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THE MERRIMACK VALLEY STARTS PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF HOUSING IN THE REGION

Haverhill, MA, March 17, 2017– Starting this month, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) will embark on a first-of-its kind project to develop a Regional Housing Plan for the Merrimack Valley. This plan will provide strategies for developing housing that meets the needs of existing and future residents. While there are other regional housing plans throughout the state, this is the first time a regional planning agency has engaged in a planning effort that will provide certifiable housing production plans for each community in the region. According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, a housing production plan (HPP) is defined as “a community’s proactive strategy for planning and developing affordable housing.” The HPP outlines a strategy to enable the community to meet its affordable housing needs in a manner consistent with the Chapter 40B statute and regulations. The plan will outline a strategy to help the individual communities achieve and maintain 10% affordable housing, as well as how to meet the needs of all residents. Only 2 of the 15 communities in the Merrimack Valley region have HPPs, so this project will help fulfill a need to have a solid plan in place.

“MVPC is excited to work with the communities in the Merrimack Valley on this unique project,” stated Karen Conard, Executive Director for MVPC. “In addition to assisting the communities with HPPs, we will also have a region-wide strategy to help address housing issues on a larger scale.”

Another major component of this project is stakeholder engagement. MVPC will work with local officials, planning boards, housing trusts, and municipal staff, non-profit organizations, housing organizations, institutions and other partners to develop a plan that is realistic, relevant, and implementable. One key partner for this project will be Salem State University’s Center for Economic

Development and Sustainability. Faculty and students at Salem State will be assisting in data collection and analysis, to provide a solid foundation for identifying housing needs and themes in the Merrimack Valley. The Salem State team will be led by Executive Director, Professor Lorri Krebs (PhD).

MVPC will also draw from its own staff to create this plan, many of which have been with the Commission for 15+ years, so this is a high level of knowledge of the region.

“This is an all-hands-on-deck project,” said Mike Parquette, Comprehensive Planning Manager at MVPC. “We have staff from Community Development, Economic Development, Transportation and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) working together to create this plan. Planning for housing has many elements, and we have the benefit of having a talented staff to address all of those elements.”

Virtual and in-person public engagement opportunities will begin in the Spring. MVPC plans to use social media, unique public engagement platforms, and community workshops to assess housing needs and issues throughout the region. The first community workshop will be Wednesday, May 24th from 6-9pm at the Louise Haffner Fournier Education Center on the Northern Essex Community College campus in Lawrence. For more information, please visit MVPC’s Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/mvpc.org>.

MVPC is established as a regional planning agency under [Section 3, Chapter 40B](#) of the Massachusetts General Laws. Our mission 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.” For more information on MVPC, please visit: www.mvpc.org.

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