



# Region Matters

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Merrimack Valley  
Planning Commission  
*plan • develop • promote*

**WINTER 2014**

## Highlights:



***The Chapel at West Parish  
- Andover***

*Photo by: Peggy Erb*

### **2013 First Prize Essex National Heritage Area**

For Contest Results go to:  
[www.essexheritage.org/  
photocontest](http://www.essexheritage.org/photocontest)

### [MVPC Pursues EPA Brownfields Funds](#)

### [Methuen First to Participate in Valley Support Team](#)

### [Making Connections](#)

### [Reconstructing Gateways](#)

### [MVPC Commissioners meet Monthly 3rd Thursday of each month](#)

***There is no January Meeting***

## Representative Dempsey Receives Legislator of the Year Award

At this year's Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA) annual dinner, Representative Brian Dempsey, from Haverhill, was recognized by the thirteen state regional planning agencies as "legislator of the year". Over 50 representatives from RPAs across the State attended the dinner, which was hosted by the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) and held in Haverhill. Dennis DiZoglio, Executive Director of MVPC, presented the award to Representative Dempsey and recognized the legislator's long history of supporting planning and regionalization.



*MVPC Executive Director Dennis  
DiZoglio and  
Representative Brian Dempsey*

Mr. DiZoglio reminded those in attendance that "Representative Dempsey originally filed the legislation that created District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA), which is the State funding program that many of the communities rely on to regionalize municipal services and plan ahead for their community's growth."

Representative Dempsey was also responsible for legislation that allows communities to use Energy Service Contractors (ESCO) to perform energy saving improvements with the cost savings used to finance the improvements. Dennis told those in attendance that "here in the Valley six communities are using this innovative way to retrofit their municipal buildings. The total cost of the improvements for those participating communities will be over \$10M and will save the communities over \$1M a year in energy costs." Also cited was the Representative's efforts to help the City of Haverhill revitalize its downtown by creating partnerships with the University of Massachusetts in Lowell, and the Northern Essex Community College.

*Written by Dennis A DiZoglio  
MVPC Executive Director*

*MVPC Regional Energy Plan is available at  
the MVPC website. [Click Here](#)*

## MVPC Pursues EPA Brownfields Funds

To support our ongoing regional brownfields assessment and cleanup program, MVPC is applying for a new 3-year brownfields assessment grant of \$400,000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Brownfields Program. If awarded, the EPA funds will be used to conduct additional environmental site assessments on eligible municipal, nonprofit, and private properties whose current and future use is impaired by real or perceived hazardous substances and petroleum contamination. Since the inception of the MVPC Brownfields Program in 2003, MVPC staff and a technical consultant have successfully completed over 70 high priority ASTM Phase I and II site investigations and Massachusetts Contingency Plan response actions across the Merrimack Valley region. Sites have included inactive rail corridors, abandoned mill buildings, metal-plating and dry cleaning firms, truck depots, and auto body shops, along with dozens of vacant, blighted urban lots. Determining the nature and extent of contamination at these sites is the critical first step toward restoring the sites to productive use, whether for economic development, housing, or public green space purposes.

In addition to an assessment grant, MVPC is also applying for an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) grant of \$800,000. If awarded, the RLF funds will be used to recapitalize MVPC's current

Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund, which provides gap financing for eligible site cleanup projects. To date, MVPC has awarded low-interest loans and/or subgrants to the city of **Lawrence** for its Oxford Park restoration project, situated on land formerly occupied by paper mills; the City of **Methuen**, for cleanup of a vacant downtown area property that once housed a manufacturing facility; and the City of **Amesbury**, for creation of a public, multi-use 'Heritage Park and Greenway' to be located at the confluence of the Merrimack and Powow Rivers. Combined, the MVPC RLF financing for these three projects totaled \$485,000 and leveraged over \$2 million in project funds from various state and federal sources. A potential fourth MVPC RLF loan/subgrant project, involving the cleanup and mixed-use development of a vacant brownfield site near downtown **Salisbury**, is pending.



*Stevens Street Mill, Haverhill*

For more information on MVPC's regional Brownfields Assessment and Cleanup Program, contact Alan Macintosh at [amacintosh@mvpc.org](mailto:amacintosh@mvpc.org).

*Written by Alan Macintosh  
MVPC Assistant Director & Environmental Program Manager*

## City of Methuen First to Participate in Merrimack Valley Support Team

The City of **Methuen** is first off the line to ask for assistance from the new MVPC initiative – **Merrimack Valley Support Team**. City officials have requested that MVPC assist them with their efforts to designate the downtown as a 40R Smart Growth District. **Methuen** would be the fourth community in the MVPC region to have a 40R district. Other districts are located in **Amesbury**, **Haverhill**, and **North Andover**. Chapter 40R of the Massachusetts General Laws encourages communities to create dense residential or mixed-use smart growth zoning districts in areas most suitable for development such as in existing city and town centers.

