river are creating new living, working and recreating opportunities for future generations.

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

Very truly yours,

Richard Byers, Chairman

## Executive Director's Comments

- Dennis A. DiZoglio



In 2015 MVPC highlighted the importance of the Merrimack River as a catalyst for economic development, recreation and the region's quality of life. We partnered with the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce to host the "Rising with the Tides" summit with Congresswoman Niki Tsongas as the Keynote speaker who cited the importance of a shared vision for the region along the Merrimack River. We also worked with the Merrimack Valley Mayors and Managers Coalition to improve the Merrimack Valley Means Business website by posting real time real estate listings and up to date Community Profiles. We completed our industrial cluster analysis, promoted our Valley Support Team effort to support economic development and began to connect our efforts with those of the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board (WIB).

We crafted a planned vision for the region in 2009 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. In 2015 MVPC adopted the 5 year update of our Strategy to better coordinate our joint efforts with those of the Commonwealth.

This year we updated our long range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and saw a significant investment in implementing the Region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Projects under construction included the Route 110/113 & I 93 Rotary in **Methuen** and the Whittier Bridge over the Merrimack River in **Newburyport/Amesbury** and saw the completion of the Town of **Merrimac** Square Project. While we have made great strides in implementing our program we continued our advocacy for the design of the Route 114 improvements identified in our completed corridor study.

This year MVPC drew down all the funding available in the EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund Program and we recapitalized the fund with a \$375,000 Brownfields RLF Program grant. We completed the Regional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan and submitted it for approval to both MEMA and FEMA. And MVPC continued to play a leadership role in implementing the regional Sandy Grant partnership grant started in 2014.

All of our accomplishments in 2015 can be viewed on our website. As we close our look on the MVPC accomplishments of 2015 we hope to be as successful in accomplishing our work program for 2016.

### MVPC 2016 Work Program

- Support the implementation of the Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy.
- Expand the use of Technology throughout the Region.
- Manage the FFY 2016 TIP & UPWP and Develop the FFY 2017 TIP & UPWP. Assist Communities advance their Prioritized List of Transportation Projects for Programming purposes.
- Implement CEDS and expand the Role MVPC can play in Promoting Economic Development in the Region.
- Promote the MVPC "Valley Support Team" to provide Technical Assistance to Member Communities.
- Provide information and training to the Professional and Volunteer Planners in the Region.
- Identify ways to improve the overall administration of the Commission to make it more efficient and effective.
- Continue to elevate the Profile of the Commission throughout the Region and the State.
- Promote regional Cooperation and Collaboration and bring regional solutions to common challenges the communities face.



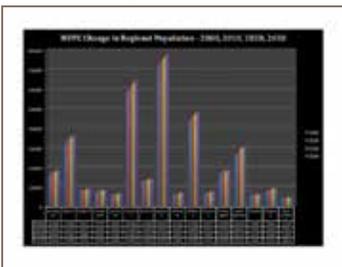
## *Promoting Redevelopment and Growth*

MVPC has a strategy that can drive the orderly development of the region for years to come. The Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy, the comprehensive plan for the region is the cornerstone of this effort. 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 2014 the Commonwealth, through its “Planning Ahead for Growth” initiative identified Priority Development Areas (PDA) and Priority Preservation Areas (PPA) across the Merrimack Valley with the hope of targeting State resources to advance these priorities. The Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy was updated to reflect these priorities and the Commission adopted the updated Strategy in January of 2015.

To implement the current Priority Growth Strategy MVPC focused its activities on “promoting redevelopment and growth”, “protecting the region’s environment” and “prioritizing transportation investments” during 2015.

### **Promoting Redevelopment and Growth**

**Merrimack Valley Clean Energy Action Plan Implementation:** In September, 2012, MVPC completed the Merrimack Valley Clean Energy Action Plan, a 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 municipalities are an important element of the Plan, and have proven crucial to tracking the Plans’ success. We currently have four communities in our region with “green community” status and designation - **Amesbury, Andover, Newburyport, and West Newbury**. Collectively, these four communities have been awarded over \$1.6M which has been used towards energy conservation infrastructure improvements in their public buildings. The regions Energy Services Company has completed projects in **Merrimac, North Andover, and Lawrence**. A project in **Salisbury** is under construction. **Methuen** will include the retrofitting of streetlights in their work program and **Haverhill** is undertaking a \$2.5 million project that will save the city \$270K per year. **Lawrence** may undertake a second phase and the Greater Lawrence Tech is negotiating an ESA. When all six communities complete their energy projects, the annual savings will be over \$1M. Lastly, the region has explored electrical aggregation and in 2015 the cities of **Newburyport, Haverhill, and Methuen** began implementation and preliminary meetings were held in **Salisbury, Lawrence, Newbury, North Andover and Andover** to consider participating.

