



Region Matters

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Merrimack Valley
Planning Commission
plan • develop • promote

FALL 2013

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Energy Action Plan Receives National Award

MVPC recently received a 2013 Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation for the Merrimack Valley Regional Clean Energy Program.



NADO is a Washington, DC based association that promotes programs and policies that strengthen local governments, communities, and economies through regional cooperation, program delivery, and comprehensive strategies. The association's Innovation Awards program recognizes regional development organizations and partnering organizations for improving the economic and community competitiveness of our nation's region's and local communities. MVPC, one of only three award winners from all of New England, accepted the award at the NADO National Conference in San Francisco on August 26.

The Merrimack Valley Clean Energy Program consists of several energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives developed by the agency to allow member communities to cooperate and work jointly, thus forming an economy of scale that saves the communities valuable time and expense. MVPC developed a very innovative, action oriented Regional Clean Energy Action Plan, detailing specific recommendations and suggestions for advancing clean energy goals for each city and town in the region. MVPC conducted procurement for a regional

performance contract on behalf of several of its cities and towns and the resultant projects are expected to achieve more than \$1 million in annual savings. MVPC contracted to perform an analysis of opportunities for solar PV on closed landfills in the region and is now providing assistance to communities looking to move forward with project development. MVPC is currently in the process of contracting for a Regional Aggregation Plan to aggregate the electric load of electricity users in the region, and is working with a Renewable Energy developer on a solar net metering project for member communities. These efforts of MVPC have laid the groundwork for projects that its communities would not be able to pursue without the resources provided by the Commission.

"Creative projects like MVPC's Energy Action Plan advance the economic growth and sustainability of our nation's regions and communities. For more than 20 years, NADO's Innovation Award has provided regional development organizations throughout the nation a unique opportunity to showcase their important work and their critical role in promoting economic development for rural and small metropolitan communities," said NADO President John Leonard.

For more information about the award-winning project, contact Executive Director Dennis DiZoglio (978) 374-0519 ext 12 or email ddizoglio@mvpc.org or Comprehensive Planning Manager Mike Parquette (978) 374-0519 ext 27 or email mparquette@mvpc.org

Local Communities Celebrate Bridge Openings

After many years of planning, budgeting and just a few years of construction, MassDOT opened to the public the replacement Bates Bridge on September 20 and the rehabilitated Rocks Village Bridge on September 29.



Bates Bridge Replacement Project

The new \$49.7 million, 775' foot long span between Groveland and Haverhill replaces the preexisting structure that is approximately 60' upstream. Named for former Congressman William H. Bates, it was constructed in 1914 and last rehabilitated in 1951. The new span, for which construction began in 2011, retains the movable bascule span (i.e. "drawbridge") feature of the preexisting bridge that allows larger vessels to pass through the structure. Also included are 9-10' wide shoulders on both sides of the bridge and a 7-8' wide sidewalk on the bridge's north side for improved bicycling and walking. This project was built using federal and Commonwealth transportation funds programmed by the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization, staffed by the MVPC. Cianbro Corporation, the

MassDOT's Project Contractor, expects to complete demolition of the pre-existing bridge in 2014.

A ribbon cutting ceremony for the new bridge was held on September 19, the day before the bridge was opened to traffic. It was officiated by Senator Bruce Tarr and included remarks from Haverhill's Mayor James Fiorentini, Senator Kathleen O'Connor-Ives, State Representatives Leonard Mirra and Linda Dean-Campbell and Groveland's selectmen Joseph D'Amore and Betty Gorski.



Rocks Village Bridge

Less than five miles downstream of the Bates Bridge is the 812' foot long Rocks Village Bridge, which was constructed in 1883 and refurbished in 1914. MassDOT's oldest movable span bridge is famous for its hand operated turning span that is used to allow larger vessels to navigate the river. Unlike the Bates Bridge, the historic Rocks Village Bridge was extensively rehabilitated than replaced. After several decades of planning, design and engineering work, MassDOT initiated a \$14.4 million rehabilitation project for the existing structure, which began construction in June 2012, using funds from the Commonwealth through its Accelerated Bridge Program. The existing piers were inspected and repaired where required; the bridge deck and some structural elements were replaced; the swing bridge span's mechanical system was fully refurbished, and the sub and super structures were fully cleaned and re-coated. New guardrails, lighting and approach roadway surfaces were also installed.

"As one of the earliest riveted metal trusses yet identified in the MassHighway inventory, the Rocks Village Bridge is also the earliest known surviving work of the Boston Bridge Works, a Massachusetts bridge building firm active from the 1870s through the 1930s." - Shawn Regan, Newburyport Daily News, August 16, 2013.



A Bikeable and Walkable Region

What could a bikeable region look like? MVPC has been meeting with community groups around the region this year with the hope of wrapping up a draft plan by the end of the calendar year.

Most recently, an enthusiastic discussion about how to make bicycle and pedestrian connections within the City of Methuen was held on August 20. Organized by Phil DeCologero in Mayor Zanni's office, MVPC's transportation planners Betsy Goodrich and Todd Fontanella met with interested Methuen residents about how bicycling and pedestrian transportation could be enhanced through their city. Many ideas were generated including cross-town connections along Route 113. Other important bicycle and pedestrian connectors include Merrimack Street, a connection along I-93 over the river and the Methuen Rail Trail.