The **Merrimack Valley Support Team** idea came to light 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 nec-

essary 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.

The idea is to help increase local planning capacity to deal with the myriad of issues that local planners and economic development officials face.

Funding is limited, so to find out if your project is consistent with the Regional Plan contact Dennis DiZoglio—[ddizoglio@mvpc.org](mailto:ddizoglio@mvpc.org) or Mike Parquette—[mparquette@mvpc.org](mailto:mparquette@mvpc.org).

*Written by Mike Parquette  
MVPC Comprehensive Planning Manager*

## Making Connections

The Merrimack Valley region continues to make progress toward creating a non-motorized network. One of the more advanced networks in the Merrimack Valley exists in the coastal area. Four trail segments in this subregion are on the Transportation Improvement Program including: (1) a segment of the Powow Riverwalk that connects the current endpoint to Water Street in **Amesbury**; (2) Phase II of the **Salisbury** Eastern Marsh Trail (Mudnock Road to the New Hampshire Border); (3) Phase II of the Clipper City Rail Trail in **Newburyport**, and (4) the **Newbury** to **Georgetown** section of the Border to Boston Trail.



However, a few important connections still need to be made. In November, MVPC staff joined MassDOT engineers and town officials in a site walk for the trail connection from the current endpoint of the **Salisbury** Ghost Trail at Rabbit Road under the highway over to Elm Street in **Amesbury**. The proposed trail segment will skirt the highway entrance ramp and come out onto Old Elm Street. MassDOT will design the trail and construction funds will be sought through the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO). Once this segment is complete, only one missing link will remain to connect **Amesbury** to the Coastal Trail Network, which will allow **Amesbury** residents to safely bicycle and walk around the region as well as create opportunities for the more than 1 million visitors to the area annually to more easily frequent **Amesbury** restaurants and businesses.

The group also took a look at the site for the envisioned stairway from the Whittier Bridge trail to Evan's Place in **Amesbury**. This stairway will provide an important connection from the trail to the scenic roadway along the Merrimack River. This stairway will be designed by Parsons Brinkerhoff, the firm that is designing the Whittier Bridge Trail. Construction funds will also be sought through the MVMPO.

*Written by Betsy Goodrich  
MVPC Sr. Transportation Planner*

## Powow Riverwalk



## Reconstructing Gateways



**Canal Street and Canal Street Bridge Reconstruction Project, Lawrence:** 2013 has been an extremely active year in the Merrimack Valley for the construction of major transportation projects. On November 15<sup>th</sup>, the new Canal Street Bridge was formally reopened at a noontime ceremony hosted by outgoing Mayor Lantigua. The new structure was dedicated to Army Sgt. Alex Jiminez, a **Lawrence** native who lost his life in active military service in Iraq in 2007. Mayor Lantigua, City Veterans' Services Director Jaime Melendez, and State Representative Frank Moran, as well as Rev. Joel Almono, pastor of Grace Episcopal Church in Lawrence, spoke to attendees including area residents and businesspeople,

MVPC and MassDOT staff, employees of MassDOT's construction contractors. The \$10.5 million project was initiated by the City and MassDOT over twenty years ago and was amended to include key improvements to Canal Street, which is one of the City's most important gateways to its Downtown. The project's technical complexity, its phasing with EPA/MVPC funded remediation activities on the adjacent Oxford Paper/Gencorp sites and connection to projects undertaken by the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority, Groundwork Lawrence and Lawrence Community Works represented a major accomplishment for many of the ceremony's attendees. The former Canal Street Bridge, which dates from 1857, has historic significance and has been preserved for conversion into a pedestrian/bicyclist facility connecting the North Canal District and Union Crossing with the newly opened Spicket River Greenway. Work on the historic bridge should be completed in Spring 2014.



**Ferry Road Bridge Reconstruction Project, Haverhill:** This \$4.3 million project, which was initially approved by MassDOT on October 4, 1995, replaced the existing bridge at this location. This long-established crossing provides access to residents west of MA-125 and to the Ward Hill Business Park. The new bridge assures proper clearance for MBTA's Haverhill Commuter Rail Line, which is also utilized by the Amtrak Downeaster to Portland, ME and PanAm Railways to provide freight service. MassDOT announced that the completed bridge would be reopened on October 29, 2013 @ 7:00 a.m. Ricci Concrete Co. of Georgetown served as MassDOT's contractor on this project.

*Written by Todd Fontanella  
MVPC Sr. Transportation Planner*

### **MVPC Monthly Commission Meetings**

MVPC Commission Office  
160 Main Street Haverhill, MA  
Third Thursday of the month @ 7pm  
**(There is no January meeting)**

Check our website for details on upcoming events: [mvpc.org](http://mvpc.org)

Contact Nancy Lavallee - email: [nlavallee@mvpc.org](mailto:nlavallee@mvpc.org) Tel: 978-374-0519 ext. 10