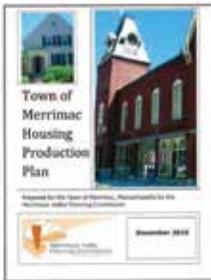


**Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:** In May of 2015 the Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Annual Update was submitted to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). As the economic development master plan for the region, the 2015 CEDS Update features progress made on implementation of the goals, objectives, and regional five-year vision promoted in the 2013 CEDS. The five-year vision was highlighted by three Executive Actions for immediate consideration: **1.** enhanced regional marketing of economic development resources and opportunities available; **2.** increased coordination of local

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

capacity assistance in critical planning issues such as priority development sites/Chapter 40R establishment, design review/form-based coding, complete streets, stormwater management, and compact neighborhoods; **3.** identifying critical workforce development needs, programs, and partnerships in the Merrimack Valley.

Enhanced marketing of the region is being done through an updated and improved Merrimack Valley Means Business website. We have better marketed the region to developers and businesses and [MVMB.biz](http://MVMB.biz) now features a more advanced property search tool along with links to other important regional information on doing business in the Merrimack Valley. The overall goal of the initiative is to attract new economic development by strengthening the regional business support network, enhancing the marketing of development opportunities, and bolstering the collection of timely data.



Local capacity assistance has developed into the "Merrimack Valley Support Team" and in 2015 we completed projects in **Merrimac, Newburyport, Groveland, and Methuen**. Projects range from writing Housing Production Plans to developing a Permit Guide, to assisting communities adopt "smart growth" 40R districts.

A Cluster Analysis was completed which identified four industry clusters driving economic growth in the region: Food Manufacturing, Electronics, Life Sciences, and Metal Fabricators. MVPC's Executive Director has been appointed to the local Workforce Investment Board helping to target workforce assistance to businesses in these clusters.

On December 3, 2015 the CEDS committee held a meeting at Northern Essex Community College. A lively discussion ensued among the thirty people in attendance which included a mix of realtors, city and town planners, business owners, chamber of commerce folks, and state representatives. The goal of the meeting was to inform the committee on the progress being made on the five-year CEDS implementation.

**Brownfield's Assessment:** In December, 2015, MVPC submitted a three-year \$400,000 grant application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to extend the Merrimack Valley Brownfield's Assessment Program to 2019. Previous grants funded the completion over 70 site investigations and reports on brownfield sites throughout the Merrimack Valley. Many of these investigations has 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**.



*Hamel Mills, Haverhill*

Additional hazardous material and petroleum assessment funding is needed, as all funding from the current three-year grant program has been allocated. Award announcements from EPA are expected in the spring. If awarded, new assessment projects from the regional program could begin as early as October 2016.

Activity with the EPA Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan fund include the financing of a cleanup project of a contaminated site in downtown **Salisbury** for the development of affordable housing. We are also assisting **Merrimac** to obtain funds and find a developer to clean up the abandoned Coastal Metals site.

**Other Economic Development Support:** MVPC staff handled numerous demographic data inquiries and requests for regional economic development overviews for businesses, individuals, and community officials. MVPC is the regional repository of demographic data from various federal and state agencies. In 2015, MVPC continued to collect and analyze data releases from the U.S. Census Bureau, including the annual American Community Survey (ACS).



## *Protecting the Region's Environment*

The MVPC in 2015 partnered with federal, state and local community-based organizations in building regional capacity to promote sustainable development and infrastructure investment that protects and enhances the Merrimack Valley's environmental resources. Environmental Department initiatives this past year have included:

### **Regional Multi-Hazard Mitigation Update**

MVPC worked with 14 of the 15 communities in finalizing action plans for the Merrimack Valley Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan Update. The plan includes assessment of community hazard risks and outlines structural and prevention mitigation priorities to minimize long-term casualty and property losses from potential disasters including floods, winter storms and high winds. The plan makes communities eligible for discretionary federal hazard mitigation grants to undertake infrastructure and property protection measures. The plan draft has been submitted to the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) for review and eventual approval by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).



### **Brownfields Assessment and Revolving Loan Fund Financing**

Questions of liability and environmental cleanup costs continue to be among the prime obstacles to redevelopment of urban and downtown sites. MVPC with funding through the U.S. EPA and in partnership with Mass-DEP and MassDevelopment, continues to provide financing and technical resources for site assessments and contamination cleanups.

In 2015, MVPC provided technical assistance on environmental site planning in communities including **Amesbury, Merrimac, Methuen, Lawrence** and **Haverhill** and financing cleanup work underway at Elm Street in **Salisbury**. Current funding for the MVPC program is available through September 2016 and MVPC is seeking additional grants from EPA to continue to make Brownfields resources available to member communities.