Coming up, Ms. Goodrich will take part in a panel discussion on the same topic in Andover on October 22. Look for scheduling information on the MVPC website mvpc.org and on the Town of Andover's website andoverma.gov

MVPC to Offer Targeted Technical Assistance

As MVPC was developing the recently adopted 2013 Merrimack Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), a common theme was heard in the strategy sessions held with municipal officials and business leaders. Due to ever tightening municipal budgets and resources, local capacity necessary to conduct normal municipal activities such as planning and economic development has diminished. Many municipalities are working with far fewer staff than a few years ago, forcing municipalities to just undertake the “day to day” issues and putting off the bigger projects for later. The CEDS committee therefore incorporated into the new Plan the goal of creating a “Merrimack Valley Support Team” to assist communities in their planning and development efforts to advance the region’s “Priority Growth Strategy”.

The idea is to help increase local planning capacity to deal with the myriad of issues that local planners and economic development officials face using the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) grant funds to cover the cost of providing this help. MVPC has expertise in transportation, environmental, land-use, and community development planning. We also offer exceptional GIS services to our communities. The “Valley Support Team” will be comprised of appropriate MVPC staff to provide assistance on a project by project basis. Whether it is assistance needed to develop necessary zoning, or obtain state incentive des-

ignations like 40R or 43D MVPC can help. Assistance could also be in the form of preparing a housing production plan or completing a corridor plan or just sponsoring timely workshops on key issues if the assistance helps implement the Regional Plan.

The Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, working with MVPC, developed the *Merrimack Valley Regional Plan*, released earlier this year. The plan identifies 13 state-designated Priority Development Areas (PDA), which are areas that are capable of handling more development and have good access; strong infrastructure including water, sewer, and transportation; local support; and an absence of environment constraints. The Merrimack Valley Regional Plan was based on previously completed work by MVPC’s 2009 Priority Growth Strategy Report, which provided a regional vision of promoting growth in identified sites. To achieve the Commonwealth’s housing and economic development goals in our region EO-HED has committed to be an active participant in the Valley Support Team effort.

Funding is limited so to find out if your project is consistent with the Regional Plan contact Dennis DiZoglio (978)374-0519 ext 12 or email ddizoglio@mvpc.org or Mike Parquette (978)374-0519 ext 27 or email mparquette@mvpc.org

A MVMPO 2013 USDOT Certification Review

The US Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway and Transit Administrations periodically conduct Certification Reviews to ensure that Metropolitan Planning Organizations are conducting their transportation planning processes in accordance with federal standards. The Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO), which is staffed by MVPC’s Transportation Program Unit, recently completed its latest federal Certification Review. Earlier this year MVMPO staff responded to USDOT questions and provided copies of its planning documents in preparation for an April 4 on-site meeting at MVPC. USDOT issued a final Certification Review report during the Summer 2013. This review is important to both USDOT and MVPC as it offers an opportunity for exchanging updates on key legislation, Best Practices in transportation planning, and previews of upcoming federal transportation program information.

The day-long event on April 4 included an MVMPO staff recap of work that it completed since its last Certification Review (2008); a USDOT presentation on Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century, the two

year federal transportation authorization under which all MPOs are presently conducting their work, and an MVPC presentation of its award-winning Priority Growth Strategy (PGS), the Merrimack Valley region’s comprehensive plan for growth. The MVMPO’s integration of transportation into the PGS earned praise as a candidate Best Practice. Moving ahead, the MVMPO staff, in concert with MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning staff, will be working to:

- expand outreach efforts to community-based organizations;
- socioeconomic research targeted toward identification and increased engagement of non-traditional participants in the transportation planning process, and
- adoption of transportation-specific performance criteria.

The MVMPO Certification Review final report is on file at MVPC. To view this report or request additional information on the 2013 Certification Review contact Anthony Komornick (978) 374-0519 ext 15 or email akomornick@mvpc.org

MVPC's Citizen Training Program for Planners

MVPC will be hosting a new round of the Citizen Planner Training Program in 2014, according to Dennis DiZoglio, MVPC's Executive Director. The 2014 program will feature three unique topic choices ranging from permitting to interdepartmental cooperation to duties of municipal officials. Later in the year, participants will have a choice of two CPTC workshops. The three Monday evening sessions will be held at the MVPC office, 160 Main St., Haverhill at 7pm.

To register contact Nancy Lavallee nlavallee@mvpc.org
Telephone: 978-374-0519

Session I: Deals with legal matters related to permitting, including ethics law, open meeting laws, public records, and conduct of meetings.

Date: Monday, January 6

Session II: Involves cooperation and coordination among municipal departments, permit seekers and various boards.

Date: Monday, February 3

Session III: Outlines the duties of each board and commission, as well as various municipal officials.

Date: Monday, March 3

Session IV: CPTC Workshop, Fall 2014

Cost: \$100

Upcoming Workshops

Monday, October 21 - **Special Permits and Variances**
Location: MVPC office Time: 7pm

Monday, November 4 - **Writing Reasonable and Defensible Decisions**
Location: MVPC office Time: 7pm

To register contact CPTC: umass.edu/masscptc

MVPC Monthly Commission Meetings

MVPC Commission Office—Third Thursday of the month
@ 7pm

Check our website for details on upcoming
events mvpc.org

Contact Nancy Lavallee - nlavallee@mvpc.org
978-374-0519 extension 10

Photographer's Get Snapping !

All photographers are welcome to submit images to the Essex National Heritage Area Photo Contest that capture the essence of the Essex National Heritage Area (ENHA) or speak to Essex Heritage's role in preserving the historic, cultural and natural treasures of Essex County! Photographs must be taken within the ENHA and represent one of four Contest Categories listed below. Read the complete Rules & Requirements then send in an entry form to win!

*All photos must be received or postmarked by
Friday, November 15, 2013.*

*For details go to the Essex National Heritage Area
website*

essexheritage.org/photocontest