### **Northeast Direct Natural Gas Pipeline Project**

Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company filed in November 2015 with the Federal Emergency Regulatory Commission seeking certificate approval for the Northeast Energy Direct Project, a proposed \$5 billion gas pipeline expansion from New York to Dracut with lateral lines that directly impact MVPC communities of Andover and Methuen. MVPC has filed for intervenor status with FERC and is providing technical review assistance in monitoring the federal permitting process.

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

### Merrimack Valley Stormwater Collaborative

With participation of all 15 cities and towns, MVPC organized the Merrimack Valley Stormwater Collaborative to prepare communities for implementing new municipal stormwater system management requirements expected to be finalized by EPA in 2016. Stormwater is now the largest source of pollution found in our region's waterways and communities are addressing the problem by working to minimize contaminants entering stormwater systems through public education, low impact development and introduction of "green" infrastructure filtration.

The Collaborative hosted a series of Spring 2015 training workshops focused on best management practices in Facilities planning, Parks & Recreation Operations, and Stormwater Infrastructure Maintenance. More than 150 attended the three sessions offered.

Other training programs organized included a site tour in July of the University of New Hampshire Stormwater Center field resource facility in Durham, NH for an overview of bioretention systems, pervious surface treatments, hydrodynamic separators and subsurface gravel wetlands.

Through the Collaborative and with grant funding from the Commonwealth's Community Innovation Challenge Program, MVPC launched the [merrimackvalleystormwater.org](http://merrimackvalleystormwater.org) website as a technical resource and information clearinghouse for stormwater managers and the public. The website includes a quick technical guide on elements and costs of an effective and compliant municipal stormwater program.



*Andover hosted facility review tour at the town maintenance yard, part of MVPC's 2015 program of stormwater management training.*

# Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

## Eight Towns and the Great Marsh (ETGM) Committee

### Eight Towns and the Great Marsh

In the first full year of the **Hurricane Sandy Resiliency Grant Award**, the Eight Town and the Great Marsh and Merrimack Valley Planning Commission successfully achieved the several target objectives of the grant that we are responsible for. These include the following:

- Seventy-five acres of invasive *Phragmitesaustralis* vegetation was chemically treated, and mowed. Over 200 acres of invasive pepperweed were successfully treated. Hundreds of volunteers were engaged in mapping, monitoring, and controlling both pepperweed and Phragmites. The two invasive plants will naturally be replaced with native marsh grasses and vegetation thus increasing the resiliency of the marsh ecosystem.
- The first phase of the hydrodynamic modeling data (topography, bathymetry, sediment accretion rates, sediment cores, etc) for the Plum Island Sound/Merrimack River Estuarine system has been collected. The data has been QA/QC'd and assembled in a form that can be readily used by the Woods Hole Group Modeling team which is assembling the actual model. The Hydrodynamic model will be used to assess salinity patterns in and around Plum Island Sound, in particular the influence of the Plum Island Turnpike bridge on salinity movement in the marsh. The model will also evaluate sediment movement and erosion in the channels, creeks and along the barrier beach system.
- One and a half acres of eelgrass were transplanted by over 50 community volunteers into Essex Bay. Over 1280 acres of marsh habitat was monitored/managed for green crabs throughout the Great Marsh.
- Three Student Conservation Association (SCA) interns were hired and worked on several components of the Sandy Project between April 15, 2015 and October 15, 2015. They were actively involved in managing selected components and assisting with eelgrass restoration/green crab monitoring, invasive vegetation control, as well as other Hurricane Sandy Resiliency projects such as surveying tidal restrictions and barriers to flow, dune planting and restoration and related resiliency projects.



*Spraying invasive phragmites*



*Training Eelgrass Volunteers*



### ***Volunteers Harvesting Eelgrass***

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

In addition to Hurricane Sandy Resiliency Projects, the Eight Towns and the Great Marsh Committee was actively involved in an assessment of **Marsh Edge Erosion** assessment in the river and creeks of the Great Marsh. This project is examining the role of green crab burrowing, sea level rise, wave impact, nutrient loading and invasive plants colonization on the erosion of marsh banks. More than twenty sites from **Salisbury** to Gloucester and even down to Salem Sound are being examined and GPS'd for changes in marsh edge erosion. Preliminary indications are that the average marsh erosion around the Great Marsh is around one meter, and in some places as high as two meters. The cause of this erosion is not yet conclusive.



*SCA Students GPS Marsh Edge Erosion*

Green Crab in Marsh Bank



*Measuring Marsh Edge*

The Committee embarked on a new study near the end of the year to investigate the viability of a technique known as **Thin-layer Deposition** (TLD) to help the marsh combat the impacts of sea level rise. This practice has been successfully performed in other central and southeastern Atlantic coastal states to allow the marshes to keep up with sea level rise. Several experiments are being conducted in the Great Marsh to determine the ability of the marsh to thrive when elevation building sediment is placed on the high marsh platform. Our test plots are investigating the most suitable marsh vegetation types for this activity as well as the best types of sediment mixtures and thicknesses to allow the marsh to grow. If deemed applicable, a cost effective sediment sources for TLD could be from within clogged channels and creeks of the Great Marsh.



*Installing a thin-layer deposition experimental plot*



*TLD Plots on the Marsh*







## *Prioritizing Transportation Investments*

**MVMPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP):** The **MVMPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** is the most widely recognized transportation document in the Valley since any transportation project in the region that is to be funded in whole, or in part, with Federal transportation dollars must appear in it.

### **Prioritizing Transportation Investment**

**2016 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP):** The MVMPO adopted a new long-range transportation plan for the region, which became effective in October. Over \$436 million in roadway, bridge and bicycle/pedestrian projects were identified, representing a mixture of projects that address safety, mobility and maintaining the system in a state of good repair. Among the projects listed include implementing portions of the Active Transportation Network, reconstruction of roadways as well as replacement of transit buses and construction of a new Intermodal Parking Facility in Downtown **Newburyport**.

New to the document this year were performance measures that will help guide decisions and projects in the future. Over the next couple of years, the staff will implement these measures.

MVMPO staff implemented a robust outreach plan for the **RTP**, which included new efforts to reach non-English speakers and minority groups. For example, working with the Lawrence Senior Center, the staff met with a group of Chinese and Vietnamese seniors as well as Spanish-speaking seniors to discuss their transportation needs. We will continue to look for ways to reach these groups annually going forward.

**Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs):** The **TIP** continues to be the MVMPO's most dynamic document, owing to project scope and budget changes encountered during the project development process. The MVMPO endorsed its **FFYs 2016-2019 TIP** in July, and amended elements of its preexisting **FFYs 2015-2018 TIP** during the year as necessary. Projects for which funds were programmed include:

- **Amesbury-Salisbury:** I-95 Whittier Bridge/Ghost Trail/Powow Riverwalk Trail Connector;
- **Georgetown:** Border-to-Boston Trail, Southern Segment;
- **Groveland:** MA-97 Reconstruction, Parker St. to Georgetown Town Line;
- **Haverhill:** Main Street, Reconstruction of Key Intersections between the Basiliere Bridge and Monument Square and MA-97 Reconstruction, Silver Birch Lane to Research Drive;
- **Lawrence:** Lawrence and Park Sts. Intersection Reconstruction and Safe Routes to School Improvements, Bruce Elementary School;
- **Methuen:** MA-213 Resurfacing;
- **Newbury:** MVRTA bus purchase, Newbury Council on Aging;
- **Newburyport:** MVRTA Intermodal Parking Facility and Clipper City Rail Trail, Phase II;
- **North Andover:** Safe Routes to School Improvements, Middle School and Intersection Improvements, MA-125/Massachusetts Avenue, and
- **Salisbury:** Salisbury Rail Trail, Phase II.

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

**Public Participation Plan (PPP):** The MVMPO staff prepares the **PPP** to define how the MVMPO will provide the public with early, continuous, and meaningful opportunities to help identify social, economic, and environmental impacts of proposed transportation policies, projects and initiatives. The implementation of a robust outreach plan for the **RTP**, the availability of new socioeconomic data for minority, low-income and limited English proficient populations in the region and the submittal of a Title VI Annual Update to MassDOT that incorporated new MassDOT analytical work on project spending led the MVMPO to prepare the Draft 2106 Public Participation Plan for the MVMPO that reflected these changes. This document will be released by the MVMPO for public review and comment early in 2016.

**Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP):** The MVMPO staff UPWP Studies and Local Technical Assistance analyses during 2015, including:

- Traffic and Safety Analysis of the Haverhill Street/Broadway and Broadway/Tremont Street intersections in the City of **Lawrence** and participated in the MassDOT Road Safety Audit that was performed for these locations in December 2015;
- Traffic Impact Analysis for the City of **Newburyport's** proposed 40R District. This analysis looked at the immediate and long-term impacts that such a district would have on the nearby Route 1 Rotary;
- Feasibility study for implementing Heavy Commercial Vehicle Exclusions on roadways in the Searle Street area of **Georgetown**;
- Working in conjunction with MVPC staff, MVRTA continued work on an update of its Strategic Plan, which was first prepared in 1999. The Strategic Plan provides a comprehensive examination of the Authority's organizational structure, its existing strengths and weaknesses, the performance of its various fixed route bus and demand response services, and the characteristics and needs of the population that it serves. The updated Strategic Plan will allow the MVRTA to adjust its policies and strategic goals to reflect the changes to the transportation system that have taken place in its service area since the original document was prepared over a decade ago, and
- Late in 2015, MVPC began to assist the Town of **Newbury** in completing the Transportation Element of that community's upcoming Master Plan Update.

**Transportation Funding:** In early December 2015, The U.S. House and Senate approved the final five-year, \$305 billion Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act transportation authorization. The FAST Act is the successor to Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21), which was initially set to expire in October 2014 and survived in continuing resolutions through 2015. The FAST Act's significance is that it provides transportation agencies with a measure of multi-year funding and program predictability. It also continues federal requirements under MAP-21 for transportation agency performance, safety, and asset management programs, which remain in development at the federal level.

### Projects Completed

**Merrimac Square:** Reconfiguration of the Square has been a top transportation priority for the Town of **Merrimac**. This \$5 million project, which was funded in the FFY 2013 MVMPO TIP, was designed to improve travel safety and efficiency, better balance bicycling, motoring and walking activity, and stimulate both business and civic activity in the Town's traditional village center. Its centerpiece is a new roundabout complimented by new roadway, sidewalks, parking, and streetscape amenities along MA-110 both east and west of the Square. MassDOT's contractor was also able to rebuild a deteriorated retaining wall just east of the Square and made utility upgrades that should serve the community well for many years. Notably, MassDOT's contractor completed construction of this long-awaited project in December.



*Merrimac Square*

# Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

## Projects in Construction:

- **I-93/MA-110/MA-113 Rotary:** This project, which began construction in June 2014, is approximately 50% complete and is expected to be 100% complete by Summer, 2018;
- **Bradford Rail Trail Phase I:** September 2015 start;
- **Groveland MA-97 Reconstruction:** Notice to Proceed issued January 2016;
- **Amesbury MA-150 Reconstruction:** 64% complete;
- **Clipper City Rail Trail (CCRT) Phase II:** construction bids received, and
- **Whittier Bridge:** 77% complete; first of two spans opened for traffic and dismantling of old bridge began in December.



*Whittier Bridge Demolition*

**Trail Planning Update:** MVPC staff continued working with local officials in **Haverhill**, **Groveland** and **Georgetown** to implement the recommendations made in the Georgetown Branch Rail Trail Feasibility Study. Notably, the Town of **Groveland** voted to use its Community Preservation Act funds to prepare 25% design plans for the Groveland Community Trail, which will utilize the old railroad right of way. Staff members also assisted the City of **Haverhill** to address a last-minute brownfields issue concerning the Bradford Rail-Trail and ensure that the project was not delayed. Staff continued to assist the communities of **Georgetown**, **Newbury** and **Salisbury** as well as MassDOT in developing the preliminary design of segments of the Border to Boston Multiuse Trail.

**Complete Streets:** This new-for-2016 MassDOT grant program has become a hot topic. The MVMPO has focused its funding efforts on constructing the non-motorized trails, such as the Border to Boston and the Coastal Trails Network. All federally-funded roadway and bridge projects must address the mobility needs of bicyclists and pedestrians in addition to automobiles, trucks, etc.

MVPC has also increased its outreach to communities to assist them with implementing Complete Street strategies:

- MVPC partnered with the Haverhill Police Department for a second year of a MassDOT-funded program to reduce bicycle and pedestrian crashes. Between May and October, the HPD spoke to and/or issued citations to 424 pedestrians, 239 drivers and 194 bicyclists. The objective is to educate people on proper driving/walking/bicycling practices and also determine if there are infrastructure changes that could address habitual problems. The City of **Haverhill** will receive additional funding for design and construction of infrastructure to address some of the issues identified through this program.



This map identifies locations of the enforcement location for our bike ped/safety project in Haverhill. It includes both year one and two. The green boxes represent those locations focused on in year 1. The blue boxes are locations that were added for year 2. The circles are automobile crash locations. The stars are bike/ped crashes.

- MVPC staff drafted a complete streets ordinance for the City of **Haverhill**.
- MVPC staff worked with the City of **Lawrence** Mayor's Health Task Force to implement the Ciclovía on two Sundays in August. Ciclovías are also known as open streets or Sunday streets in other communities. The Ciclovía was designed as a fun way to promote active living and educate people on Complete Streets.
- Speakers from the Town of Reading and the City of Salem (MA) were invited to participate in a very practical discussion with DPW directors about the impacts of implementation of Complete Streets.

## Promoting the Orderly Development of the Region

**MVRTA:** Staff provided planning assistance for the MVRTA on a variety of transit-related tasks.

- Review of information for proposed federal transit rulemakings;
- ADA Compliance reviews for MVRTA's FY14 and FY15 Special Services;
- Attendance at various meetings, including the MVRTA Advisory Committee, transit information sessions, and the Regional Coordinating Council;
- Participation in an Amesbury Community Television's Gray Matters program on transit that aired in November;
- Hosting of the MassDOT training session for prospective applicants of the FY15 Community Transit Grant program and reviews/scoring of applications, and
- Drafting the 2015 Strategic Plan and Title VI program as well as assisting in review of information for Triennial FTA review Assisting in producing revisions to MVRTA Bus System Map.



**Title VI/Environmental Justice/Nondiscrimination Activities:** the MVMPO staff was particularly busy in 2015 in this aspect of its work. Key accomplishments included:

- Updating its regional socioeconomic data for minority, low-income and limited English proficient populations;
- Submittal of a Title VI Annual Update to MassDOT, incorporating new MassDOT analytical work on project spending statewide and by MPO communities;
- Increased outreach to organizations for development of the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP);
- New draft Socioeconomic Guide to use in planning MVMPO outreach as well as to document important statistics that guide the MVMPO's work. This Guide will also serve as a primer for MVMPO members, staff, and MVTC members, and
- Participation in one or more training/oversight sessions: NTI Environmental Justice (11/14-15) and MassDOT/Boston UZA MPOs in Lawrence on October 19.

**Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA):** MVPC continues to be highly involved in MARPA's ongoing coordination of RPA activities across the Commonwealth. MARPA is actively engaged in representing RPA interests that include:

- Zoning reform;
- Promotion of best practices in land use, environmental and regional planning;
- Regional collaboration and shared services;
- General legislative advocacy, and
- Transportation program coordination.

In 2015, at MARPA's direction the MVPC staff undertook to design and construct a new MARPA website. For the first time, MARPA will now have a central site offering important information to the public and to members. In addition, the website will connect with MARPA's Regional Best Practices website (completed by MVPC in 2014). The site is expected to 'go live' in 2016.



## *Coordinating Activities in the Region*

MVPC has extensive experience helping its member communities plan for their future. Clearly well planned communities produce a well-planned region so MVPC has used its expertise to help communities coordinate their planning actions. Through technical assistance and technology MVPC has undertaken the following activities:

### **Managing the Region's Information Technology and Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

**Regional CMMS Project:** Working with the regions DPW Directors, MVPC continued to manage the implementation of its regional Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS). During the early part of 2015 MVPC coordinated on-site training and facilitated the installation of the system for the four participating communities of **Amesbury, Andover, Haverhill** and **Newburyport**. Using the system, work requests from the general public as well as internal requests are evaluated and processed and subsequently converted to municipal work orders. Recording information in a CMMS allows managers to evaluate performance and response time with the goal of increasing responsiveness. It also allows municipal leaders to scrutinize maintenance expenditures on community assets to more efficiently make determinations as to when preventative maintenance should be applied to assets or to make the decision to replace the asset when maintenance expenses exceed the cost of replacement.

**Plum Island Sewer Application:** In response to a catastrophic failure of **Newburyport's** vacuum sewer system on Plum Island, MVPC's GIS Program worked closely with the City's Sewer Department to design an asset management system accessible from mobile phones or tablets. During the project, GIS staff worked with Sewer personnel to capture the locations of all sewer system components on Plum Island using high-accuracy Global Positioning System (GPS). Each component of the sewer system was then converted into an electronic "layer" of information and organized into a system known as GIS (geographic information systems). The sewer system layers were then assembled in a mobile application which allows sewer personnel to access each component of the system using a smart phone or tablet computer. Developing a system such as the one created for Plum Island makes it possible for sewer department staff to instantly locate features on the ground using the GPS in their device. The system has also been set up to enable sewer personnel to record critical information about system components such as typical problem areas, component maintenance dates and recommended steps to resolve malfunctioning valves. While the winter of 2015/2016 is not expected to be record breaking like that of the previous year, the development of the Plum Island sewer information system will provide system managers and operators a more efficient method to respond to incidents and record performance data with the goal of preventing failure in the future.

**Lawrence Parcel Mapping:** Working collaboratively with the City of **Lawrence**, the GIS Program developed the first GIS-based assessment maps of the City ever produced. During the course of the project, GIS staff digitized new subdivisions and parcels and then linked the electronic parcel data to the City's Vision Appraisal system. Personnel in the City's Assessing Department then reviewed the information and worked jointly with MVPC GIS staff to update missing records and refine incorrect information. With the project completed midway through the year, the City was then provided its first ever GIS-based parcel maps. Development of GIS-based parcel records has numerous uses from electronic mapping to analysis of neighborhoods these maps will provide a valuable resource that can be further enhanced over the course of time.

## Coordinating Activities in the Region

**Priority Growth Strategy:** During 2015 MVPC completed an update of the regions Priority Growth Strategy. During this project, GIS staff worked with the Economic Development, Transportation and Environmental programs to revise maps and analyses included in the plan. First completed in 2010, the purpose of this effort was to update areas of open space acquired since the initial release of the plan as well as to account for changes in zoning and completed transportation projects. MVPC also adopted terminology and designations consistent with the state's priority development areas and priority preservation areas. The updated Priority Growth Strategy is available in printed form or electronically via the Commission's website at: [mvpc.org/programs/economic-development-planning/priority-growth-strategy/](http://mvpc.org/programs/economic-development-planning/priority-growth-strategy/)

**GIS and Information Technology Projects:** MVPC's GIS Program continued to engage in new and innovative projects during 2015, including the evolution to house all of the Commission's web-based GIS resources on cloud-based servers. This trend in technology allows for improved efficiency of operation and ease of scalability to improve performance as necessary. The GIS Program continued operation of its MIMAP (Municipal Information Mapping Access Program) with 14 of the 15 communities in the region enrolled in the program. GIS staff also began exploring a new 'engine' for MIMAP with the goal of increasing functionality and expanding its offerings to member communities.

Other projects undertaken by the GIS Program include the development of a mobile application for inventorying recycling for the City of **Amesbury**, providing mapping support for the Environmental Program's assessment of the proposed Kinder-Morgan pipeline and development of a water quality educational map series in support of the Greenscapes program

**Local Technical Assistance:** Through the Commission's Local Technical Assistance (LTA) MVPC's GIS Program completed a series of projects for member communities. GIS staff completed open space map series for the communities of **Amesbury**, **Boxford**, **Georgetown** and **North Andover**. In the area of zoning, program staff worked with the **Georgetown** Planning Department to update the town's zoning map and overlay districts. GIS staff also worked with the City of **Lawrence** to prepare a map depicting the proposed Medical Marijuana Zoning district as well as to assemble a list of properties within the Floodplain District in the City. Other efforts included preparation of a map depicting historic locations in **Groveland** and creation of a new Hunsley Hills trail map for the Town of **Rowley**.

2015 was a very successful year for the Commission's GIS Program with staff engaging in a wide variety of GIS and Information Technology initiatives. The GIS Program looks forward to continuing its work in 2016. For more information, visit: [mvpc.org/programs/gisinformation-technology/](http://mvpc.org/programs/gisinformation-technology/)





Encouraging member communities to cooperate and jointly work together has always been a responsibility of MVPC. Instigated by a recovering 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. In addition Governor Baker's new Community Compact Cabinet (CCC) initiative added "best practices" to the list of ways MVPC and the Communities can work together.

## “Cooperating Through Regional Collaboration”

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 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 throughout the year and took up subject such as stormwater management and computerized maintenance management system (CCMS) software. The Coalition was awarded a 2014 Commonwealth Community Innovation Challenge grant to implement a region-wide program to help the communities meet proposed EPA stormwater management regulations released in 2014. All fifteen communities in the region decided to participate in this program and significant steps were taken by this Stormwater Collaborative in 2015.

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 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 2014 three communities completed their projects, **Lawrence, Merrimac and North Andover**. In 2015 the **Salisbury** project was under construction. **Methuen** and **Haverhill** are adjusting their programs to deal with net school spending issues. **Methuen** has expanded their program to include retrofitting their street lights. **Haverhill** project is for the schools only, it will be a \$2.5M project and the City will save \$270K per year. Lawrence is considering a second phase and the Greater Lawrence Technical High School is negotiating an ESA. When all six communities complete their respective project the total construction costs will be over \$10M and the annual saving for the communities will be well over \$1M.

The Coalition also explored electric aggregation with the hope of saving residents money through the purchase of electricity collectively. In 2015 **Newburyport, Methuen and Haverhill** completed their planning and began implementation. Preliminary meetings have been held in **Salisbury, Lawrence, Newbury, North Andover** and **Andover** to considering participating.

## Cooperating to Address Common Challenges

We also continued to hold regular meetings with the community planning directors from the region. Collaborating together the directors have discussed common planning issues such as a MVPC's Economic Development Tool Kit, Complete Streets, the TA Connector and the Merrimack Valley Priority Growth Strategy. We also met with the Town Administrators and Finance Directors from the smaller communities in the region in 2015 to identify opportunities for regional cooperation and applications to be designated Compact Community. We hope to continue these meetings in 2016.

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.

### Regional Planning Day

**Rising With the Tides: Economic Development Opportunities Along the Merrimack River.** Over 100 people came together on October 16 at Roma's Restaurant in Haverhill to participate in Rising with the Tides, a morning seminar organized by the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with MVPC. This event was organized as a unique opportunity to showcase the Merrimack River's symbolic and functional importance. Speakers highlighted the River's evolution as a natural resource, a locus of employment, and how specific revitalization and transportation projects along the river are creating new living, working and recreating opportunities for future generations.



Stacey Bruzzese and Tom Mortimer of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce provided opening remarks, followed by a welcome from **Haverhill's** Mayor Fiorentini. Congresswoman Nikki Tsongas cited the importance of a shared vision for the region and the need to sustain existing revitalization efforts in her keynote address. Participants then focused upon the moderators and speakers in the following panel discussions:

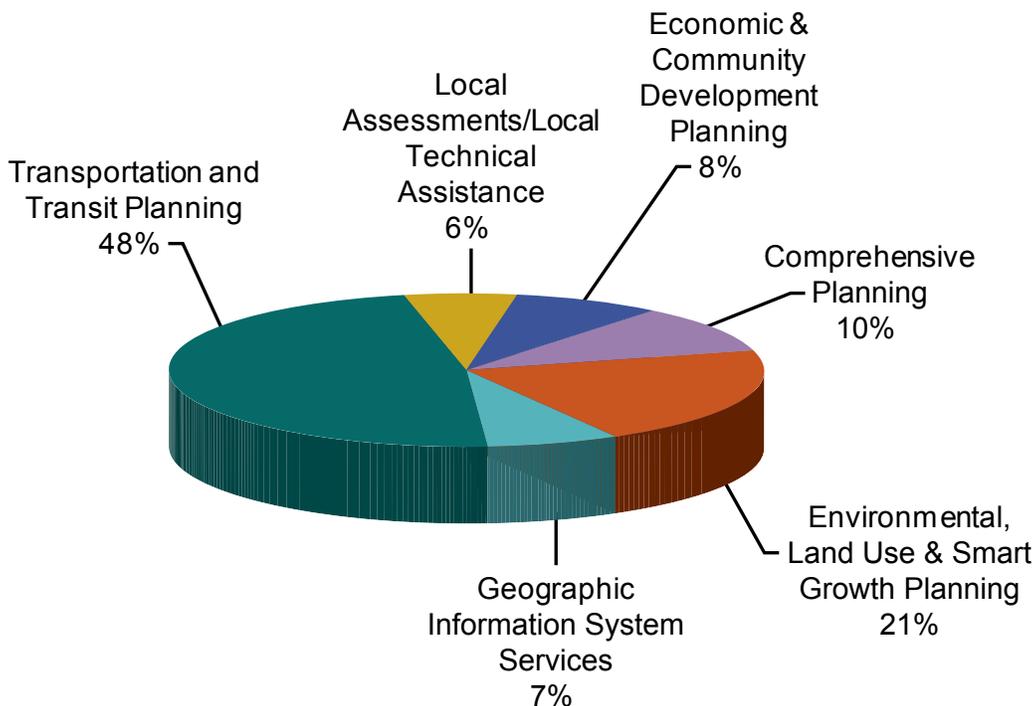
- **Development (Moderator: Bill Pillsbury, City of Haverhill).** Ron Trombley and Sally Cerasuolo- O'Rorke of the Greater Haverhill Foundation highlighted Haverhill's progress in revising its regulations and permitting procedures to stimulate construction of housing, mixed-use development, and transportation amenities in its Downtown. Noah Koretz from MassDevelopment provided an overview of their Transformative Development Initiative for Downtown Haverhill, and Dave Traggorth of Traggorth Companies added his expertise in site selection for mixed-use development projects.
- **Live/Work (Moderator: Scott Cole, Pentucket Bank).** Lane Glenn of Northern Essex Community College and Steven Tello of UMass-Lowell each talked about their institution's unique and shared roles in preparing the region's students for tomorrow's economy. MVPC's Dennis DiZoglio showed how important the river has been in shaping the Valley's civic and economic life, and offered the MVPC staff's planning / programming assistance.
- **Recreate and Expanded Access (Moderator: Senator Kathleen O'Connor Ives).** Dave Goodwin of the Greater Haverhill Foundation described the recently completed Merrimack River study and its importance to future transportation/recreation; Mark Cutter of the U.S. Coast Guard discussed river navigation issues and opportunities; Mike Vets, Groveland/Haverhill Harbormaster spoke about increased marine activity on the river, and Ann Marie Casey of the North of Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau underscored tourism's importance to the region's economy.

## Administration and Finance

**Distribution of Fiscal Year 2015 Funds:** MVPC's operating funds for FY2015 supported a broad range of planning and technical services in the following six major functional areas:

### Funding Areas in Fiscal Year 2015

- Local Assessments/Local Technical Assistance
- Economic & Community Development Planning
- Comprehensive Planning
- Environmental, Land Use & Smart Growth Planning
- Geographic Information System Services
- Transportation and Transit Planning



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 has been completed. Audited statements show MVPC expenditures to be within the budget and the fund balance remains positive.

# MVPC Professional Staff

## **Administration**

Dennis A. DiZoglio, executive director  
Jenifer Dunlap, financial administrator  
Nancy Lavallee, executive assistant/office administrator

## **Environment**

Joseph Cosgrove, 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 Ovale, field services specialist  
Elizabeth Goodrich, senior transportation planner  
Todd Fontanella, senior transportation planner

## **GIS**

Jerrard Whitten, GIS/IT manager  
Steve Lopez, Senior GIS analyst  
Kelsey Quinlan, GIS technician

## **Community and Economic Development**

Mike Parquette, comprehensive planning manager  
Ted Semesnyei, economic development coordinator (resigned)  
Heidi Murphy, economic development coordinator



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